

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

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

*Sad sister smack talking*  
Suprema? Yeah, right. She would be the last person Evie would go to for <sup>①</sup> anything.

When Evie got inside the house, her plan was to go to the den, grab the warm, afghan, a` la Lindsay, and snuggle in front of the television. Maybe People's Court was on. *She loved* Yeah, that would be great. The way Judge Milian *a comb* lashed out Cuban dichos and costly rulings to poorly prepared defendants *It* always made Evie feel better about her own *problems* predicaments in life. *awk*

But when she got to the den, Evie was surprised to find Sabrina ~~there~~, spread out on the den's brown leather couch *stepped down into* and covered with Lindsay's ~~homemade~~ afghan. *crochet*

"What are you doing here?" Evie asked. *Crossed over Sabrina's legs*

She didn't mean to come across as accusatory as she might have sounded. It was *since she had been home* just that Sabrina *never* left her room. Also, Evie still held a grudge over what she had <sup>①</sup> overheard Sabrina say about her on the phone. *And of course*

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

*it just* "No, I mean, you're usually in your room." Evie flopped down on the matching leather loveseat and kicked her feet up on the coffee *own* table. The den's *her mother* furniture was expensive, mid-century California Mission that <sup>①</sup> their mother insisted no 'flopping' or 'kicking up' *on the* was allowed on them, but their mother wasn't around. *awk*

Sabrina kept her eyes on the television. She was watching a soap opera, a *Korean* soap opera with no subtitles. Suddenly <sup>she</sup> Sabrina laughed along with the laugh track.

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

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

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

"Of course I <sup>do</sup> ~~can~~ understand, or else I wouldn't be watching it," Sabrina replied.

"Oh, that's right. You're president of the Korean Language Club, right?" <sup>Evie said sarcastically</sup>

"Evie, just let me be. I've been in my room all morning, and I just wanted to take advantage of no one being home today. Or I *thought* no one was gonna be home. Why aren't you in school?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Heard me, what?" Sabrina asked.

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

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

One thousand, two thousand...

Evie <sup>cried in her head</sup> “Evie,” Sabrina sighed. “You just wouldn’t understand.”

Evie said “Oh, and that’s because I’m such an *idiot*?”

“No. Evie. It’s just,” her sister started. “I’ve been having a really, really hard time and...”

“And what?” Evie wasn’t so convinced that Suprema could ever have such a hard time at anything. <sup>none?</sup>

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

<sup>and ideologies</sup> *Chill?* Was such a word actually coming out of Sabrina’s mouth?

“You don’t know, maybe you don’t understand. I mean, you’ve always been the baby of the family, the favorite.”

“The *favorite*?” Evie gawked. ~~How could Sabrina even think that?~~ “Me?” <sup>Why yark?</sup>

“You’re the one everyone just idolizes. Mom, Dad, Lindsay, Dee Dee’s dad...A through H.”

“A through H?” Sabrina <sup>pursed her lips & looked</sup> cracked a slow smile. “I haven’t heard that name in years. He’s still at Nueva? You call him that too?”

“Yeah,” Evie said. It had been a long time since she’d seen her sister smile. “I mean, everyone does.”

“Does he still clean his glasses, over and over again? Like obsessive compulsive?” *Sabrina asked*

Evie laughed. “Oh, my God. Yeah. I don’t think he ever pays attention to what *anyone is* I’m saying.” *if your a girl*

“Oh, he’s paying attention all right, but in a different way. He’s the biggest perv.”

“What?” Evie balked. “A Through H? Gross! That is so not true! He’s like three hundred pounds and three hundred years old.”

“It is true!” Sabrina slapped her hands together and laughed. “We used to say that A through H stood for Ass and Hiney. That was his specialty.” *reference.*

Sabrina had a high pitched laugh, almost like a seal gasping for air. If you had to *guess* name the *something* most unattractive thing about Sabrina, which could be hard, considering she *even* was suprema, Evie guessed it would be her laugh. As a kid, Evie was always embarrassed by her big sister’s laugh. She *even* could remember some of her grade school classmates making fun of it, but now it sound okay. *example?*

“Oh, ~~my God,~~” Sabrina turned down the sound on the TV. “Those were some fun times, back at Nueva. I wish I was back there, when life was much more *simple.*” *laid back*

“Simple?” Evie asked. “Are you sure we went to the same school?” *l.b.?*

“Well, you just have a different circle of friends than I had,” Sabrina said. “I was always with the square kids. The future CPAs of the world. *realed her eyes.* I don’t know, I ~~think~~ maybe because I am the oldest, mom and dad were tougher on me. Mom was so strict with me when I was at Villanueva. I wasn’t allowed to date, or hang out at Sea Street or with someone like Raquel when I was fifteen. *No way.*”

“Fifteen and three quarters,” Evie corrected her. “I’m almost 16”

<sup>repeated</sup>  
“Almost sixteen,” her sister added. “Evie, I’m sorry what you heard that day on the phone. I’ve just been out of my mind. I don’t <sup>hate</sup> like being here, but it really doesn’t have anything to do with you. Mom and Dad are really getting on my case. Mom especially. She can be so stifling.”

