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name of Alex
Alejandro
Mundo
Daneys
eaks
Vicky or
Vicki
Chapter One
car

For once Evie Gomez finally felt free. Free, not that weak ass sense of freedom she felt when she was done showering and waltzed around her bedroom with only her favorite hot pink terry towel wrapped around her waist, and it certainly wasn't that pseudo sense of liberation she experienced when the call of nature decided to give her a ring when she was surfing and had no other choice but to relieve herself, right there in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in her wetsuit and all. On this particular Saturday afternoon in mid January, Evie felt free due to the simple metal ring that dangled from her fingers. It wasn't just any ol' ring she carried to Lindsay's, the Gomez's housekeeper, and ten year old sedan. This ring had the car keys attached and Evie was more than ready for a little joy ride. Not that she actually stole the car keys. *Please*. If she were truly going for a joy ride, she wouldn't be boosting Lindsay's rickety *ranfla* that's for sure, but Evie was desperate. She was just five weeks away from taking her California State driving test and she had yet to master the challenge of three point turns and the ins and outs of parallel parking. Thus, the resilient begging to borrow Lindsay's sedan had ensued just minutes earlier.

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

1

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

“I *know*,” Evie exhaled impatiently. “But that’s only if I’m gonna be out driving on the street and everything, and I’m not. I’m gonna stay on the driveway, just in front of the house. Nothing’s gonna happen.”

“I dunno...” Lindsay was still hesitant.

“Lindsay,” Evie followed her down the two steps that led into the den. “We live on a cul de sac. It’s not like cars go speeding by all the time. I’ll totally be safe.” She **leaned** her head forward and to the side, fashioned after the infamous **tilt** learned from her best friend, Dee Dee de LaFuentes, who, usually having let the left side of her head go soft, got her way. “And the more I practice,” Evie continued. “I’ll be sure to get my license and then I can drive myself anywhere. You won’t be having to cart me around anymore. Don’t you want a break from being a chauffeur?”

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

“Well, I guess... maybe... it would be okay.” Lindsay pushed Meho, Evie’s grey tabby, aside and made room for herself on the den’s smooth leather sofa. She had now been lured into her habitual trance by *La Cueva*’s leading man, **Leonardo Phillipe**. “Get the spare key,” she told Evie. “And promise me that’ll you’ll stay within the dead end. Do *not* leave Camino del Rio.”

“I will, promise!” Evie sprinted as fast as her Havaiana flojos could take her towards the kitchen. She didn’t find the spare key, but no worries. She snatched a key ring off the kitchen’s metal key holder, grabbed her iTrip, (a boast of over 1100

downloads), her wallet (an even better boast -- a freshly issued drivers permit) and sprinted out of the house.

But once Evie got out to the driveway her **honest** plans of taking Lindsay's sedan immediately fell to the wayside. There, parked to the left of Lindsay's car was Evie's mother's brand new Mercedes. ~~Actually~~, not *brand* new, but definitely new to her mother, Vicki Gomez. The Mercedes was a good thirty years old, a classic by anyone's standards especially with its high gloss burgundy paint job, detailing by West Coast *Custom, Designs*, original leather interior, glistening chrome, and the cali de la cali, a **fuel** conversion by LoveCraft's BioFuel in Los Angeles. Yes, the Mercedes had been converted to run on vegetable oil rather than gasoline. *Gas was so passe' & conversions were* ~~It seemed to be the~~ thing done to cars in South Cali, and now Vicki Gomez's Benz was the talk of Rio Estates and, of course, she just loved, *loved*, the attention.

Evie looked at the gleaming Mercedes and then at Lindsay's nondescript four-door sedan, which **suddenly** seemed dull and lifeless. Not to be superficial, but Evie wondered, what *kind* of car *was* Lindsay's? Was there even a question of which ride she should choose for such a sunny Saturday afternoon drive?

Evie opened the driver's seat of her mother's ~~Mercedes~~ *burgundy* and got in. She inhaled the aroma of the vintage white leather. Her choice had clearly been made. She pulled out her cell from the front pocket of her Senor Lopez pullover and immediately called her boyfriend, Alex. How grand would that be, she thought as she speed-dialed his number, to swing by his house and, for once, be the one in control of such a cool, luxury automobile? But alas, the dreaded voice mail.

Duuude...leave a brief. Not a bio.

She had remembered that Alex had gone to Sea Street with Mondo that morning and felt slightly disappointed. It was almost 1 p.m., and he *still* wasn't back from the beach? Ever since their old clique, the Flojos, which had consisted of herself, Alex, Mondo, Raquel, and her former boy, Jose, had pretty much disbanded last semester, Alex still surfed at Sea Street and Mondo still tagged along with him, sometimes. While Evie no longer considered herself a "Flojo", in the true sense of the definition that she strived to maintain the chill chica mindset and just hang at the beach all day, she did continue to wear flojos (aka flip flops) 24/7/365. Flojoism may not have been a way of life for Evie, but flojos were definitely a surviving style statement.

To be honest, Evie sometimes missed the days of Flojo past, the carefree afternoons of pot and plasmas -- before Jose became a two timing jerk, before Raquel started partying too much and before Mondo cared more about his business than friendship. But then again, those were pre- Dee Dee and Alex days and Evie really loved having the double D and Alex, as a boyfriend, in her life.

Evie sighed and decided to leave neither a brief message nor her autobiography, thank you. She hung up and speed dialed best girl, tied for first place, Raquel Diaz. *in the photo finish*

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

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“Not you, obviously.” Evie switched from, **her mother’s favorite Oldies station** ✓
to Dios (Malos). Nothing like brown boy emo bumping the speakers to calm one’s novice nerves. She was ready to go.

“Hey, I’m coming to pick you up,” she announced to Raquel. “Let’s cruise The Shores.”

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

“You ain’t picking me up to go anywhere,” Raquel’s voice was throaty and harsh. “I ain’t even awake.”

“Well, get up,” Evie ordered. “I got my mother’s car.”

“What do you mean, you got your mother’s car?” Raquel asked. “How did you swing the g-ride? Ol’ Vicki Gomez must be out of the country, ‘cause there’s no way you’d risk taking her precious veggie grease mobile out.”

“She’s not out of the country, but it’s the next best thing,” Evie mused. “She’s at the factory outlets with my dad. They’ll be gone all day.”

“And where’s La Lindsay?” Raquel inquired.

“Oh, she’s so far away in novela-vela land.” Evie adjusted the seat closer to the gas pedal and positioned the rearview mirror so she could see all things slow and less

important behind her. She turned the key in the ignition. "Come on, the day's almost over."

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

"And," Evie explained. "You know I need a licensed driver to really go anywhere."

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

"Raq, come on," Evie pleaded. "We'll have fun."

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

"Who's that?" she asked.

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

Ever since Raquel had caught Jose sneaking around with Alejandra de los Santos last semester, her Buddy List of bad boys was being utilized to the max. It didn't help Raquel's ego that Alejandra de los Santos headed the Sangros, a foursome of *fresas ricas* from Mexico City. There had always been a clash between the Flojos and the Sangros, so of course, Raquel felt completely humiliated and betrayed when she discovered that her boy had cross pollinated and had been with one of *them*. Evie and Dee Dee had actually been foolish enough to become sorta friends with Alejandra last semester. But that was

- mere freshmen

when they didn't know better. Not only was Alejandra a *puta*, plain and simple, but she wore the scarlet letter P on her chest proudly.

Jose no longer went to Villanueva Prep, having got kicked out for his poor grades, but he still ran in a similar **party circuit as Raquel, and she** needed to teach him that she could be just as scandalous, if not more, than him. Whereas any cool girl at Villanueva (which Raquel claimed there were only three – she, Evie and, of course, *la otra*, Dee Dee) would gain cred (say, a hottie shortboarder with major label sponsorship or a member of a local neo-nardcore band) to inspire jealousy in an ex, Raquel was hooking up in the polar region opposite of north. She was dating down, *way* down. Evie had no idea who the owner of the background voice was and she didn't bother asking. If she knew Raquel, the voice and the male attached to it wouldn't last more than a couple of weeks.

"Where are you?" Evie asked.

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

As Evie started to back out of the driveway, she looked up towards the Diaz's house. Between the towering cypress trees that divided the properties, she saw that the window shades to Raquel's upstairs bedroom were pulled up, a sign that Raquel was definitely not in her room. She kept her shades closed until she, and only she, decided it was time to finally start her day and make the grand decision to get out of bed and pull the blinds open. Evie wondered where Raquel had gone the night before that led her to still be away from home. Whenever Raquel took off somewhere ~~scandalous~~ ^{questionable} for the

evening, Evie would get a call to cover for her. However, last night Evie didn't get 'the call.'

"O-kay, Raquel." Evie struggled to shift from reverse to first gear. Damn, couldn't her father have had the stick shift converted to manual? "I'll let you go do whatever, with whomever. Just call me later."

"Yeah, yeah. Definitely," Raquel said before hanging up and after playfully slapping "*stop it!*" to the mystery boy with her.

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

"Hi Evie!" Dee Dee practically chirped on the other end.

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

"You sound in a good mood," Evie observed.

"Oh, I just got off the phone with Rocio," Dee Dee's voice got light and dreamy.

"Oh, Evie, I love him *so* much."

Rocio was Dee Dee's long lost boyfriend she had to leave behind in Mexico City once she and her family returned to Rio Estates. She talked to him every day and every night.

"Hey, so I've got the Mercedes," Evie bragged as she slowly entered Camino del Rio and cautiously looked both ways down the street. "I thought I could come over and pick you up."

Dee Dee also lived in Rio Estates just a few blocks away on Camino Cortez. ✓

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

“Eileen? Who’s that?”

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

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

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

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

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

Duckies?

Ever since Dee Dee was a little girl she always talked about being a La Patrona debutante. Her mother was one, her grandmother was one and, of course, Dee Dee not only wanted to be one, she *had* to be one. La Patronas was the oldest and most respected debutante society in the county. It was started by the wives of the early Southern Californian landowners, all of them wealthy and many of them Hispanic. Dee Dee’s father didn’t have such regal connections to early Ventura County, but Dee Dee’s mother, the late Margaret de LaFuente, sure did. Her family had owned multiple ranches in the

area long ago, when the area was still Mexico. You couldn't get more regally connected than that.

Between Dee Dee's calculated pursuits to obtain the key to the city, Raquel jonesing for a key to the nearest mini bar, and she, herself, most desirous of the keys to an available automobile, Evie sometimes wondered how all three girls could each be so unique and remain best friends. But then again, no matter what kind of keys they each longed for, the three of them had once been three little girls in tight *trenzas* with *respado* juice dripping down their chins. It was nostalgia (or was it embarrassment?) that kept their bond strong. **MORE** *who mother's shipped off their own flipflops...*

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

"If I'm so good," Evie said, not buying it and struggling with the gears, "then why don't you ever let me drive Jumile?"

Jumile was the name of Dee Dee's VW Beetle. Sailors christened boats, socialites attached pretenious tags on pet Chihuahuas, but in South Cali, it was in proper order to conjure up a cutesy names for one's car. To own a nameless vehicle? *Unthinkable.*

Jumile was **also** the name of a particular tree beetle found in the hills of Taxco, Mexico. Dee Dee had informed Evie and Raquel that on the first Monday after *Dia de los Muertos*, it was a tradition to hike into the hills of Taxco and search for the little green beetles so the locals could roast and grind them up to make salsa **and celebrate the new season.**

"*sta loco, no?*" Dee Dee gloated to Evie and Raquel after she had shared that she had been adventurous enough to partake in the beetle eats, as if to prove, **under her** *Selma*

styled hair and immaculately applied make up, that she could be *loca* in her own way. So when Dee Dee got her lime green VW Beetle, she instantly **baptized** him Jumile, in honor (or remorse?) of the little green beetles she supposedly gobbled up in Taxco.