“Tell me about it.” Evie was surprised that her sister shared the same sentiment. She had always thought that the two “Go-mez Girls” consisted of her mother and Sabrina and that she was the odd one out. <sup>Go Mez - Go mere</sup>

<sup>Sab continued</sup>  
“I just feel like I am letting everyone down. I don’t need to be reminded how much Stanford is costing mom and dad, or how I didn’t support Robert enough.”

“Is that why you broke up?” Evie asked. <sup>What do you mean support.</sup>

<sup>Shook her head in disbelief</sup>  
“It was a big part of it,” Sabrina sighed and curled her legs onto the couch. “He was going to start grad school this spring, in Massachusetts, and he wanted me to transfer schools so I could be closer to him. But it was just consuming me. I was losing a part, a big part, of myself. And before I knew it, I couldn’t find myself. I wasn’t Sabrina Gomez anymore. I was Robert Ramirez’s girlfriend.”<sup>the idea</sup>

“I can’t believe he wanted you to leave Stanford,” Evie said. Sabrina had always wanted to go Stanford. She had memorized Sanford’s school song when most kids were learning the pledge of allegiance. <sup>which is!</sup>  
~~AD~~ <sup>Mickey D’s</sup>

“Yeah, and I was like, no way,” Sabrina shook her head. “I wasn’t about to leave my sorority sisters, my friends, ~~my~~ family...California.”

“In that order, right?” Evie smirked.



~~No, I didn't mean it like that.~~ <sup>smiles</sup> But God, Evie, <sup>if she</sup> he was was insulted, and he would go on and on, as if I didn't love him enough or something. I grew up wanting to be a <sup>grad</sup> Stanford ~~sorority~~ girl, not somebody's girlfriend in friggin' freezing Massachusetts."

"Right," Evie nodded. It made sense to her.

"So anyway, I really just want to rest," Sabrina pulled the aghan up to her chin.

"At least for one quarter, and then <sup>g</sup> maybe I'll go back to school. I want a fresh start. Fresh starts are always good."

"Yeah," Evie agreed. "Everybody needs a fresh start once in a while."

Sabrina reached over and gave Evie the remote. "So what do you wanna watch?"

"Uh, I don't care, really."

"Are you sure?" Sabrina asked.

"Yeah," Evie said.

<sup>we can watch whatever you want?</sup>  
~~Without realizing it, Evie and Sabrina were, in fact, sharing a fresh start~~  
themselves.

## Chapter 20

When their mother and Lindsay got back, Evie and Sabrina were still in the den. They had created a feast of <sup>Canned</sup> bean dip and bagel chips and were <sup>used in</sup> engrossed by TiVo'd episodes of Laguna Beach. <sup>and</sup>

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172 gnt requirement

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

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

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

"Oh. My. God," Evie laughed. "No class."

"No pass," Sabrina laughed with her.

Mom told Sabrina

"It is *so* nice to see you out of your room, Sabrina, and to see you two together," their mother joined them in the den. "You know, I'll call your father. Maybe we could barbeque tonight."

took a seat on the couch

"It's okay, mom," Sabrina patted her belly. "I'm already full."

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

Mom insisted

"Oh, I think we should, we could barbeque some tri-tip."

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

"But what about your So SoCal diet?" <sup>Evie</sup> she asked their mother.

Vicki Gomez waved her hand aside. "Oh, I'm not concerned with that anymore."

awk & feels  
tasted in  
Evie felt worried. Not a good sign that her mother was off her diet. She had started the diet because of the Sixteenera. Was her mother losing her enthusiasm?

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

"Hi, Kitty!" their mother sang into the receiver. "You know, I was going to call you, I was at -."



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

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

Evie figured she should get up from the <sup>loveseat</sup> ~~den~~ and make a run for her bedroom...window? Her mother was obviously hearing about last night's activities.

"Kitty, no, of course, not," Vicki Gomez continued. "I won't say a word. You have my promise. No, she's right here." She looked over at Evie again, <sup>turned away from her</sup> ~~just as she was~~ getting up.

Evie was confused. What was going on? What was Kitty telling her <sup>mother</sup> ~~her~~?

After a few more "oh nos" and "of course, nots" Vicki Gomez hung up the phone. <sup>finally</sup>

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

Sabrina looked up. <sup>cautiously</sup>

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

"Isla del Mar?" Evie was taken aback.

Sabrina looked up. "What? Why?"

Isla del Mar was on the northeast hills of the county, a Spanish style building that one might confuse with an early California Mission or, like Villanueva, a five-star hotel.

(But in reality, Isla was a center that treated people for addiction or depression.) On the outside, Isla was a beautiful, serene place with lots of oak and palm trees. Sometimes, the Flojos, she, Raquel, Mondo, Alex, and Jose would cram into Mondo's Maurader and

make their way up the winding road to Isla's faculty parking lot, just to hang out and chill. It had the perfect panoramic view of the city, and if you went at night, which they often did, you could take in the offshore oil rigs twinkling in the distance. But Evie never dreamed that one of *their own* would be an in-patient at Isla.

"Kitty said Raquel got another MIP and -."

"What's an MIP?" Evie ~~interrupted~~. *asked.*

"She was drunk in public, again. And because she's underage, and because it's not her first time, she could very well do jail time." *check juve*

"What? You are *not* serious." Evie didn't quite believe her mother. "Jail time? Isn't that a little severe?"

"Evie," her mother said sternly, "she could end up at the CYA, so it's better she get help. Raquel is in some serious trouble. Kitty and Charlie want to curb it before it gets out of control, but frankly, I think they should have *done something* curbed it a lot earlier."

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

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

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

"Kitty is going to take her tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow?" Evie asked. *we* ~~Already?~~

*I do not know*

*Why so soon what the mom*

9  
“Yes, they wanted to take her in today, but they needed to get some things in order first.”

100% that  
“Well, I’m going over then,” Evie got up and started for the kitchen door.

“Evie, don’t.” Her mother blocked her with her arm. “You need to leave her alone.”

One  
“What?” Evie balked. “My best friend is going away and you’re telling me I can’t see her before she leaves?”

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

Evie went up to her room and was about to text Dee Dee but decided against it. What would Dee Dee even say anyway? ~~How~~ <sup>NOVE</sup> could she even help the situation? ~~Suddenly~~

“E-vie!” Her mother called out from downstairs. “You have a visitor!”

Visitor? Her mother sounded happy, almost singing out the announcement. It must be . . . Raquel!

Evie rushed downstairs, but instead, to her shock, she didn’t find Raquel in the foyer. It was Arturo.

“Hey, Evie,” Arturo started nervously as she came into the foyer. <sup>what was he doing at in work?</sup>

“Oh, hey, Arturo,” Evie said. “Um, how did you know where I lived?”

*Hello, Stalker.*

“Your address was on the file card,” Arturo explained. “I’m sorry to just drop by, but you forgot your backpack.” He lifted Evie’s suede blue bag <sup>from</sup> off the foyer’s wooden bench. “You took off so fast yesterday.”

<sup>right</sup>  
“Oh, yeah. Sorry about that.” Evie took her backpack from him. Okay, so he wasn’t a stalker, just a conscientious student. “I hadn’t even noticed it was missing.”

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

“No,” Evie felt embarrassed. “It’s just been a rough two days.”

“Oh. Sorry,” Arturo looked awkward. “I didn’t want to make things complicated. I hope I wasn’t disrespectful, you know, about...”

*he looked at the floor and then back the hallway*  
*lowered his voice*

“No, it was okay,” Evie said.

“Just *okay*?” Arturo winced jokingly.

“No, I mean, it was nice.” Evie <sup>also</sup> lowered her voice and looked down the hall. She didn’t want her mother overhearing.

“I meant all those things I said,” Arturo told her. “I don’t want you think that you were some kind of rebound or anything. <sup>you know what?</sup> I have always been intrigued by you.”

“By *me*?” Evie couldn’t quite believe him.

“Yeah, why not?” he <sup>to</sup> asked “From that first day I met you, I thought you were really cute, but I didn’t know what to do. I was still with Josephina and I knew you were with someone.”

“How did you know I was <sup>had a boyfriend</sup> with someone?” Evie asked. “I don’t think I ever mentioned it.”

“I could tell by that ~~shell~~ necklace you were always wearing,” he said.

<sup>shell</sup>  
“My necklace?” Evie asked.

“Yeah, I don’t know. It looked homemade and seemed sorta special to you. Girls usually don’t wear the same necklace, every day.”

Evie smiled. “Sure they do, that is if the necklace is special.”

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

"I don't know," Evie said. <sup>stated</sup> "I mean, I've already got my most of my hours and -."

"So it *was* just about the hours," Arturo interrupted. "I thought you had this  
"newfound love for horses and -." <sup>locked his head to the right</sup>

"No," Evie tried to explain. "I'm just saying that I have to focus ~~putting together~~ <sup>on</sup>  
my essay about working at the reserve and then, I don't know, my bestfriend is going  
away -."

"Back to Mexico?" <sup>Arturo asked</sup>

"No. I mean, yes. Dee Dee might be going away too. I don't know Arturo. I've  
just got a lot of things on my mind and my birthday is coming up and I don't think I'm  
gonna be getting the party I wanted. Everything is just a mess."

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

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

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

"Well, if you're not gonna be at this reserve this week, can I at least get your cell  
number?" He pulled out his <sup>phone</sup> ~~cell~~ from his front pocket. <sup>Tucks</sup> "I mean, at the very least let me  
take you out for your birthday."