But now here was Dee Dee, again. Insisting that it was her father's fault that Evie couldn't drive Jumile.

"Evie," Dee Dee started. "You know I'd let you drive Jumile if I could, but it's all about my dad. He's so uptight about my insurance and everything. Really."

"Uh huh. I *love* that story," Evie **said**. "Well, I'll be getting my own car soon enough, and then I won't have to count on poor little 'uninsured for additional drivers' Jumile."

Evie was now heading south, down the eucalyptus lined street of Calle Bonita and towards the main gate of Rio Estates. **She was ready to gun the engine and make a run for it. A cruise by The Shores was calling.**

"Oh, Evie, please, there is *no* way your dad isn't going to get you a Beetle for your birthday," Dee Dee insisted. "He just *has* to come through. We have to have the complete set."

It was Dee Dee's plan that Evie and Raquel get VW Beetles just like hers. She believed the three girls were a team, a dynamic trio, and not having similar modes of transportation would be like the three musketeers not having, well, identical moustaches.

The flower holder in Jumile held incense sticks, and a large sticker of Dee Dee's favorite band/soap opera's crest, RBD, was on the back window. Raquel's parents had

just bought her a Beetle a month ago for Christmas. Hers was black and named B.J., as in Beetle Juice, not the *other* thing. B.J.'s flower vase held cigarette butts, and adhered across the top of B.J.'s front window visor was 'So-Cal' in white, old English script. Both Dee Dee and Raquel, of course, had vanity license plates that clearly stated their Beetles' pet names, JUMILE for Dee Dee and BTLE JCE for Raquel.

Evie wanted her Beetle to be red, cherry bomb red with a sunroof, Bose speakers, fresh cut hibiscus flowers in the flower holder, and the quintessential decal that identified Evie totally--a white outlined pair of flip flops, stuck smack center of her back window. She had already purchased the decal months ago at the Ventura Surf Shop, and now all she needed was a brand new car to attach it to. Simple enough, no? But unlike ~~JUMILE~~ and ~~BTLE JCE~~, Evie's Beetle was going to be fabulously sexy and fun, ~~CHRY BMB~~, and it was her dream to drive away from her birthday party at Duke's in Cherry Bomb.

In about a month and a half, on February 29th to be exact, Evie was going to turn sixteen, and this particular birthday was special for two reasons. One was that there was actually going to be a February 29th on the year's calendar. Being a leap year baby, Evie had to celebrate her birthday either on the 28th of February or the first of March. Not to be all *sentida* about it, but it sorta sucked not to have your birthday party on your actual birth date. And two, this birthday celebration was going to be extra ~~special~~ ^{cool} because Evie's mother was going to throw her a ~~Sixteenera~~, more Sweet Sixteen, way less *quinceanera*, which only meant one thing in Southern California -- A Mexican style luau. Evie was planning to have her bash thrown at Duke's in Malibu. Could she *even* keep count of all the *Seventeen* magazine tear-outs lining the inside of the locker door of all her favorite

Laguna Beach and *O.C.* stars lunching and “canoodling” at Duke’s? Duke’s was a **super cool** restaurant that overlooked the Pacific and was named after the OG Hawaiian surfer himself, Duke Kahanumoku. It only made sense that Evie would celebrate her sixteenera in all of Duke’s Polynesian atmospheric glory. Her reputation as a surfer-flojo-wearing chick, depended on it.

As Dee Dee claimed, Evie’s sixteenera party was the talk of Villanueva Prep, and how could it not be? After all, Evie’s father had already secured DJ VHS (state who) to spin nothing but classic surf and power pop. There would be Polynesian dancers and *lechon*, roasted pork, but Hawaiian style with the pig’s head intact and everything. Evie’s mother had planned to make gift bags filled with disks of Mr. Zog’s Sex Wax, Roxy Mariachi flip flops, sunblock, and customized sun visors with the words, ‘**Evening with Evie**’, **stitched on the front**. But the main attraction at Evie’s sweet sixteenera? She, Raquel, and Dee Dee were going to perform a *hula auana*, a slow Hawaiian dance complete with grass skirts and faux coconut shells that they somehow were going to secure over their chests. For weeks, all three girls had been practicing to learn, in sync, the graceful hand movements and hip swaying by following an instructional video and CD, *Honolulu Now*. Evie had to admit, the hours of practice did leave her to question her patience and rhythm, **but Dee Dee and Raquel’s total dedication and support always made her feel more sure about herself**. She had never performed for an audience in her life and now, here she was planning to do so at her birthday party, in front of hundreds of people. But who better to do it with than her two favorite AdAs? Amigas del Alma, that is.

which Dee Dee had explained

“God,” Evie went on about her party, “I just hope my party doesn’t turn into some mascara running drama straight outta *My Sweet Sixteen*.”

“Oooh, I hope so or it wouldn’t be good party, otherwise,” Dee Dee mused. “So, why don’t you take Alejandro or Raquel for your drive?”

“Alex is out at Sea Street,” Evie said.

“Surfing, again?”

“Uh, huh,” Evie turned up **Dios**. “I’m gonna hook up with him tomorrow. We might take the boards to Santa Barbara.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Dee Dee’s voice suddenly turned **slo mo**, leading Evie to believe that she was applying either eyeliner or mascara or channeling Anna Nicole Smith. “No offense,” Dee Dee continued slowly, “but don’t... you... ever... get tired that... all... you do with Alex is... surf?”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked as she shifted down to bring her mother’s car to a stop. The whole thing stalled. Sheeyat. Evie started the Mercedes up again.

“Don’t get me... wrong. I think .. it’s cool that... you... two have something major in... common, but,” Dee Dee finally **put her vocal cord on the right rpm**. “It’s just, I mean, in Mexico, boys take girls out, on dates. You get to dress up and have a nice dinner, go dancing.”

“Dee Dee,” Evie rolled her eyes to the side. “I’m fine with the stuff we do. Alex is my bud and Sea Street is *our* place.”

True, Sea Street had pretty much been deemed Evie and Alex’s place. Last semester, Evie would kick back on the promenade’s wall with Raquel, Jose, and

Mondo, while Alex surfed. Now ~~that the Flojos were no longer a clique~~, she was an official surfer and Alex's official girlfriend. So yes, Sea Street *was* their place.

"Your *bud*?" Dee Dee asked. "Oh, I thought he was your *boyfriend*."

Evie could sense Dee Dee's blonde tinted eyebrows (Michael Kelley Salon, 60 dollars a pair) rise in surprise.

"He is," Evie felt she had to defend his title. "But he's also my buddy, my friend. And that's very important in a relationship."

"*Claro*, of course, it's important," Dee Dee agreed. "I was just asking, that's all. So, what about Raquel? Did you call her to go driving?"

"I already did, but she's totally out of it."

"Out of it or hung over?" Dee Dee asked.

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

"She was just tired," Evie lied. "I woke her up."

"Woke her up?" Dee Dee exclaimed. "It's after 1 o'clock! *Ay. That* girl!"

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

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

“Nothing,” Evie tried to soft pedal backwards. She knew better than to diss the all mighty D.F. Besides, she was now approaching Calle Aqua Caliente and had to focus. The transmission of her mother’s Mercedes revved hard as she fumbled into second gear. Damn. Could it be that her father accidentally filled the fuel tank with vinegar instead of vegetable oil? Evie’s efforts made her sound like an amateur barista-in-training, grinding espresso beans to a pulp. She reached the intersection just as a silver sports car pulled up, but she could not remember who had the right away to go first.

“Hey, *maestro*,” Evie started. “I’m at a four-way stop and I forgot, who has the right away?”

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

“Uh,” Evie looked over at the sports car. “She’s not moving.”

“So wave her to go,” Dee Dee advised.

“I just did.”

“Then just go, I guess,” Dee Dee said.

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

“Oh, my God!” Evie screamed as she dropped her phone to her lap. She felt her throat plummet to her gut. Her chest grew numb. She did *not* just hit another car.

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

Evie picked up her cell. “Dee Dee!” She yelled into the mouthpiece. “I just hit a car! Oh, my God, what do I do?”

“What? Oh *my* God. Are you okay?”

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

He lifted his thick arms up in a thug-like ‘*what the?*’ confrontation as he sauntered over to the front of his car to check for any possible damage. He was short, but stocky, with a shaved head and wearing a supersized football jersey throwback. He was definitely someone you normally didn’t see behind the cloistered gates of Rio Estates.

“If you weren’t so busy yakking on that damn cell phone,” he ranted towards Evie.

“Maybe you’d know how to drive. Pay attention, you pinche *idiot!*”

“Oh. My. God.” Evie sunk into the leather upholstery of the car seat. She held her head and the “damn phone” down, away from the driver’s view, and whispered into her cell. “Dee Dee,” her voice started to crack. She thought she might cry. “He’s *totally* raging at me.”

“*Who?* ”

“This guy. The guy whose car I hit!” *How* could she have hit a car? If this guy didn’t kill her, her mother certainly would.

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

“Dee Dee,” Evie pleaded. “You gotta come. *Now!*”

The guy was now at the driver’s side of her mother’s Mercedes. He tapped on the side of the door with the back of his hand and glared at Evie. “Hang up the damn phone,

turn off the friggin' music, and get out here and deal. What, you want me to call the cops?"

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

"Dee Dee," Evie could still feel her throat in the pit of her stomach. "I... I have to go."

"Wait! Evie, where are--"

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

"I am *so* sorry!" She looked over at the guy's car. It looked like a lowered Honda or Toyota. "Did I ding it?"

"Uh, yeah," the guy **said**. "You fucked it up all right."

He walked back to the front of his car and Evie followed him. He crouched down to show her.

"*Mira*," he said. "Right there." He pointed to his bumper.

Evie looked. And looked. And looked. She strained to find something out of the ordinary, something concave or indented, but couldn't detect anything. Then finally she saw it. A small dent, the size of a dime, okay, *maybe* a quarter. "You mean *that*?" She ran her finger over it.

"Yeah, I mean *that*." The guy looked at her in amazement.

Evie looked over his car's bumper and then at mother's Mercedes. The Benz appeared flawless.

"I'm gonna need your license," the guy said. "And your insurance info."

"My license?" Evie's heart dropped.

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

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

One ring, two ring...

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

Three ring, four ring.

“*Bueno?* Gomez residence.”

Finally.

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

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

“I’m not in front of the house. I’m—”

“*What?*”

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

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

“Lindsay, I know, I know. Please, just come now.” She looked back at the driver to make sure he couldn’t hear her. “And, I’m in my mother’s car.”

“What?!”

“Lindsay, please, just come now. I’ll explain later. Just come. *Now!*”

“Evie, this is not good,” Lindsay told Evie something she already knew. “Stay *right* there!”

Evie hung up and slowly got back out of her mother’s Mercedes.

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

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

“Yeah, right now. She should be here in a few minutes.” Evie looked down the street. “We live just a few streets down, on Camino del Rio.”