"Okay," Evie took his phone <sup>to</sup> and punched ~~in~~ <sup>his</sup> her number. "That would be nice.  
You can text me."

"I don't do text," he said. "Besides, I'd rather hear your voice." <sup>as he watched over his shoulder as he punched in her name</sup>



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

"Is that your boss? From the reserve?" her mother asked. "He's <sup>so</sup> very handsome. I like his cowboy boots!"

"He's not really my boss," Evie said. "He's just in charge of things."

Unlike Alex, Evie thought. With all that had been going on, she suddenly missed him more. He was great when it came to listening to her problems. She didn't need great, super planned evening out on the town, but rather just a good shoulder to lean on.

awk  
seeing  
too  
summary

## Chapter 21

The next morning, a little before 7 a.m., Dee Dee showed up at Evie's house.

Evie had <sup>called</sup> reached Dee Dee <sup>the night before</sup> later that night. Dee Dee couldn't believe the news about Raquel. Of course, they agreed to see Raquel first thing the next morning.

"Lo siento, girls," Kitty told them at the front door. "Raquel's still sleeping."

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

"We're going to leave around ten," Kitty said. She looked tired. Her eyes were puffy with dark circles. <sup>but</sup> half moons under each.

"Could we wait until she gets up?" Evie asked. "Or could you wake her up and tell her that we're here?" <sup>was anxious</sup>

"No, Evie, I can't," Kitty said. "You girls go to school. You'll be able to see Raquel soon enough."

Raquel's father came to the door.

more  
commit  
from  
her  
me

"Ay, Kitty," Charlie Diaz said. "Let the girls see Raquel. These are her best friends, her **amuegitas**."

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

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

When Evie and Dee Dee got to Raquel's bedroom, her door was slightly open. The window shades were pulled down and the entire room was dark. - *Screen saver*

"Raquel?" Evie whispered.

Dee Dee pushed open the door and both girls peered in. Raquel lay on her side in bed. *among a mountain ro . . . .*

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

"Wait," Raquel turned under the blankets. "Don't go."

Evie and Dee Dee went into the room towards Raquel.

"Hey, Raquel," Evie said softly as she sat down on the foot of the bed. "How you doing?"

*How do you think*  
"My parents are trying to get rid of me," Raquel answered.

Evie looked at Dee Dee, not sure what to say.

"No, they aren't," Dee Dee said. "They just want you to get better. We all want you to get better."

"And the best place to do that is at a hospital? Why don't they just send me to Hawaii for a few months?"

"Raquel..." Evie started.

"Evie, I'm sorry I can't be a part of the Hula Auana. I was thinking we could do it for your next birthday. I know it won't be on the 29<sup>th</sup>, but we can still do something, right?"

"Right," Evie said. "Of course."

"I know I haven't been the greatest friend lately,"

"No," Evie said. "That's not true."

Okay, she had to admit, there were times when Raquel could have been a better friend.

"I guess I have been in my own zone," Raquel confessed. "I didn't think I was drinking that much, and the lady I was talking to at Isla said that I should stop making boys the priority in my life."

"You know," Evie said. "That's the same thing Sabrina was telling me."

"Suprema?" Raquel sat up slowly and leaned against her pillows. "She's talking now?"

*is she crack open the window*

"Yeah," Evie said. "I didn't know that Robert had wanted her to move to

**Michigan** with him. He was going to go to grad school there."

*is gonna*

"Really?" Dee Dee looked over at Evie.

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

Raquel, "Yeah, I couldn't see Sabrina living somewhere other than Cali. Ew."

*isn't her cigarette*

"Yeah," Evie agreed. "She said there was no way she was gonna move across the country for some boy. It's funny," <sup>she</sup> Evie said to Raquel. "I never thought you and Suprema would have something in common, you two taking a break from boys."

"Yeah," Raquel said, "and I'd never thought you and I would change roles."

"What do you mean?" Evie asked.

"You have two dudes and I have none."

Evie laughed. "I wouldn't say I have two guys. Alex isn't talking to me and I don't know where I stand with Arturo. He said he might take me out to dinner for my birthday." <sup>but</sup>

"Will you guys come visit me?" Raquel asked.

"Of course," Dee Dee smiled. "We'll bake you a cake with a file in it!"

<sup>Kathy Nazi</sup> Raquel's mother came in the room. "Girls, you better get going." <sup>it's ahead after 8</sup>

Dee Dee and Evie reluctantly left. ✓

"I hope Raquel is <sup>sorry</sup> going to be okay," Dee Dee said. "She seems okay to me, I mean, making little jokes y mas." <sup>I mean</sup>

"Yeah," Evie said. "I have no idea." <sup>got in car</sup>

<sup>totally in</sup> "So why wouldn't your sister move with Robert?" Dee Dee asked. "I thought she loved him? I just always imagined they were, like, the college sweethearts that would get married."