Camino del Rio. Why? Why didn’t she just stay on her street like she was supposed to? Why didn’t she just practice with Lindsay’s car like she said she would.

Evie looked at the guy who was now rummaging through his glove compartment. What if the cops *did* come? **Would it delay her getting her license? Would she still be allowed to even apply for one? Evie had no idea. She was definitely out of her element, in a world full of road rules and, seemingly, road rage.**

Evie looked over at the driver, whose eyes where angry and impatient.

She then checked the time on her own cell phone. *Oh, Just hurry Lindsay.*

Chapter 2

It seemed like forever for Lindsay to finally show up at the scene of Evie’s **crime**. When she did, she was out of breath, and her dark wispy bangs were stuck to her forehead with perspiration. Evie couldn’t understand why she showed up on foot.

“Lindsay,” Evie started. “Why didn’t you just drive your car?”

+8 19

“Because,” Lindsay huffed between breaths, “You took my main set of keys.” She grabbed the key ring from Evie’s grasp. “I *told* you to take the spare. I didn’t have the keys to my own car!” She took a breath and looked Evie over. “Are you okay? What happened?”

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

“Her license?” Lindsay looked at Evie.

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

Of course, Evie neither had a license nor car insurance. But as any Californian driver knows, it’s not about sweating fellow fender benders, but rather making sure that said fellow fender benders had good car insurance or, at the very least, a good connection to repair any damage they were liable for.

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

“My brother-in-law works at Williams Automotive,” Lindsay informed the guy. She looked over the car’s bumper. “He could fix this in a day. I’ll call him tonight. I’d rather keep my insurance out of it.”

Of course, that was enough for the guy. Everyone in the whole county knows about Williams Automotive. They fixed all kinds of cars, “From Model-As to Orales.” *Orale* was Spanish for “cool,” but at Williams Automotive, and pretty much in the whole

805, *Orale* meant lowriders, and as Evie had noticed earlier, the guy's car practically swept the street about an inch from the ground. It definitely fell under Williams' *Orale* category.

Finally, after an exchange of info, the guy and his dime-sized dent were on their way. It couldn't be soon enough for Evie.

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

Lindsay pursed her lips and took a walk around the Mercedes to double check that there was no damage. Evie followed suit, and, fortunately, there was nothing. Nada. Vicki Gomez' classic veggie mobile was spared.

Lindsay got into the driver's seat. Evie opened the passenger door and got in.

"Evelina," Lindsay started the Benz. "You told me you were taking my car, and you told me that you were going to stay in front of the house and —"

"I know, Lindsay." Evie felt badly and didn't want to hear it. She hated letting Lindsay down. She was often her only ally, and now Evie had been purposely dishonest with her. "I'm sorry. I am *so* sorry. I was gonna ask you if I could take my mother's car, but you were watching La Cueva, and I didn't want to bother you. Then I got on the cell with Dee Dee and—."

"You were *talking*?" Lindsay instinctly tapped the brake pedal and glared at Evie. "On the *phone*? While driving your mother's car?"

Was that steam coming out of Lindsay's nostrils?

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

Evie was afraid of that.

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

“How are you going to pay for his car?” Lindsay shook her head in disbelief. “That dent isn’t some little pop out. It could be a lot of money, Evelina. A lot.”

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

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

“Um, no,” Evie confessed. “Not yet, really. But you know Grandma Pama always sends a check, and now that it’s gonna be my 16th birthday, I’ll probably get more money than usual.”

Lindsay didn’t say anything because she knew it was the truth. Evie’s Grandma Pama, her father’s mother, always sent Evie and her sister, Sabrina, grand checks with a substantial amount of zeros for their birthdays. Could it be guilt that she was the absentee abuela and rarely attended her own granddaughters’ birthday parties? That she preferred studying viticulture at UC Davis with her fellow grad students than help fill some Bart Simpson shaped pinata or lead the traditional Mexican birthday chant of *Las Mananitas*? Whatever the case, neither Evie nor Sabrina questioned Grandma Pama’s

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motives or lack of attendance at their birthday parties. They'd been cashing her checks as soon as they had learned what the word endorsement meant.

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

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

Lindsay didn't say anything as she drove on Camino Pacifico and turned onto Camino del Rio. It was true that Evie's father, who owned four successful panaderias in the county, had invested a lot of money and time into his fat free sweet bread idea. He then lost a lot more money when it didn't do so well. Since then, the subject of money had been a sensitive topic in the Gomez household.

Evie looked out the window. She was already on thin ice for breaking her curfew (*again*) with Raquel (*again*) over Christmas vacation, and all she needed was a third strike that could land her in internment (*again*). In California, "the three strikes and you're out" law was harsh, but Vicki Gomez could be just as severe. Would she cancel Evie's sixteenera? Not let her drive once she got her license? Or worse, would Evie's little fender bender keep her from getting Cherry Bomb? Dear precious CHRY BMB with her sun roof, the Bose speakers, and don't forget the single white outlined decal of flip flops on the back window!

When they finally pulled up to the house, Evie was horrified to find her father's Escalade parked in the driveway. What were her parents doing back so early?

"Your mother is going to wonder why we took her car," Lindsay said as she pulled up into the circular driveway. Evie noticed that Lindsay sounded just as uneasy about the whole situation.

Evie clenched her jaw. "Hey, Linds..."

"Si?" She parked alongside the Escalade and turned off the Mercedes' engine.

"Nothing," Evie sighed. She knew it was no use. She would have to face the consequences.

As they entered the house, Evie had to adjust her eyes from coming in from the outside afternoon sun. Lindsay stepped down into the den where the closing credits of *La Cueva* were rolling down the TV screen. She clicked her tongue as well as the television off, in annoyance. Obviously, **in her haste**, she had forgotten to TiVo her *novela favorita*.

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

"Why did you take my car?" Evie's mother asked Lindsay as she entered the kitchen. She was sorting through a pile of place mats, all of them in different shades of green, forest green. "Is there something wrong with your car, Linds?"

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

“Molesto got out,” Lindsay quickly interrupted. “And I could not find my spare key. *Ay*, we were driving up and down the street, looking for him.” She clicked her tongue again and ran her fingers through her hair in pseudo exasperation. “*That* dog.”

Evie looked over at her, in surprise.

“Oh, no,” Evie’s mother feigned concern. “Did you find him?”

Vicki Gomez actually despised Molesto, the black Labrador that had once been Sabrina’s. It would be her ultimate dream come true to have him to run away and never return to the Gomez residence. Last summer, Sabrina had been working for El Mision and Molesto (then properly named Ernesto) was training to become a seeing-eye guide. Molesto flunked not just a few, but all of his obedience classes, and Sabrina, feeling empathy and concern for what would happen to dear old Ernesto, begged her parents to let her take him. Of course, they conceded, and at the time he was a cute blind school flunkie pup, but now Sabrina was back at Stanford, and Molesto was displaying the true colors of his Spanish nickname— he *was* quite *bothersome*.

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

Evie looked up at Lindsay and got her eye. *Thank you*. She owed Lindsay big time.

“Well, I don’t want him in my car,” Evie’s mother said. “He’ll scratch up the leather and leave his hair all over. If that ever happens again, which I’m sure it will, just let him go. He’ll eventually come home.”

“*Si, si, claro*,” Lindsay said.

Evie suddenly couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt. She didn't want Lindsay to get in trouble with her mother due to her **deliberate delinquency**.

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

"*Si, claro*," Lindsay agreed again as she gathered old newspapers off the counter and took them to the recycling container outside. She was smart to make an early exit before **General** Gomez got too inquisitive.

Evie had forgotten that her sister was due home the following week. Sabrina had decided to take a short break from her studies at Stanford. Evie didn't know the whole story but she knew that Sabrina was really bummed about the break up with her boyfriend, Robert. Evie was apprehensive about Sabrina's return. In a way, she liked being the only child in the household. She got a lot of attention. Okay, sometimes maybe too much? But she definitely didn't like being constantly compared to her over-achieving sister. Suprema, as Evie often called her, was nineteen years old, only four years older than Evie, but they were a world of merit badges apart, and now that she was going to be back home for a while, the difference between the two worlds were going to be painfully apparent.

"When is Sabrina getting here?" Evie pulled up a stool next to her father. Considering what had just happened back on Calle Aqua Caliente, she felt more relaxed, at least for the time being. She helped herself to some nuts from the ceramic bowl that Lindsay always kept filled.

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

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

“Nothing,” her mother said. “One of her girlfriends will drive it down later.”

It all seemed very odd to Evie. What was the urgency to have Sabrina home so soon? Was the whole drama of having her car driven down really necessary? Stanford University was only five hours north of Rio Estates, and her sister, as well as the whole family, relished the long scenic drive along the California gold coast. Why wouldn’t her sister just drive home, like she usually did?

“I could drive her car down,” Evie volunteered. Sabrina had a brand new Mini Cooper, silver with a black stripe down the roof and hood. It was polished, petite, and always filled with a tank of premium gas. **What chica wouldn’t want to ~~get to~~ cruise a Mini?**

“No. You. Can’t,” her father emphasized each word with a slow nod of his head. “It’ll be a while before you can go making trips like that.” He opened another business envelope and started to read the contents. “Evie,” his casual tone suddenly dropped to *serious*. “What’s going on here?”

“What?” Evie grabbed more nuts and looked over towards the paperwork he was reading.

“Your quality check,” he said.

Sheeyat! How could Evie be *so* careless? QCs came out every three weeks, more or less. This was her first quality check of the new semester. If only she had checked the mail instead of being in such a rush to go out driving, she could have retrieved the

incriminating evidence addressed to “The parents or guardian of Evelina Maria Gomez.” It could have bought her some time.

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

“I have no idea,” Evie said. Civics and English were not her favorite classes, but she didn’t know she was doing that badly. If anything, she thought she had a low B in both classes.

“Well, you better get an idea,” Her father’s tone turned even more serious, a tone Evie did not want to get used to any time soon. “An idea how to change these grades. We don’t have you going to Villanueva for nothing. Do you know how much it costs us to send you there?”

Evie didn’t say anything, and neither did her mother.

“And you’re already a sophomore,” her father added. “These grades count. You have to maintain a high GPA if you want to get into a good college. How do you think Sabrina got into Stanford? And you know our agreement,” her father said. “No birthday party at Dukes if you can’t keep your GPA up.

“And,” her mother reminded her. “If your average gets below a B, you can’t drive, license or no license.”

To be honest, Evie had overlooked that particular clause of the birthday and driving agreement between her and her parents. This semester, she had become so wrapped up in having Alex as a new boyfriend, getting her driver’s license, and planning

her big ~~S~~ixteenera at Duke's in Malibu that she had forgotten about the fine print. She didn't think her parents could be *that* serious about possibly canceling the party. Her mother, wanting to look VC style worthy for the 200 or so planned guests, had already started a new diet, and her father had paid the hefty non-refundable deposit for Duke's main banquet room. They seemed to be just **as pumped up** as if the party was for them and their country club friends.

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

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

"And I'm afraid we are going to need to know that you are improving, *in advance* of your party," her mother said. "We still need to send out the evites and the formal paper invites."

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

"Evie, don't do that," her mother frowned. "Either eat them or throw them away. Don't pick." She went on. "What I mean is, your next quality check is in three weeks, the first week of February, so we'll have to see how your next check is."

"*What?*" Evie balked. "You want me to have straight A's in less than three weeks?"