✓ "Well, Sabrina said it wasn't in her heart. She told me when she'd wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night that Robert wasn't the first thing she thought of. She thought about other things she wanted to do, for herself."

"Hmm...interesting," Dee Dee replied as she shifted gears.

Rio Carter

As Dee Dee and Evie drove past the gates of Rio Estates, the morning mail truck entered. Evie looked after it and wondered if this would be the Monday she would receive her quality check. She hadn't even started her essay or turned in her hours to Vasquez. She calculated the calendar days in her head. Yes, if all was on schedule, and if the inept student intern in the ad building would be on top of things, today she would be getting her quality check. ~~There would be no change documented on it.~~

## Chapter 21

Evie had had only three birthday parties, her fourth, eighth and twelfth, that celebrated on her actual birth date, February 29<sup>th</sup>. Her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party would have been the fourth time that the calendar lined up in her favor. Thanks to Grandma Vino, Evie was allowed not to just have a party, her Sweet Sixteenera.

Leave it to Grandma Vino to insist with a strong hand, a hand that basically lit some fire under Evie's father's ass, that he would really, *really* have regrets if he didn't give his baby daughter the Sweet Sixteenera that she so rightfully deserved. It didn't hurt that Grandma Vino reminded Ruben Gomez of his own academic troubles while he was a struggling business school student, and look how well he turned out. Yes, Grandma Vino agreed with her son that it was in the Gomez blood to succeed in life, but at each Gomez's own pace.



So, at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, Evie, her mother and Dee Dee got the go ahead from Senor Ruben Gomez. The sixteenner was *on*. It was a mad dash to send out evites and make last minute calls, but they did it. Evie and Dee Dee crossed their fingers as they checked and re-checked the RSVP list every day and just about every hour. As the number of the guest list rose higher, so did Evie's spirits. It truly looked like she was going to have her party and a *ton* of guests. One person, regrettably, who didn't reply to Evie's invitation, was Alex. Evie had sent him an evite, as well as a personal text, but he responded to neither. It hurt something awful to accept that fact that it was truly over between them.

show!

text?  
email  
IM

Also, during the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, Dee Dee announced that Rocio had to return back to Mexico City for a family emergency. She didn't go into details, but merely said that she and Evie would be each other's dance partners at the party.

show's  
is  
too  
sunny

On Saturday, February 29<sup>th</sup> as Evie walked through the grand wooden doors of Duke's with Dee Dee, she had yet to understand just how incredibly special her night was going to be.

The walls of Duke's were practically shaking from the fast, loud surf music DJ Chancla was already bumping, and Evie had to scream over the music to greet her guests.

So many guests! She felt like a princess as she made her way down a receiving line of blurred, smiling faces sweaty and pink faced from the heat and excitement. She couldn't keep count of the throngs of friends, family, and even Mr. A through H (Ew, how did he get in?), all wanting to hug or wish Evie happy birthday. Dee Dee actually had to push their way through the crowd to get to Evie through.

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Did she say Princess? How about rock star?

“Move aside, move aside!” Dee Dee ordered. “Birthday girl coming through!”

“Happy Birthday Eves!”

“Mahalo!”

“*Cool* party, Evie!”

“Feliz Cumpleanos!”

“*Nice* party hats!

Huh?

“Happy Birthday, *mi'ja!*”

Evie looked over and couldn't believe it when she saw the tiny white-haired lady in a ~~p~~pantsuit among a mob of Hawaiian print shirts and dresses.

“Grandma Vi-, Lourdes?” Evie was caught off guard. She was surprised that Grandma Vino would take a break from college lectures and her *quintana* lifestyle just to attend a mere <sup>teen</sup> birthday party. “What are *you* doing here?!”

Grandma Vino frowned. “That is no way to greet your *abuelita!*” She pushed past Big Bulge and Eyeliner Boy to give Evie a tight hug. “I’m so relieved those parents of yours listened to me. There was no way that my dear granddaughter wasn’t going to have the quinceanera of her dreams.”

“Uh, Grandma Vino,” Evie suddenly felt worried. Did her grandmother really think she was turning 15, and that’s why she had made the special trip from Davis? “This isn’t my quinceanera. I never had one, remember? I’m turning sixteen. This is my Sixteenera.”

"What? You're sixteen?" Grandma Vino looked around Duke's. "Then how old does that make me?" She glanced over at Eyeliner Boy. "Not *that* old."

"Oh, Grandma Vino," Evie leaned in to hug her grandmother tighter. She knew she was joking.

Dee Dee made a loud, distinct cough. "Uh, hem!"

"Oh, Grandma Lourdes, this is my best friend, Dee Dee," Evie introduced them to each other.

"*Estoy encantada*," Dee Dee almost curtsied.

"Oh," Grandma Vino looked at Evie with approval. "*Very* nice. You have some very nice friends, Evelina and both of you girls look absolutely glamorous!"