"No, you just need to show us that you are serious about improving," her father said. "Like your mother said, 'in advance'."

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

“But I just started the semester,” Evie protested. “How am I going to tell you *beforehand* what my final GPA will be?”

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

“No.” Evie sulked in her seat.

Her mother rolled the paper work and tapped it her under her chin. She softened her voice. “Don’t worry, *mi’jita*. You can do it. I know how important this party is to you.” She reached for some nuts and then stopped herself. Nuts were the forbidden **fruit** on her new So SoCal diet.

“Of course you can,” her father agreed. “I remember one time when Sabrina got her quality check and was so upset when a B+ brought her whole average down. Remember that, Vicki?”

Again, with Suprema.

“She was very determined to improve, and she did.” Evie’s father continued as he looked over the rest of the mail. “That kind of focus is in the Gomez blood.” He smiled to himself as if the family bloodline originated from him and only him.

Just then Molesto came prancing up. Evie’s mother’s Bluetooth, completely covered in dog slop, was stuck halfway out of his mouth.

“Molesto!” Her mother cried out. “Ruben! Call him! He’s got my phone!”

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

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

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

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

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

- new chapter

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

Dee Dee texted back right away:

Cn u cmc here?



As did Raquel:

Same place?

Raquel's quick response surprised Evie. Fun time with Rebound Boy must have ended.

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

Because Dee Dee was still fussing over her precious Patronas meeting, the girls didn't meet at the "same place" but rather at Dee Dee's house. Raquel picked up Evie, and they drove over for the ER/RE! meet up.

As soon as they were loaded up with the regulatory Snapple and pita chips, courtesy of the de LaFuente's housekeeper, Evie and Raquel settled in Dee Dee's bedroom upstairs.

"Oh, my God," Dee Dee fussed over Evie as soon as she let her and Raquel in. "You're in one piece! What happened with that guy? You just hung up on me, and I had no idea what to think."

"You won't even believe today," Evie started as she placed her Snapple and chips on the dresser. "Oh. My. God. It was the scariest thing I ever had to deal with in my

whole life. I mean, this dude was so right in my face, with his jersey and shaved head, you just know he was some gangbanger ready to cap my ass or something.”

“*Please*,” Raquel crammed some pita chips into her mouth and smirked at Evie. “A gang *banger*? In Rio Estates? And if he *was* a gangbanger, what kind of jersey did he front?”

Evie looked at Raquel. It was *so* like her to try and act like she held all knowledge of street sense and sensibility.

“Raquel, you were *not* even there,” Evie insisted. “You didn’t even see this guy. He was all in my face and just ready to throwdown.”

Okay, maybe a slight exaggeration, but Evie felt the need to enhance her **story**, at **least for the sake of her suburban pride**.

“Ay, well, I’m just glad it’s all over with,” Dee Dee **checked the heat of her hot rollers on her head**. “When I got your text, I didn’t know what to do. What happened to the veggie Benz? Anything?”

“Nothing,” Evie said. “But I dinged, sorta, the other guy’s car, but Lindsay’s got this brother-in-law at Williams Automotive, so I think it won’t be too much.”

“What, you’re gonna have to pay for it?” Raquel asked.

“Of course,” Evie said. “What, you think I’m gonna ask my mother to have her insurance take care of it? No way.”

Evie got up from the edge of Dee Dee’s bed and paced on the wide loop shag of her bedroom carpet. “But that’s not the worst part. I got my quality check today, and my parents are totally freaking out. They told me that I couldn’t have my party unless I bring

my average up by the time I get my next quality check. That's in **three** weeks. There is *no* way I can bring my average up in time."

"How bad was your QC?" Dee Dee asked as she held up two different blouses in front of her vanity mirror. That was the problem when the girls didn't meet at their regular place on the secluded stretch of the golf course. Evie felt that multi-tasking often led to a lack of focus.

"It was okay," Evie took a sip of her Kiwi Strawberry and felt a little embarrassed. Among the three friends, Dee Dee was the brain, and without even trying. It often made Evie feel inferior that she studied so much, yet Dee Dee achieved better grades so effortlessly. "I mean, I got two Cs. One in English and the other in civics."

"How could you get a 'C' in English?" Raquel flipped through Dee Dee's *Elle Girl*. Far from her personal flavor, but she wasn't about to waste her time with any of the "moda estylo" 'zines in Spanish that Dee Dee subscribed to from Mexico. "Harrison is total kick back. Even I'm doing well in her class."

Great. Even Raquel was doing better in English. Could Evie feel *mas* substandard?

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

"I don't. I love writing," Dee Dee said. She hung up one of the blouses after choosing a femmy pink one with a conservative neckline.

"Since when?" Evie asked suspiciously. She didn't remember that Dee Dee *loved* to write so much when they were little kids.

“*Since* I lived in Mexico,” Dee Dee answered defiantly. “That was the best thing about going to school there.” She suddenly got dreamy eyed. “I got to write and read in Spanish, all the romantic poems and essays by Neruda and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and of course, love letters from Rocio.”

Raquel threw Evie an exasperated “here we go again” look. She and Evie had both grown weary of the Rocio valentine that stayed pinned on Dee Dee’s heart. If Dee Dee wasn’t texting him *larga distancia*, she was gabbing with him in that show offy big city *espanol* of hers on the cell. Yes, Evie thought, it was one thing to claim the love of your life, but another thing to friggin’ **talk** about him “venti-cuarto/siete.”

Raquel turned her attention back to Evie. “So why don’t you just do some community service crap or something for extra credit in civics? Vasquez loves that kind of stuff.”

“Oh, yeah?” Evie took another sip of her Snapple.

“Uh, *yes*,” Raquel answered. “How do you think Jose skated through Nueva when he used to go there? All that roadside trash he picked up off Vineyard Avenue wasn’t *always* a court appointed assignment.”

Evie laughed. “*Serio?*”

“Seriously,” Raquel smirked with evil pleasure. “*What* a loser.”

“And,” Dee Dee added. “I’m sure you could volunteer for something like The Surfrider Foundation or Adopt the Beach. Something totally Evie Gomez.”

“Yeah,” Raquel agreed. “That would be way cooler than being stuck after school every day with some boring ass tutor.”

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

“Yeah,” Evie felt encouraged. “That might be cool.”

“Look,” Raquel continued. “You could do some community service for civics, and then write a paper about your experiences for English. Make it a paper full of hardship and woe, you know how Harrison loves all that ‘struggling brown people’ stuff.”

“More writing?” Evie gawked. “No thank you.”

“I can write the paper for you,” Dee Dee offered. “You can just basically tell me what to say and I’ll write it up, real good. A+ quality.”

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

“I could do it in *Francais* if you want.” Dee Dee wasn’t gonna let them get the best of her. “You know I’m already at level III and at the top of my class.”

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

“And we don’t want that,” Raquel took a swig of her Snapple. “It’s been a friggin’ dry spell around here.”

“You’re telling me,” Dee Dee agreed. “*Totally seca.*”

“And what language is that?”

“**Chilango**,” Dee Dee said with a smug smile.



— *Chilango?*

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

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

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

NW Swell @ C st. Cnt make 2morw. Srry!

To imitate Dee Dee, *Mande*? There is a northwest swell at the Sea Street break, and so now he was canceling their plans to go to Santa Barbara? Just so he could go surfing? Again? Argh!

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

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

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

But Evie didn't laugh. She was about to text Alex back but decided she should talk to him in person, meaning, over the phone. She was overwhelmed with what she had gone through in one day – the car accident, a tongue lashing from a total stranger, her miserable quality check, the possibility that she may not have her birthday party. And Alex, her *boyfriend*, wasn't even around to comfort her during any of the drama. He had been *too* busy surfing at Sea Street, and now their Sunday plans were cancelled because he suddenly wanted to go surfing. And did she mention *again*? And to make matters worse, he didn't even invite her to go along!

Evie re-read his text message again and felt angry, and to be honest, a little sad. She and Alex had only been going out a little over two months. Was he already losing interest in her? She fondled the abalone necklace her had given her just last November. She wore the necklace every day, sometimes even in her sleep. It was a sign of his affection towards her. But now, it seemed his text messages on her cell phone symbolized how he really felt.

Chapter 3

420 in the 805

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

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

"Don't make promises you can't keep," Evie knew she was being a baby about him canceling the day before, but to be honest, she was getting a little tired of Alex's flakiness. This wasn't the first time. There was the time they had plans to go to the new skatepark over on Rose Avenue, and he flaked because Mondo's Maurader was down and he needed a ride to Oakview. Then there was the other time when they were supposed to go to her father's Christmas party for all the employees at his bakery, and, at the last minute, Alex wanted to drive to Santa Barbara for a "super amazing" board sale at Remmies. He wanted to go the night before so he could curb camp and be the first in line for the morning selection. **Evie sighed again.** Maybe Raquel was right. Could a girlfriend compete with the internal search for stoke that so many surfers were born with?

"No, but really," Alex said again as she opened her locker door. "I am *so* sorry."

One million and one.

"God," Alex said as he looked over her O.C. magazine cut outs, taped to the inside of her door. They were primarily of ~~Adam Brody~~ ^{Seth}. "You *like* this guy?"

"And what's wrong with him?" Evie asked.

"Nothing," Alex said. "If you like dorks."

"He is *not* a dork," Evie slugged Alex on the arm. "He's sensitive and sweet."

"I can be sensitive and sweet." Alex put his hand on her back. "Hey, I'll totally do whatever I can to help you with this volunteer thing. I don't like seeing you so bummed out." He leaned in to wrap his arms around her.

"Hey!" Dee Dee came up behind them. "*Que pasa*, lovebirds?"

Raquel was in tow, listening to her ipod with the wheel cranked to the maximum right.

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

“I’m *totally* starving!” Raquel yelled. “Let’s go eat, already!”

“Raq,” Alex motioned to her ears. “Calm the wheel!”

“Oops, sorry.” Raquel removed her iPod earplugs out.

“When you are gonna get a decent headpiece?” Alex frowned at Raquel’s white plastic ear plugs. “Those are crap. No wonder you have to crank them up.”

“Sor-ry,” Raquel said. “Not *everyone* has a boyfriend who buys them four hundred dollar Bose headphones.” She glanced into Evie’s locker, where such headphones, a gift from Alex, were carefully tucked in their black pouch on top of her books and notepads. “You two are such *i-snobs*.”

“And proud of it,” Evie said.

“Hey,” Alex rubbed his stomach under his T-shirt. “Let’s bail for lunch. I’m jonesing for an O-hi Frostie.”

“Claro,” Dee Dee smacked her lips. “Sounds *muy* yummy.”

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

“Oh, yeah. That’s right,” Dee Dee **said**. “I completely forgot.”

Evie’s mood turned sour as she shut her locker door. How could her own boyfriend and best friend not remember the major dilemma she was still facing? Were they that self-absorbed? She couldn’t think of anything else the rest of the weekend.

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

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

"See!" Evie huffed. "I knew this was gonna happen. I told my parents that there was no way I could get my average up in time. If I don't get rid of those two Cs, my mom is totally gonna cancel the party."

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

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

~~One~~ avocado?" Dee Dee's forehead creased. "But that makes no sense. They're totally fattening."

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

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

Alex read the listings from the volunteer board outloud. "Here's some help needed: 'Working with the elderly, three days a week.'"

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

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

“Yeah,” Evie laughed. “You’re at risk every time you paddle out on that nine hundred dollar ~~Stewart~~ board of yours.”