Evie felt glamorous. She was wearing a form fitting vintage halter gown, soft chocolate brown with a print of pink hibiscus flowers that she had found at Decades on Melrose. Underneath? A hot pink toe job from Michael Kelley and hot pink jeweled flojos from Barney's. *No* bronzer.

Evie felt a nudge and noticed that her grandmother had slipped a small, white envelope into her hand.

"Grandma Lourdes..." Evie started. She knew what was in the envelope

"Take it," her grandmother insisted. "But do something *good* with it. You're sixteen now. You should learn how to make the right decisions."

The rest of the evening, Evie couldn't catch her breath as she was pulled from one friend to another and then from side of the polished wood dance floor to the other side.

She couldn't remember having laughed, danced and eaten so much. The buffet was a mad

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fusion of *lechon*, Huli Huli chicken, Mango BBQ pork ribs, and pineapples filled with Mexican rice. The line of sexy Polynesian dancers that shook the stage made Evie instantly regret that she ~~and Dee Dee had agreed to still perform their Hula Auana. Why had they planned to perform after such rhythmic greatness?~~

While the party staff worked on getting the custom surfboard shaped piñata hoisted from the restaurant's rafters, Evie stepped onto the wooden balcony that overlooked the Pacific. She needed to get some air. She was already exhausted from excitement and her party was far from over. She still had to take the first whack at the piñata, cut the two feet high mango and whipped cream birthday cake (from her father's bakery), ~~unwrap a multitude of presents and, of course, perform the Hula Auana with Dee Dee.~~

Evie noticed she wasn't the only one on the balcony. She looked over and saw that Y-von 52 was at the other end and in an intimate embrace with her boyfriend, Gabriel. Evie's chest felt heavy. Alex wasn't at her party with her, and it was hitting her hard. When she had decided to have her sixteener at Duke's, she imagined being on the balcony with him, just like Y-von 52 was with Gabriel. Now Alex was nowhere near the balcony, and she was nowhere near his heart. What had gone so terribly wrong? He had never returned her calls and perhaps he never would. The idea of ~~not~~ speaking to Alex ever again just about killed her.

She looked back at her party through the glass doors. Everyone was dancing and laughing. How could Raquel also not be with her on her most special night? Raquel was the last person to ever miss a good party and this was most definitely a good party. Evie turned back to look out to the water and leaned against the balcony's ledge. She folded

her hands and rested her head <sup>on</sup> ~~in~~ them. She took a deep breath. It was great, *awesome*, to have the sixteeners of her dreams, but in a way, the party had two big, gaping holes.

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

He whistled again.

Evie finally pushed up from the ledge. She was ready to throw him a smirk and a smart remark, but when she turned around, she couldn't believe who was standing in front of her. It was *Alex*. Evie's stomach flipped. And then it flopped.

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

"No, no," Evie started. "*I'm* sorry!" She wanted to reach out and <sup>wild</sup> embrace him but wasn't sure if she should. He just stood there and she just stood there, as if they both really didn't know what to do. "Please, Alex," she continued. "You have to know that it was nothing with Arturo. I know that sounds cliché, but really, I was just stupid and maybe I was a little mad about that night with Mondo and the night-."

Alex held up his hand. "I know, I know. I haven't been the best boyfriend. Really. And *I'm* sorry."

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

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

Alex reached for Evie and put his arms around her shoulders. He held her tight and Evie was overwhelmed with how good he felt. His hair was slightly damp ~~from a~~



fresh shower and she smelled the tiniest hint of cologne (fresh and sea breezy!). He wearing a sports jacket and dark slacks. <sup>on</sup> ~~Que Seth!~~ + show. <sup>night to all night</sup>

SRE PINK  
“Oh, Evie,” he whispered into her ear. “I was so afraid I was gonna mess up your birthday by showing up here. I had no idea what to expect. I didn’t know if that other guy was gonna be here or what. I was going crazy trying to find out if you were with him or not.”

“Not,” Evie insisted. “I am *not* with him. I’m technically not with anyone, *yet*.”

Was that too desperate?

Alex pulled away.

Oh no, it *was* too desperate.

Alex, however, reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box. His neck turned pink. Evie <sup>similar</sup> knew that shade of nervous pink. “I think this would *really* go with your outfit.” He looked Evie over. “Wow, you look *so* beautiful.”

Evie smiled. Alex had never called her beautiful. He had called her cute and sexy, that one time, but never beautiful. She loved hearing it. She looked down at the box as he <sup>put</sup> ~~placed~~ it in her hands. When she opened it, she couldn’t believe what she found -- placed on a blue velvet backing was a <sup>gold</sup> ~~charm~~ - two miniature gold flip flops, one slightly over the other, and each topped with a small pearl where the ~~gold~~ ‘straps’ connected. The flip flops were attached to a thin gold chain.

“Oh, my God, Alex,” Evie’s mouth dropped open. “This is <sup>cool</sup> *so* beautiful. I can’t believe it. I’ve *never* seen anything like this.”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” he said ~~proudly~~. “I ordered a while ago. That time I went to San Diego with Bien? That’s when I finally picked it up in L.A.”



*Suddenly*  
"Are you serious?" Evie felt like such a ~~loser~~ *basu*. She had gotten on him for not postponing that trip so he could take her.

"I wanna be your boyfriend again," Alex told her as he removed the necklace from the box. "And I want to be the boyfriend you deserve. You're ~~totally worth it.~~" *on Alex*

"I would like that," Evie smiled at him. "No, I would *love* that." She looked at the charm. "Will you put it on me?"

"Of course." Alex moved behind Evie and fastened chain around her neck.

"Evie?"

*looked at*  
Dee Dee was ~~peering out from~~ the balcony's sliding glass door. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" She smiled as soon as she saw Alex. *→*

"No, not anymore," Evie look up at Alex. "Look!" She held out the ~~flip flop~~ necklace for Dee Dee to see. "Look what Alex gave me!"

"I know," Dee Dee looked at the charm. "~~Que~~ cute, huh?"

"What do you mean, you know?" Evie asked.

"I know because he kept asking me if he should get you the flojo earrings or the flojo necklace or the flojo bracelet. He drove me *crazy*."

"Yeah," Alex said. "I even asked Raquel, and she had told me to get you a flip flop navel ring, but they didn't have one."

*Raquel!*

"Dee Dee, what time is it?" Evie asked.

"That's why I came out," Dee Dee said. "I wanted to remind you of the time. We should get going if we're gonna make in back in time to do ~~our Hula Auana.~~" *for you to*

*raised his eyes*  
“Where are you going?” Alex asked. “You’re gonna *hang on* leave your own party?”

“We gotta go to Isla del Mar,” Evie told him. “Raquel’s there.”

“What?” Alex’s face dropped. “Are you serious? Since when?”

“Since last week,” Evie said somberly. “We’re *gotta see* gonna go visit her. I *have* to see her, tonight.”

“Um, *h* can I go with you?” he asked.

Evie looked at Dee Dee.

“Well, I don’t know,” Evie said. “It’s sorta just a girl thing.”

“Come on, Evie,” Alex asked. “She’s my friend too. We were all Flojos *together*.”

Evie looked at him and then at Dee Dee again. *me me struggled*

“I don’t know, Alex...” Evie started.

*oh* “Why doesn’t he just come with us?” Dee Dee asked. “I think it would make *if he okay* Raquel happy. Everyone likes visitors when they’re feeling down, no?”

“No,” Evie said. “No, I mean, yeah. Maybe you’re right.”

“We better hurry,” Dee Dee looked at the time on her cell phone. “We have just about an hour. *before visiting hrs.*”

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

“Yes, we will,” Evie took his hand. “We gotta at least try.”

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

“God, I hope we make it.” Dee Dee said.

“We will, we will,” Evie asserted.

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“So, are you bummed that you didn’t get Cherry Bomb?” Dee Dee asked.

“Yeah, sorta,” Evie confessed. “But it’s not like I could drive her anyway. I still gotta re-take my test.”

“I feel sorta stupid with the surf racks I bought you,” Dee Dee said. “I thought for sure you were gonna get a car.”

“Oh, she’s gonna get Cherry Bomb,” Alex said. “*And* she’s definitely gonna put those surf racks to use, right, Eves?”

“Right,” Evie smiled. She *hoped* he was right.

“Speaking of presents,” Dee Dee started. “So what’s the grand total from Grandma Vino UC Davis?”

Ⓢ Oh, you know, I didn’t even check.” Evie opened her macramé bag and ripped open the envelope. She counted out sixteen hundred dollars.

“Wow, *pretty* nice!” She held up a fan of one hundred dollar bills. “Sixteen hundred buckaroos.”

“That’s a lot of *lana*,” Alex said. “What are you gonna do with it?”

“I gotta pay Lindsay back, like right away, and then,” Evie paused. “I guess, I’m gonna save the rest so I can visit Dee Dee in Mexico.”

“Mexico?” Alex asked. “You’re moving back to D.F., Dee Dee?”

“Well,” Dee Dee started. “I’ve really been thinking about it, but now...I don’t know.”

“What?” Evie practically got whiplash from twisting her head to face Dee Dee.

“What are you talking about?”

“Yo no se,” Dee Dee said. “I mean, after you told me about Sabrina and her boyfriend, I started thinking about myself and Rocio. And then I started thinking more about myself. I don’t know, since I was a little kid Sabrina has been my idol and I guess she made me re-think moving back to Mexico City. I really, really want to be a Patrona.”

“Oh my God!” Evie was overwhelmed. “I am *so* happy. I mean, I’m happy that you’re gonna be a Patrona, and I’m sure you’ll be nominated to be one, and I’m happy that you aren’t moving away! This is the *best* birthday present ever!”

“Better than my present,” Alex teased from the back seat.

“Well,” Evie smiled at him. “Just as good.”