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

Evie felt a little uncomfortable hearing about Raquel’s latest transaction with Mondo. Raquel had upgraded from last semester’s dime bags to this semester’s **bountiful purchases.**

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

“I’m only texting,” Raquel explained, not bothering to look up.

“You know the rules,” Miss Peterson pointed to the doorway. “Take it outside or it will be confiscated.”

Raquel rolled her eyes at Evie as if for permission to be excused. “I’m just gonna find out what’s up with Mondo. I’ll be right back to help you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Evie knew better than to really count on Raquel. Once party supplies entered the picture, Raquel became suddenly camera shy. “Just go.”

“I’ll be right back,” Raquel said. “Promise.”

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

“So what’s up with Raquel?”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked.

“She’s been going a little off the deep end, don’t you think?” Dee Dee glanced over to where Raquel was in the hallway. “Do you know who she has been going out with? Did she tell you?”

“Nuh, uh,” Evie answered. She didn’t like to admit she didn’t know something so personal about Raquel. For the four years that Dee Dee was away in Mexico City, she and Raquel had become very tight. And now, here was Dee Dee knowing something about Raquel that Evie didn’t? It didn’t seem right. All three girls should pretty much know the same thing about each at pretty much the same exact time.

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

“Davey Mitchell?” Evie repeated the name. “Who’s that?”

“Ronnie Mitchell’s older brother, that’s who,” Dee Dee answered.

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

“He’s practically twenty-two years old,” Dee Dee said of Davey. “And he did time at the CYA.”

“Really?” Evie couldn’t believe it. The California Youth Authorities housed inmates between ages thirteen to twenty-four. It wasn’t just a probation agency or juvie. Kids housed at the CYA had done some **hard, hard things**.

“Yes,” Dee Dee knowingly raised her eyebrows. “Raquel told me. She was actually bragging about it. She’s become such a *leva*.”

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

“We’re not gossiping,” Dee Dee insisted. “Raquel *is* our friend and we are just concerned. You should talk to her, Evie. She’ll listen to you.”

“Listen to me? Say what?” Evie asked. There was no way anyone could dim Raquel shine when it was set on ultra high.

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

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

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

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

Just then, the door to one of the counselor’s office opened. None of them could help but hear the *voice*, that thick Spanish accented voice of Alejandra de los Santos. It monopolized the whole hallway. She was just concluding her session with her counselor, Counselor A through H. There were only three counselors at Villanueva, and each one assisted students based on the the first letter of their last name. There was Counselor A-H, Counselor I-Q and Counselor R-Z. Because their last names started with G and D,

Evie, Dee Dee and Raquel all had Counselor A-H. Alejandra de los Santos had him as well.

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

“Alejandra,” A through H started. “I hope you think more of your internship as just putting in hours. Thousands of other high school juniors across the country would die for the opportunity to intern at Yale. Don’t take it so lightly.” A through H was the oldest of all the counselors, and Evie wondered if his noontime impatience had something to do with needing a noontime nap, or if he was just exhausted by Alejandra’s arrogance.

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

As she left his office, Alejandra couldn’t help but come head to head with Evie, Dee Dee and Alex in the narrow hallway. How could she be so lucky, Evie thought, that Raquel had *just* left? Ever since Raquel had found out that it was Alejandra who had been seeing Jose behind her back, events like the keying of Alejandra’s silver Audi, derogatory spanglish scrawled on her locker door, and more than accidental ‘domino’ slams in the hall had occurred. Was Raquel involved with every one of these **incidents**? Who knew? Evie and Dee Dee didn’t condone such behavior, but never once did they question her about it.

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

Dee Dee, however, answered in English, slowly and calmly. "Oh, my father loves his new position," she said. "But I *really* don't think *your* father got him his job, Ally. I mean, my father has his own credentials. But it was very nice of your dad to mention the position to him."

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. Was Alejandra insinuating that her dad had gotten Dee Dee's father his new position as chancellor at Cal State Channel Islands? She couldn't believe that Alejandra would be so bold, especially when it was just her against the three of them. Her sidekick Sangros, the *Ah-migas* – Natalia, Xiomara, and Fabiola – were nowhere around.

"So," Alex asked Alejandra, "You're gonna do an internship at Yale?"

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

"*Claro*," Alejandra smiled deeply into Alex's eyes. "This summer. But I still don't know," she sighed heavily as she pulled on the dark strand underneath her prominent mane of blonde. Last year, the Sangros' trademark had been their vivid blonde highlights. But this semester, after Christmas break, they all had returned from Mexico City with completely ~~blonde~~ *black* hair. That is, except for a thick, solid strand of ~~brunette~~ *black*. The strand was not quite an '80s punk rock rat tail. It was thick, ~~yet hidden under the blonde~~ *and hung to the left*. A secret hint to their affiliation to their native country?

"I might just go back to Mexico and intern at UNAM," Alejandra continued. "I really miss the sophistication of city life." She glanced at the volunteer list in front of

them. "Are you doing an internship, *tambien?*" She asked Alex. "*Oye*, maybe we could both do one at UNAM. That would be fun." She looked over at Evie.

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

Evie's face burned. Why are boys *so clueless?*

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

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

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

"I wasn't talking about volunteer work," Alejandra smiled slowly. "I'm talking about 'your party.' What made you decide to have it at Dukes?"

"What wrong with Duke's?" Evie regretted asking as soon as the words came out of her mouth. What did she care what Alejandra thought? She wasn't even on the invite list.

"Well, for one thing," Alejandra took another deep breath as though she had an extensive list of problems to read off. But then her eyes gazed over Evie's shoulder and she suddenly announced her departure.

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

"Okay, it's *on!*" Raquel held up her hand to high-five Alex. She was oblivious that her nemesis had been so close by. Couldn't she smell the residue of "sulfur de Sangro" still wafting in the air? Raquel patted the zippered outside pocket of her backpack. "So, I got the goods from Mondo. You wanna go out to The Tree?" she asked Alex.

Alex looked at Evie. "Uh..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No...just go already."

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

“Don’t worry, Evie,” Dee Dee squeezed her shoulder after Alex and Raquel left the office. “We’ll find something, something, something *muy bueno* for you.”

“Yeah,” Evie looked after Alex and Raquel as they headed towards Juniper’s Tree, the big oak tree at the far end of the quad, for their little smoke-out session. “I could use something, or someone, *muy bueno* in my life, right about now.”

Chapter 4

5

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

After she and Dee Dee had picked what seemed the ideal volunteer position for her – caring for rescued horses at the Southern California Horse Reserve -- Evie tapped on A-H’s door. It was still open from his session with Alejandra de los Santos, and Evie asked if he had time to answer a quick question. But she soon found out that quick questions could lead to excruciating long-winded interrogation. A through H now needed to know exactly why Evie wanted to work at the SCHR.

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

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

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“Your community?” A through H breathed heavy over Evie’s file. He had always been a big man, but he had yet to come to terms with his heftier size upon his return from Christmas break. Too many tamales? Evie wondered. His work shirt screamed creases in just about every direction. “I thought you lived in Rio Estates,” he said.

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

“Do you mean equine?” He looked up from Evie’s file and smiled.

“Yes,” Evie answered. Isn’t that what she had just said? “I was reading that they needed help for horses that have been abused or injured. I want to do that.”

“Well, you do know that it’s already three weeks into the semester, and they may not have availability.” A through H adjusted his wire-frame glasses and looked at the calendar hanging to the left of him. It was a Villanueva school calendar, the one that all the seniors so enthusiastically sold every year to raise money for their prom, as if any student who attended the ten-g-a-year Nueva really needed more money to showcase **pretension**. “They may not have room for you.”

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

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

“Oh, do you need someone to work in the office?” Evie asked quickly. An office job would be so cool. She would have full access to hallway passes and the internet

(though most likely with limited viewing blocks), and she could work during class hours and *all* for course credit. *Que* cake. “Because I could do that, too.”

“I thought you wanted to work with rescued horses?” A through H pulled a cloth lens cleaner from the drawer and started to clean his glasses. “At the reserve.”

“Oh, I do,” Evie answered. “I was just asking. I mean, if Villanueva needs help, I totally wanna help.”

Nice save?

“It’s refreshing to hear such school spirit,” A through H smiled as he continued to clean his glasses, going over the lenses with meticulous form. It seemed obvious to Evie that he was on to her. “Well, if we can’t get you at the reserve this semester, there is always their summer program.”

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

“And the urgency is because of your love of horses and has nothing to do with the two Cs on your last quality check?” A through H held up his glasses to the sunlight to inspect them.

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

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

“My party?” Evie asked.

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

“Oh,” Evie cringed. “I didn’t know that. I’m sorry.” Should she offer him an invite?

“No worries,” A through H took off his glasses again and looked at them. “Just try to focus on matters on hand, Evie. Your grades need improving. You know, I was your sister’s counselor when she was a student here. How is she doing at Stanford?”

“Great,” Evie answered. When was Suprema not doing great?

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

“Uh, huh,” was all Evie could think of to say.

Evie soon found out that, A through H was good on his word. The strings he pulled actually yanked a last minute internship for her at the Southern California Horse Reserve. He then drafted a note to Vasquez and Harrison, suggesting they allow Evie to do the extra credit. Counselor A through H held true to his administrative title, A-H, as in *Aaah*...Evie could relax, if only just a little.

Evie’s moment of serenity was short-lived. She still had to get final approval from both Vasquez and Harrison to do extra credit.

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

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

“Give me the mood,” Mrs. Harrison weaved her hands dramatically in the air, a gesture that Evie guessed she wanted her to capture on paper. “I want to hear the complexity of what a *charro* life really is.”

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

“Depending on the length and quality and if you do well on your other class assignments,” Mrs. Harrison said as she initialed the paper, “you can bring your grade up to half a point. By the end of the semester, you could very well have a B.”

“Wow,” Evie wasn’t expecting a full letter B. “And that will be reflected on my next quality check? In three weeks?”

“It very well could be,” Mrs. Harrison confirmed.

“Then I’m really going to do a very good job,” Evie assured her.

Yeah, a very good job getting on Dee Dee’s ass to write a damn good paper.

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

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Vasquez, on the other hand, was harder to convince that Evie was an oppressed upper middle class teen struggling for the Malibu birthday party of her dreams.

“I normally don’t allow this type of extra credit after the semester has already started,” he stated **dryly** as he erased the chalkboard. He kept his back towards Evie the whole time. “It’s standard procedure to request volunteer work at the commencement of a new semester. You know that.”

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

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

“Oh, I totally agree,” Evie said. *Please*, just *sign* the paper. “I mean, all my friends were telling me I should work at a hospice, or with Heal the Bay, but I felt I could be more useful volunteering at an animal reserve. It’s pretty tragic how horses are so neglected in this country. I mean, they were once the symbol of our frontier, right? Now, not enough citizens bother to care about them.”

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

Mr. Vasquez turned around to face Evie. The bottom of his nose had been accidentally dusted with powder from the white chalk. *Party hearty, Mr. V!*

He squinted his eyes at Evie and slowly nodded his head with approval. “Good for you, Evie,” he said. “It’s good to see that you are thinking for yourself. I remember last semester, when you dyed your hair blonde and started hanging out with a different

crowd, Alejandra de los Santos and all her friends, I became a little concerned about you. You're a bright girl, and now here you are wanting to do your own thing. Good for you."

Yes, good for me, Evie floated as Vazquez signed her sheet. She was on her way to becoming the most popular sophomore at Nueva, and maybe, just maybe, she could catch up with ~~La~~ **Sister Suprema's** legacy.

Chapter 5

To be honest, Evie didn't know much about horses. Most of what she had related to Vasquez she had paraphrased from the Southern California Horse Reserve's flyer. She did, however, love when Dee Dee's mom, Margaret, took her, Dee Dee, and Raquel horseback riding in **Oakview**. And she did fancy herself a lover of animals. Really, wasn't she the only one who made sure Meho's litter box remained semi clump-less, and wasn't *she* the only one who rewarded Molesto with bona fide doggie treats after her father had so cruelly faked him out with his air nothings?

After all the paperwork had been approved, signed and turned in, Evie was scheduled for her first day of volunteer work at the reserve that following Wednesday after school. Alex offered to drop her off at the reserve before heading out to Sea Street. As Evie walked out to the student parking lot to meet him, she heard someone call out her name.

"Hey, Evie."

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

“Oh, hey,” Evie said back.

She recognized them from their photos in the school paper’s sport’s page, but couldn’t remember their names. Normally Evie wouldn’t think much of jocks in their numbered jerseys and obnoxiously lifted 4x4’s, but these jocks, *hello*, where on the *water polo* team, and while she had never bothered to read the accompanying text to remember their names, Raquel had pointed out the differences between team members, which now helped Evie differentiate the two boys who were now walking next to her.

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

“Yeah,” Big Bulge Speedo came up to her right. “You gonna supply customized party hats? For all your guests?”

“Party hats?” Evie asked. How did he know she was going to have visors?

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

“Actaully, I am having hats,” she told them.

“*Coo’*.” Fine Ass approved. “My cos from SB said your party’s all over myspace.”

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

“Yeah,” Big Bulge said. “Your party’s gonna knock 805 on it’s ass!”

“Marco...”

Fine Ass and Evie turned around. It was Alejandr-*a* de los Santos and her *ah-*miga, Fabiol-*a*, walking by.

“Uh, hey,” Fine Ass looked over at the two Sangros.

“We’re gonna go **downtown**,” Fabiol-*a* said. “*Quieres contigo?*” She didn’t look at Evie. It was clear that the invitation did not extend to her.

“Uh, not right now,” Fine Ass said. “I’m talking party talk with Eves, here.”

“Yeah,” Evie couldn’t help but add as she looked directly at Alejandr-*a*. “My party at Duke’s.”

She couldn’t feel more in Flojo heaven (okay, maybe she was slightly Flojo at heart) when Alejandr-*a* and Fabiol-*a* continued to walk away on their own.

When Evie and the Speedos reached Alex’s truck, Alex had just taken his long board out of Mondo’s Marauder and was putting it into his flatbed. On days he wanted to surf right after school, he’d keep his board locked up in Mondo’s car and then transfer it to his truck after classes.

“Hey, Marky,” Alex raised his eyebrows and chin at Fine Ass.

“Hey,” Fine Ass looked over Alex’s longboard. “You gonna rip Sea Street?”

“Nah,” Alex curled his upper lip. “Wetsand predicts flat and glassy. I’m gonna try Rincon.”

“You’re going to Rincon?” Evie balked as she opened the passenger door and tossed her backpack behind the seat. “You didn’t tell me that.”

Evie felt left out. As long as she’d been dating Alex and as long as she’d been surfing, basically the same amount of time, she had never been to Rincon, which was

only a mere five more miles north of Sea Street. The waves at Rincon were supposedly as fierce as its local territorialism. Alex pretty much kept her away. Sometimes, Evie felt he patronized her when it came to surfing.

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

Yes, he did patronize her.

Evie felt a twinge of embarrassment. How could he say such a thing in front of Fine Ass and Big Bulge? *The* two top swimmers of the water polo team?

“You can’t swim?” Fine Ass asked Evie.

“Of course, I can swim,” Evie wrinkled her face and shook her head. “He’s just being stupid.”

“‘Cause I was gonna say, if you need help,” Fine Ass started. “I could totally help you.”

“*You?*” Big Bulge smirked. “After your lousy numbers at the last meet? Look, Evie. If you ever wanna enhance your technique, let *me* know.”

Evie could not believe that she was in the middle of two *water polo* boys, seniors, fighting over her. She couldn’t help but glance over at Alex, who appeared to be not paying attention as he made sure his board was strapped in.

“Wow, that’s so totally nice of you,” was all Evie could say. “I gotta admit, I still get a little tense when I gotta turtle turn, you know, under the waves.”

“Oh, you don’t wanna be tense when you should be having fun. I can totally help you with that,” Fine Ass nodded. “Just let me know.”

“So, we gotta get going, **Marky**,” Alex told Fine Ass as he came around to the other side of the truck. “Evie’s got an internship over at the SCHR.”

“Oh, yeah?” Fine Ass asked. “Cool, helping the horsies. Well...see you guys later.”

“Yeah, Evie,” Big Bulge added. “Lates,”

“What was that all about?” Alex asked as he started up his truck and pulled out of the parking space.

“What was what?” Evie asked.

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

“I wasn’t flirting,” Evie tried to deny it. Was she *really* flirting? Or just being friendly?

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

“I did *not* say that,” Evie pinched him on the side.

“In so many words you did.”

“Aw, you’re just jealous.”

“Not even,” Alex tried to shrug it off. “I just know that you wouldn’t like that it if I did that in front of you.”

“You’re right,” Evie admitted. “But God, it’s not like Fine, I mean, Marky talks to me every day. He’s like Mr. Big Man of the water polo team.”

Alex shook his head in disbelief. “God, Evie. You are so impressionable. He’s not *that* great.”

“Right,” Evie looked over at Alex. “And you’re *so* not jealous.”

Alex waited his turn in the student parking lot to make a left on Ventura Avenue. There was no stoplight and the long line of student cars, blasting everything from reggaeton to speed metal, was practically ten autos deep.

“So,” Evie started. “Marky said that my party was all over myspace.”

“Yeah,” Alex said. “I meant to tell you that.”

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

“I’ve already gotten two bulletins for it.” Alex beeped his horn at a black SUV that completely dwarfed his own fairly large sized truck. “*Go* already,” he muttered under his breath.

“Oh, man,” Evie sank into her seat. “Now I totally gotta make sure I have a kick-ass party, let alone *a* party. Marky was even saying I should get customized party hats, can you believe it? It’s like he already knew.”

“You do know that party hats are rubbers, right?”

“What? Are you serious?” Evie held her hand over her mouth and laughed. “Oh, my God, I am *such* the dork!”

“Maybe you should get some,” Alex then lowered his voice to emulate a radio spokesperson. “Remember, you can’t share the love without the glove.”

“What if I don’t *want* that kind of love?” Evie teased.

“Not even for your birthday?” Alex softened his voice but didn’t look at Evie. “I mean, you *will* be turning sixteen.”

Evie smiled out of embarrassment. “Alex, you’re gonna crash the truck if you keep talking like that.”

“Talking like what?” he asked innocently.

Evie didn’t say anything.

“Okay, okay...” Alex said. “I don’t want the silent treatment.”

Evie looked out the window at the enormous eucalyptus and oak trees lining Ventura Avenue. This wasn’t the first time Alex had joked about them indulging in more than carpet time. That’s what Evie playfully called their extended play, carpet time. If they dared advance onto a couch or bed, it might get *too* comfortable for the both of them, and who knows what else they would or could do. If they stayed on the carpet, at least the discomfort of the floor or the consequences of rug burns would keep them in check.

To be honest, Evie didn’t know if she was quite ready to make the upgrade from carpet time. The first time Alex had made his first move on her was just enough to make her expode. Could she possibly be ready for more?

The first move had happened at Sea Street, of course, right after a twilight surf session. Alex had come up behind her, and she thought that he was going to help her unzip her wetsuit, as he sometimes did. But suddenly he kissed the back of her neck, a short, quick, and gentle peck. Evie had nearly *died*. She was *so* not expecting it. Alex then placed his hands on her shoulders, and even with her wetsuit on, Evie could swear she felt his fingers tremble. She turned around to face him, and suddenly his lips were on her mouth. Evie’s head and chest had burst with euphoria. ✓

“You’re salty,” she teased nervously between breaths.

“Mmmm” Alex muttered. His lips were cold but soft. “And you’re so not...”

The sensation of having Alex's lips on hers was a million more times thrilling than anything she had experienced in her life, a sense of weightless that made her feel as if she were going to die from excitement. When was the last time she had ever felt such a sensation? **The first time she independently kicked away from the curb to ride her bike, or the first time she caught a buzz from Veuve Cliquot with Raquel?** But even those moments couldn't compare to sweet, blissful Alex-stasy.

"Damn!" This time Alex held his hand on his horn. "What's this dude's problem? Friggin' student driver!"

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

"I'm sure you don't suck this hard," Alex finally pulled his fist off the horn. "He's had three chances to go. *No balls.*"

"Hey, Alex..." Evie's thoughts were still in Alex-stasy.

"Uh, huh?" he answered **half heartedly**.

"When do you think we can go to Santa Barbara?" she asked. "Maybe this Sunday?"

"Uh, yeah. Why not?" Alex revved his engine and finally ripped a left onto Ventura Avenue. "Hey, you know Bien Ben?" he asked. "That guy who transferred from Buena High?"

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

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

“Yeah, totally,” Evie agreed. Baja was just across the Mexican border. A lot of kids went there for simple day trips or for the weekend to surf. It really wasn’t a big deal, but the thought of going to another country with Alex, albeit just south of San Diego, excited her. Carpet time in another country? *Que romantico.*

“I’ll see if he’d wanna come out to S.B. with us, too,” Alex said.

“Who?” Evie’s mind was still south of the border, the border south of the U.S., that is.

“Bien,” Alex said.

“Can’t just you and I go?” Evie asked.

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

“Hence, his tag, *Bien*,” Evie smirked. “But yeah, I don’t mind.” She regretted asking if she could have Sunday alone with Alex. Was she becoming the obnoxious possessive girlfriend that she had read about in Dee Dee’s Mexican magazines? *Posesiva o’ No? Decide Tu.*

Alex slowed down on Ventura Avenue and looked the addresses on the mailboxes. “Where is this place again?”

“It’s actually just coming up,” Evie looked at her paper with the address. “The lady on the phone said it was a little past Kane Drive.” Evie saw the street sign for Kane and pointed, “There.”

Alex pulled over, and Evie noticed the time on the dashboard. Damn, she so wanted to make a good first impression.

“Well, here goes.” She glumly unfastened her seat belt and grabbed her backpack from behind her seat. She was not looking forward to working an afternoon in the Ojai heat when she could be out in the sea breeze with Alex.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Alex said. “It’s good to work, get the old muscles moving.”

“Oh, like you know so much about hard work, other than paddling out.”

“Hey, I’ve worked at my dad’s nursery,” Alex said. “All during Christmas vacation, and I’ll be there this spring break. Compared to loading up fifty pound palms and bougainvillea, how bad can brushing down a few ponies be?”

“You’re right,” Evie agreed.

“Hey, you need a ride home?” Alex asked.

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

“Who are the other volunteers?” Alex turned up The Rolling Blackouts on his iTrip, a definite sign that he was ready to take off, *sin* Evie, for Rincon.

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

“I’m sure there will be,” Alex said. “Text me later.”