“So now what are you gonna do with the extra Grandma Vino money?” Alex asked. “Down payment for private driving lessons?”

“No,” Evie laughed. “Actually, I’m gonna do what I had originally wanted to do with any extra money for my birthday. I’m gonna donate it to the reserve.”

“*What?*” Alex exclaimed. “You gotta be kidding! The reserve? I thought you hated that place?”

“No, not really,” Evie answered slowly. “I mean, I hate that there *have* to be places like horse rescues and stuff because there are people who don’t know how to care about animals, but there is this one horse, Chamuco, that I know five hundred dollars could really help him out.”

“You are gonna give five hundred dollars to a *horse*?” Dee Dee asked.

“Yeah,” Evie looked at Dee Dee. “I mean, *claro*.”

“Well, that’s a pretty nice gift ...” Alex observed.

“Yes, it sure is,” Evie agreed. No one was going to change her mind.

the \$ stuff feels weird to everything  
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“Oh, I can’t believe I forgot to tell you!” Dee Dee suddenly exclaimed.

“What?” Evie asked.

“Alejandra de Los Santos tried to get into the party!”

“*What?*” Dee Dee was right. Evie couldn’t believe it. “When?”

“I don’t know where you were,” Dee Dee said, “maybe dancing or something. But she showed up with her three little *a*-migas and, of course, she was denied access. In front of everyone and was she so embarrassed!” → *big moment?*

“Ha!” Evie laughed. “Okay, okay, now *that’s* the best birthday present ever!”

Evie couldn’t feel more content about the evening. She looked out the window at all the ‘Beach Access’ signs lining Pacific Coast Highway.

“Hey, Alex,” She turned to faced him from the front seat. “Do you think we can go surfing out here sometime? You know, just for a change?”

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

Evie smiled at him, and he winked back.

Evie read another sign for a different beach. “Hey, Dee Dee,” she started. “Can you stop? Up ahead?”

“*What?*” Dee Dee looked at her. “Uh, *no*. We gotta get to Raquel.”

“I’m serious,” Evie said. “Pull over at this next exit.”

“Evie, there’s nothing out here, and we’re gonna be late.”

“Yeah, Eves,” Alex said. “What’s the big deal?”

“Dee Dee, come on,” Evie asked. “Pull over at the next exit. *Please!*”

Dee Dee looked at Alex in the rearview mirror and shook her head. He shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, okay." She reluctantly pulled off the highway and onto a sandy shoulder that led to the exit. "What, you gotta take a leak?"

"This is Leo Carrillo," Evie said as Dee Dee drove Jumile onto the narrow two lane road. "Do you know I used to come here as a kid? My family used to go camping here."

"O-*kay*," Dee Dee wasn't sure what Evie was getting at.

"Drive over there," Evie pointed to a kiosk that was already closed for the evening. "To where the road goes under the highway towards the campgrounds."

"*The campgrounds?*" Dee Dee asked. "Evie, we don't have time for a little memory trip."

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

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

Dee Dee drove Jumile under the highway and towards the campgrounds. Once she pulled over, Evie got out of the car.

"Where are you going?" Dee Dee rolled down her window and called after her. "What are you doing?"

"Just wait," Evie called back.

Evie sprinted to where two wooden posts were put up on the opposite sides of the dirt road. Each post was about four feet high and had a row of circular, yellow reflective lights attached to one side. Evie checked one of the posts and saw that the bottom two lights were cracked. The same wooden post also had a small gash on the side.

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The cracked lights and the gash had been created by Sabrina years ago, when she and Evie were still kids. Evie remembered sneaking out with Sabrina, who was all of fifteen, and she was eleven. Sabrina so desperately wanted to take their parents' car for a little spin around the campground and had convinced Evie to go with her. Just like Lindsay had said, Sabrina was a horrible driver, nervous and timid. They hadn't driven more than a few campsites away from their own, before Sabrina hit the post. She was horrified. She had placed her head on the steering wheel and cried. It took Evie's urging to finally get her to wipe her tears, get the car in gear, and get it back to their own campsite, before their parents found out. Fortunately, nothing had happened to the car, and their parents never found out.

Evie looked at the post and couldn't help but smile. She had promised never to tell anyone about her sister's accident, and she never did.

Dee Dee honked Jumile's horn.

"Evie, come on!" she called out. "We gotta go!"

"I'm coming!" Evie called out.

Evie chipped off a piece of the yellow reflective light. Never mind that she struggled at the reserve, or was the best horseback ride. So she wasn't suprema like her sister. It wasn't that big of a deal that didn't pass her driving test or that she took her mother's car out without asking. Evie *was* a *good* person. She was a good friend and a good sister *and* a good daughter. At times, she could even be a good student and good girlfriend. Sure she had slip ups, but who didn't? At the very least, she had it *in* her to be good and sometimes that counted for a lot. Now on the night of her sixteenth birthday,

technically her fourth, this realization that she had the *means* to be the best person possible, was the best gift ever.