“I will,” Evie waved. “Bye!”

As she followed the handwritten signs directing her to the reserve, Evie’s rainbow flojos kicked up dust. No smoking or cell phones were allowed, the signs said, but she only had to worry about the latter. She pulled her cell phone out from the back of her

shorts and turned it off. *There*. She already felt as though she was turning over a new leaf. To click off her phone and donate a whole afternoon without ringtones or text messages once would have been unthinkable for Evie Gomez, but now she was a bona fide charity donor.

Slowly, the smell of hay, grain, and manure hit Evie's senses, and she guessed she must be getting close to the actual reserve. Sure enough, a tall blonde woman in a denim sun hat standing near a chain link gate greeted her.

"Hey, there," the woman called to Evie. She was deeply tanned with gnarly crow's feet extending from the outer corners of her dark eyes. She held a clipboard to her chest. "Are you here for the orientation?"

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

"What's your name?" the woman asked.

"Evelina," she answered. ~~Evie often introduced herself to adults by her formal~~
name.

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

"Oh, yeah," Evie answered.

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

"Yeah," Evie laughed lightly. She had learned, from spending time at her father's bakery, that you sometimes had to grant sympathy chuckles to adults, especially to those in charge.

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

"Sure," Evie smiled back as she made her way over to "join the others." Her position at the reserve was now clear, and her stomach slowly started to turn with first day jitters. She was at the reserve to work. She would be following orders from people she didn't know and would have to do tasks that she didn't necessarily want to do. At fifteen and **three quarters**, Evie never really had a job. Sure as kids, she, Dee Dee and Raquel had run **the** prerequisite cute little lemonade stand that all kids had in the summer, and she had often helped her father out at one of his *panaderias*, but both "jobs" were just for fun. Now, cuteness wouldn't cut it. She was at the reserve to *work*.

As soon as Evie reached the others, she discovered how dead wrong she was about what she had told Alex. The majority of volunteers were not high school students like herself. They weren't even sophomores, but rather seniors. Not *high school* seniors, but seniors, as in senior citizens, *old* people. There were about eight of them, small, slouching, and fragile looking in baggy, high-waisted jeans and nylon windbreakers. A few of the men even sported small, war veteran pins on their lapels. World War I? Evie wondered.

She had forgotten that there were those in the world who actually liked doing good things for good causes, completely free from an agenda, unlike herself. - God, was she...

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

Lynn walked over and stood in front of the group. Evie shaded her eyes from the late afternoon sun as she listened to her introduce herself as the owner of the reserve and talk a little bit about the reserve's history. *Yawn*. Evie hoped she'd get credit for this **humdrum part** of the orientation.

"I'm not here that often," Lynn explained. "So, you will be trained by Arturo. He has been with the reserve for over a year, and I really trust him. He's my right-hand man. And with that," she looked over at a guy sitting in the front row whom Evie hadn't noticed before, "I'll let Arturo take over."

Arturo got up from his chair and was greeted with an estatic applause. Evie saw that he was actually younger, maybe even closer to her own age.

Evie heard Emily Strange Girl mutter under her breath when she saw Arturo, "*Nice.*"

Evie looked Arturo over. Yeah, he was nice looking, if you liked that country, rural, kind of look, which she didn't. He was tall, like Alex, but not as has wiry. He had **brown** hair like Alex's, but his was a lot shorter. His eyes were light, almost green and he was very tan, which Evie did like, but he wore cowboy boots, which Evie definitely didn't like. *Que* fugly.

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

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

Point proven. Sympathy chuckles (sometimes called kiss ass giggles) *are* granted to adults or those in charge.

66

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

Arturo went on to explain that he was a senior at Thatcher High School and also an officer with the FFA, the Future Farmers of America.

“A lot of people think that the FFA is just a bunch of kids who are into raising livestock, but it’s much more than that,” he went on to explain in almost a smug demeanor. “We learn leadership and management skills. I’m the head director for Ventura county, a position that I’m very proud of, and now I’m running for state director, which is I position I feel pretty confident I’ll earn.”

Evie looked around at the group. Was this guy for real? The Emily Strange Girl was working on a blemish under her chin, but everyone else, especially Lynn, was so taken by the wonderful magical world of Arturo and his passion for taking charge.

Arturo told them that they could request their own hours; however, students usually worked afternoon and weekend hours. “We also have horses that are boarded here.” He pointed out five stables towards the far back of the reserve. “They’re basically our bread and butter. Their owners’ rent pays for our feed, our supplies, and our own rent.” He rubbed the palms together, a gesture that Evie took to mean that orientation was nearly over. She sat up in her seat.

“Now,” Arturo said. “Who’s ready to meet our clients?”

No! There’s more? Evie was getting impatient.

Of course, all the old people chuckled again and raised their hands in anticipation.

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

“Have fun and be sure to listen to Arturo,” she said before adjusting her denim sun hat and heading towards her pickup truck. “I’ll be back before you all leave.”

As everyone followed Arturo, Evie fell into step with the Emily Strange Girl, who glanced over at Evie.

“I like your necklace,” she said.

“Oh,” Evie fingered the chips of abalone shells that dangled from the cord.

“Thanks. My boyfriend made it for me.”

“*Oh,*” Emily made a face like she just had witnessed a kitten mid-yawn. “That is *too* sweet.”

Okay, maybe the girl emulated Emily, but she obviously had a *sentida* side.

“What school do you go to?” she asked Evie.

“Villanueva,” Evie answered.

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

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

“And your mother doesn’t?” She asked.

“No, not really.”

“Oh,” the girl said. “So you *do* have money.”

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

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

"I don't, really," Emily Strange Girl answered. "I mean, I do independent study at New Path."

New Path was a C-school, at the north end of the county. Unlike Nueva, in all its majestic Spanish architectural splendor, New Path was just a bunch of white washed quantum huts and non-descript bungalows at the Camarillo airport. Evie didn't know anyone, except for Jose, Raquel's ex boyfriend, who went to New Path.

"Do you know a guy named Jose?" Evie asked. She couldn't help but feel a little bit Emily Strange herself, hoping to hear that Jose was doing badly. But, he *had* been quite the dick to her, and of course, to Raquel, last semester.

"Jose..." Emily Strange Girl squinted her eyes in thought. "Is he a Mexican guy with wild hair, like a 'fro?"

"Yeah," Evie said.

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

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

"Excuse me, are we interrupting you?"

Evie looked up and realized that Arturo was directing his question right at her. Suddenly, ten pairs of eyes, including Emily's, were on Evie.

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

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

"I know," Evie felt the need to stand up straight. "I'm paying attention."

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

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

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

"You wear flip flops *and* shorts to school?" Arturo directed his question less to Evie and more to his newly acquired audience who were now at the mercy of his desperate jokes. "And do you wear a bathing suit to **church**?"

More tittering from the geriatric gallery.

Where was this guy *from*?, Evie wondered. Everyone knew of the lax dress code at Villanueva.

"What is your name?" Arturo looked at his clipboard.

"Evie, Evie Gomez."

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

"Uh, yeah." The magnifying glass was definitely on Evie.

"Let me tell you something, Evie," Arturo started. "I know this is a volunteer position, but you need to take your work here seriously. I'm not going to hand out credit just because you show up. You are going to have to work, hard."

"I know," Evie said. Jeez, she thought to herself, Mr. "Friend of the Animals" was really laying it on thick to ~~this particular~~ **this particular two-footed upright mammal.**

the poor

*that
stood
before
him.*

“So, anyway,” Arturo continued, still annoyed, “back to the real reason why we are all here, the care and rehabilitation of the horses.”

Arturo then led everyone to each stall and introduced each horse by name. Evie noticed that just about everyone took notes, and many of them went so far as to draw out a diagram of the reserve. She glanced over and saw that even Emily Strange Girl was writing something in her notebook. Evie immediately felt inadequate and didn't know what to do with her empty hands. Usually she would fiddle with her cell phone, but that was now not an option.

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

The whole group followed Arturo to a ^{stable} stall farther away from the other horses. A humongous carmel colored horse came over to the group, lazily chewing on strands of hay. He had big eyes that were oddly clouded, almost pure white. It was clear that Chamuco was blind. A sympathetic collective “*Aaaw*” was expressed by the whole group.

“Even though his name means devil in Spanish,” Arturo got into the stall with him, “Chamuco is one of our sweetest horses.” He pulled a carrot out of his side pocket and fed it to Chamuco while he started talking baby talk. “Aw, ha-vun't choo Chamuco? You've had a toof time. Poor *bouy*.”

Evie glanced over at one of the volunteers, a woman, about four feet tall with dirty grey hair tucked under a silk scarf, who keep fiercely scribbling on her note pad.

Evie looked over at the pad. “Chamuco/devil, has come along way, pick up Poly-grip on the way home.”

“Who’d like to meet Chamuco?” Arturo asked, more as a challenge than a question, as if no one would dare enter the stable with him.

Suddenly the shared eagerness of the group dimmed. None of the volunteers offered to get in the stable with Chamuco/devil.

Arturo looked over the group, his eyebrows raised in smugness. He then looked at Evie. “What about you, Evie?” he asked. “Why don’t you come in and say hi to ol’ Chamuco?”

“Me?” Evie pointed to herself. The whole group parted, as if they were the Red Sea separating to allow Evie access to the **Promised Land**.

“Sure,” Arturo motioned her to step the inside the stable, “come on in.”

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

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

Everyone laughed, that is, except Evie. She couldn’t help but feel a bit **hesitant**. She crept cautiously around Chamuco, allowing him enough adequate space so he couldn’t possibly feel threatened, but just as she was making her way to the right of him,

her cell's ringtone went off, all five bars excruciatingly loud. A long continuous scream of Greta, the lead singer of The Black Dolls, blared from the back pocket of Evie's shorts. It startled Evie, but not nearly as much as it startled Chamuco. His entire gigantic **body jerked sideways and his neck arched like a two ton cobra ready to strike.**

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Arturo tried to grab Chamuco's by his **neck**. "Easy does it, boy."

Chamuco swayed his head left to right. He stamped his two front hooves ferociously on the ground, kicking up mud and dirt as Evie cowered to the side of the stable and fumbled to turn off her phone that, somehow, continued **wail**.

"Get *out* of the stable!" Arturo yelled at Evie as Chamuco picked up a pace around the stable. His ears were pulled back and he started to knock his body against the wooden slants of the fence.

The volunteers watched in **horror**.

"Turo, Turo, should we go get help?" one of them called out to Arturo.

"No, no," Arturo insisted. "I got him, I got him."

After what seemed a good long while, Chamuco, unbelievably, calmed down. Arturo stroked his mane, offered him another carrot from his back pocket and softly talked that annoying baby talk to him again. Chamuco, it seemed, was finally **relajado**. Arturo, on the other hand, was **enojado**. Big time.

"You *cannot* have your cell phone here!" Arturo spat at Evie from the stable. "Didn't you see the signs before you came in?"

"Yeah," Evie tried her best to defend herself. "I mean, yes, I did." She felt horrible that she was to blame for what just happened. The last thing she wanted was to

traumatize some poor, blind, defenseless animal that had already been abused enough in his life. "I thought I had turned it off."

"Why would you even *need* your phone?" Arturo snapped. He then addressed the whole group. "Do *not* bring your cell near the stables. At all. Keep phones in your car or in the supply shed."

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

"Yes, what is it?" Arturo shook his head in exhausted frustration.

"Uh, none of us have mobile phones," the elderly man **started cautiously**. "Is that going to be a problem?"

"*No*." Arturo answered, exasperated. "Don't worry about it,"

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

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

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

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

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

“We can’t use our phones at the reserve,” Evie said. “It spooks the horses.” She decided to omit the incident that erupted between her and Chamuco/devil. She still couldn’t shake off the look of pure fright in his eyes. The pure fright *she* had caused.

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

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

“Evie, wait,” her mother called out. “I want to talk to you.”

“What?”

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

“I know,” Evie replied glumly. Hadn’t she just bust her butt for the last four hours? Of course, she knew.

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

“I know,” Evie repeated. Jeez, could she feel more pressured?

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

“Mom, of course I am,” Evie told her. “Can’t you tell? Look at me, I’m covered in sweat and mud, and I’ve been slaving away all afternoon.”

“Okay, okay,” her mother smiled. “I just needed you to know.”

“Can I go now?” Evie asked.

Her mother smiled. “Yes, of course.”

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

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

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

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

“What an asshole,” Alex said.

“Totally,” Evie agreed. “I’m thinking maybe I should just find a tutor and forget all this volunteer business.”

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

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

“What do you mean?”

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

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

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

“I hope it’s just a few times,” Alex said. “You really missed some good surf today.”

“*Thanks*,” Evie answered sarcastically. She rubbed a pumice stone across the bottom of her foot. She could hear Alex’s TV. “What are you watching?”

“Surf porn,” Alex said. “You know, big waves, big music.”

“Big boobs,” Evie teased.

“Hmmm, I didn’t notice...” Alex said. “Oh, Bien’s over, too.”

“Oh, really?” Evie asked.

“Yeah, he met up with me today and I was telling him about going down to Baja sometime.”

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

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

“Nah,” Alex said. “I’ll try you later tonight.”

Evie clicked over to Dee Dee.

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

“Don’t even ask.” Evie was set to uncork her whine all over again. “It sucked. Big time.”

“But it’s all going to be so worth it,” Dee Dee insisted. “As soon as you get your GPA up, you can have your party, and then you’ll get Cherry Bomb and your life will be so set.”

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

“*Serio?*” Dee Dee asked. “Well, at least she’s on your side.”

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

Dee Dee laughed. “So, *oye*, I haven’t told you the most exciting news.”

“What?” Evie asked.

“I talked to Rocio today…” Dee Dee paused in what Evie believed was hope to create an air of anticipation.

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

“So guess what?” Dee Dee asked.

“*What* already?!” Evie asked.

“He’s thinking of going to college out here,” Dee Dee announced. Evie could **sense a smile about crack on the other end of the line.**

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

“Here,” Dee Dee said. “In California. *Que chido*, no?”

“Uh, no,” Evie answered. “I mean, right, it’s cool.” She was always unsure how to answer questions that ended in ‘no.’ Were you to say “No” as in “I agree with you,” Or “Yes, I agree to your no”?

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

“*Claro*, of course,” Dee Dee said. “He hasn’t had any desire to ever leave *La Condesa*. That is, until he met me.”

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

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

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

“Uh, huh,” Dee Dee said. “He knows all about you. He can’t wait for your party.”

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

“God, Evie, your party is going to be ^{cool} ~~so great~~.” Dee Dee continued to make Evie’s head swell. “I already know what I’m wearing *and* what I’m going to buy you.”

“Really? What are you getting me?”

“I’m not telling you, *tonta*, but you are going to love them.”

“*Them?* So it’s a plural present?” This would be the first birthday, after four years, that Evie would get to share with Dee Dee. As a kid, Dee Dee, or at least her mother, was known for doing it up with over-the-top, perfectly selected gifts. Not that presents were what a birthday celebration was all about, but *still*.

“Oh,” Dee Dee’s voice broke up over another call waiting beep. “That’s Rocio.”

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

“*Andale pues*,” Dee Dee said.

“Lates,” Evie clicked off.

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

Chapter 6

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

Alex: Nite QT.

Evie: Nite ☺

One afternoon at the reserve, Evie noticed that the palms of her hands were callused. Now that she was in a relationship ^{with Alex}, she had become a card-carrying hand holder. Rough, calloused hands would not do.

She rolled the muck bucket towards the supply shed to get a pair of work gloves, but when she entered the structure, she was overpowered by the smell of peppermint. She noticed a girl in the shed, reclining quite casually on the top of three stacked plastic bins with her legs dangling, as if the supply shed were her very own sitting parlor. Many visitors and volunteers at the reserve often escaped the sharp rays of the winter sun by taking a break in the cool shade of the supply shed, so the girl's presence wasn't that alarming to Evie. She glanced over at the girl, who was about her own height but with shorter hair. She wore tight, high-waisted beige riding pants with black leather riding boots that looked like they had just come right out of the box. She also wore a black satin camisole, styled like a corset and fastened with seemingly hundreds of miniature black satin-covered buttons. A single thick gold chain with a ^{Amber} jeweled pendant hung around her

long brown neck and rested right into ~~the fold~~ of her cleavage. And Arturo thought that *she* had dressed inappropriately on her first day!

“Hey,” Evie said as she entered the shed.

The girl offered a slight smile, but nothing else. It was the cigarette, positioned between her thin, delicate fingers, that was causing the strong smell of peppermint. Arturo would *flip* if he caught this girl smoking on the grounds, especially in the shed. Evie didn’t necessarily like playing supply shed monitor, but she figured she’d clue in a new volunteer.

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

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

“Yeah,” Evie pulled out a small plastic storage bin from under a pile of wool blankets. She found a pair of suede work gloves and tried them on. Size Sasquatch compared to her small hands, but they would have to do. “Ar-turdo,” she smiled. “That’s what we call him.”

“Who’s ‘we’?” the girl continued with a vacant look on her face.

“Me and the other girl, Ana.” Evie laughed to herself. “You haven’t met him?”

“Me?” The girl took an even slower pull from her cigarette and smirked. “Oh, yes, I’ve met *him*.”

Just then, Arturo entered the shed.

“Josephina,” he said as he took the cigarette from out of the girl’s fingers and held it above her head. “You know better than that. *No* smoking.” He then put his arms around

the girl's waist, making sure to keep the cigarette high, away from both of them, as he leaned in to kiss her.

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

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

Reprimanded? This helper?

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

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

"What do you need, Evie?" He demanded to know. His embrace around Josephina relaxed as she took back her cigarette.

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

The girl's body stiffened as she slithered out of Arturo's embrace. "Arturo, stop it. You're gonna wrinkle my **cami**?"

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

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

"Villanueva?" Josephina asked.

“Yeah,” Evie said.

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

“Oh, really?” Evie asked. “Who?” Villanueva had about 300 students, including the resident students, and everyone knew just about everyone else, or at least their second-hand ~~drama~~ ^{gossip}. “You probably don’t know her?” Josephina guessed. “Dela? Dela de LaFuentes?”

“Dela?” Evie said. “You mean Dee Dee? She’s like my best friend. How do you know her?”

“You’re *Dela*’s bestfriend?” The girl’s dark eyes widened. “I would never imagined that.”

“Uh yeah, we’ve been best friends since we were little kids. Even when she lived in Mexico City, we were tight.”

Not quite the truth, but Evie felt as though she had to prove to this girl, whom she now deemed snooty and spoke in question marks, that Dee Dee was, indeed, a very, very dear friend to her, her *best* friend.

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

Dee Dee had mentioned the Las Patronas Senior committee, which was made up of high school seniors and had a small say-so of who was to be selected as a new Patrona for the incoming year.

“Oh, right,” Evie nodded and shook Josephina’s hand. She had forgotten to remove the oversized work glove and felt like a big, clumsy bear mauling a delicate

fawn. She wasn't used to an introduction followed with a handshake, unless it was with adults. She hoped it didn't lose points for Dee Dee.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ana took ahold of the wheelbarrow. "Come on, *Evie*."

Evie and Ana headed towards the manure pile.

"Who *was* that?" Ana asked.

"I guess Arturo's girlfriend."

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

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

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

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

Chapter 7

Despite an evening fundraiser for the SCHR later that evening, Saturday was Evie’s first free day from the reserve in **over two weeks**. She had worked a total of forty hours at the reserve, and, of course, the inner flojo in her just wanted an afternoon devoted to complete chill. It was nearly 11 a.m. and she lay in her bed blissfully devoid of duties or obligation. Nothing would get her out of bed, nothing, unless maybe the call of Sea Street. And sure enough, Alex’s text beckoned her.

C st?

To which she texted back.

Rdy in 20.

It had been too long since she and Alex had gone surfing at Sea Street, and there was no way she was going to miss out on some choice waves this Saturday. She got out of bed, slipped on her Sanuk flojos, and looked for her bathing suit. No doubt she’d need

to wear her full length winter wetsuit as well, but once she was out of the water, she liked to peel her suit down to her waist so she could tan her shoulders and belly.

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

“I can’t hear you when you yell like that!” Lindsay yelled from the kitchen.

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

“No, Evie,” Lindsay answered back from the kitchen. “Are you going for a swim? Because maybe you should wait. The pool man was here this morning **and it’s still filtering.**”

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

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

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

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

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

“I don’t know, Evie,” Lindsay said. “You should ask her.”

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

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

Which is what Evie did immediately. She marched downstairs and found her mother out on the deck with her father.

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

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

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

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

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

“Evie, no,” her mother started to tie another cushion to the next chair. “I need you to be here. Besides, you won’t be here tonight, right? You have that fundraiser.”

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

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

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

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

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

Consult? When did her father start talking like that? He has obviously been spending way too much time with her mother.

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

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

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

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

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

Alex: Bmr. Ttyl.

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

“*Ee*-yes?” Raquel answered.

“I hate my mother,” Evie announced.

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

“Don’t tempt me,” Evie said. “My mom is totally on my case.”

“When is she not?”

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

“If you so badly wanted to go surfing, maybe you should have gotten up earlier,” Raquel teased. “Isn’t that what real surfers do? What is it, yawn patrol?”

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

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

“Vasquez,” Evie sighed, referring to her civics teacher. “He wants me to put in at least fifteen hours a week. **He says that the monthly amount of volunteerism in the U.S. is usually one weekend a month and that the average American volunteer**

usually donates half that time and that I, being the 'able bodied teen' should do triple the amount."

"Where the hell does he get those figures?" Raquel asked. "That's rickulous!"

"Who knows," Evie said. "What's rickulous?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, when was he gonna tell you?" Raquel asked. "It starts in a couple of hours. In fact, I better get going. Davey's gonna be here any minute, and I've still gotta

shower, shampoo, and wax.” She yawned. “Oh, man, we totally got lit last night. You know, I think I’m getting my tolerance up. I was able to able to pound a six-pack away last night.”

“And that’s something to be proud of?” Evie asked.

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

“You know, I have no idea,” Evie said. “Everyone keeps saying ‘for a while’ and I have no idea what ‘a while’ means.”

“Well, I hope she’s still here by the time you have your party,” Raquel said. “She can totally swing us some ad-bevs at Duke’s.”

“God, Raquel, you have such a one track mind lately,” Evie frowned. “My party is still over a month away, and she’ll be back at school by then. Besides, Sabrina’s nineteen, not twenty-one, and she’s not the party type. You know that.”

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

“Are you saying my sister is a boozing slut?”

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

“Evelina!”

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