

## Chapter 8

"How was your first day, *mi'ja*?" Evie's mother asked from the kitchen. She was eating half an avocado sprinkled with chili powder as Evie came into the house with

Lindsay. "Did you make any new friends?"

Evie 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 saw that Alex had called her four times, but she was so tired she didn't call him back. She'd nearly fallen asleep in Lindsay's car on the way home from the reserve.

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

"Alex called and --," her mother suddenly sneezed. She always did when she got overindulgent with chili powder. <sup>the</sup> "He said he had been trying you all day on your cell phone but you never answered. He was getting worried."

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"We can't use our phones at the reserve," Evie said. "It spooks the horses." She decided to leave out the incident with Chamuco/devil. She still couldn't get the look of pure fright in his eyes out of her head, 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 with a spoon 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."

Need 80!

"Evie, wait," her mother called out after her. "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 worked her ass off all afternoon to make sure it didn't get cancelled? Of course, she knew.

"I really need you to know how serious he is. If you don't bring your <sup>QC</sup>GPA up, you will not only lose the party, but ~~we~~ will also lose a lot of money. I already ordered the invitations, and there are the three non-refundable deposits we made for Duke's, for the food, and for DJ Chancla."

"I know," Evie repeated. Jeez, could she feel any 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 you keep that in mind and that you *are* serious about improving your grades."

"Mom, I am," Evie told ~~her~~. "Can't you tell? Look at me, I'm covered in sweat and shit, and I've been slaving away all afternoon."

"Evie," her mother's eyes narrowed in on her. "Do *not* use that language with me."

"Okay, okay, I'm <sup>g</sup>sorry." Evie said. "Can I go now?"

"Yes," her mother looked at her sternly. "Go on."

Evie continued up the stairs. God, the *nerve*. It was like her concern about the party was just for her own sake, just to save face and money. If she wanted the party

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so friggin' bad, why didn't she just clock in under Evie's name and muck horse poop herself?

Evie slowly made her way into to the bathroom of her parent's master bedroom and turned the dial of their over-sized jacuzzi 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.

*g Brewick  
But say*

"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 as she rubbed a pumice stone across the bottom of her foot.

"I'm thinking maybe I should just suck it up and find a tutor and forget all this volunteer business."

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*→ Alex.*

"Oh, but that could be a major drag. Maybe this guy'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 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 tried to sound convincing. "Oh, Gorby's over, too."

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"Oh, yeah?" Evie asked

"Yeah, we met up today and I was telling him about going down to Baja sometime."

So, Alex *did* want to make their Baja trip into a surf dude weekend.

"Well, just make sure it's on a weekend that I can go," Evie said

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"Yeah, yeah," Alex said. "Of course."

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, charrro!*" Dee Dee said. "So, how did it go?"

“Don’t even ask” Evie was set to uncork her wine 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 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.”

“*Serie?*” 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 said, then paused. Evie figured she was trying to create an air of anticipation, ~~but no such air was created. Dee Dee talked to Rocio every day. Their conversations were far from being “the most exciting news.”~~

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“And?” Evie asked.

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“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 ~~that Dee Dee just wanted to explode~~ on the other end of the line.

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

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“*Here,*” Dee Dee said. “In California.”

"Norcal or SoCal?"

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"Evie," Dee Dee said. "South Cal of course. *Que chido*, no?"

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"Uh, no," Evie answered. "I mean, right, it's cool." "Is he coming out here

Deleted: 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"? ¶

because of you?" Evie asked

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"Evie, *Claro*, of course," Dee Dee seemed to sound frustrated. Did Evie know the depth of his devotion to her? "He hasn't ever had any desire to ever leave *La Condesa*.

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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 little 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 she had never even met, from Rocio to all her Myspace friends (up to 220!), knew all about Evie aka RioChica805. At least about her party, anyway.

"God, Evie, your party is going to be *tan naco*," 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 in four years that 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 Sixteener. She *had* to. She set the jacuzzi jets to high. The hot water blasted, soothing her muscles. She stank like a sweaty horse blanket, her arms ached, and she was still scheduled to practice driving with her father later that evening. And she had yet 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 9

The rest of the week at the SCHR was ridiculously stressful for Evie. ~~Thursday~~ ~~and Friday~~ Alex drove her to SCHR directly after school 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.

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Alex: Nite ~~QT~~ ~~TTYL~~

Evie: Nite ☺

By the beginning of her second week of work, Evie noticed that the palms of her hands felt rough. Now that she was in a relationship with Alex, she had become a card-carrying hand holder. Rough, calloused hands would so not do.

“Hey, didn’t *Turdo* say they kept gloves around here?” Evie asked the Emily Strange Girl, whose real name was Tori.

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“Yeah,” ~~Tori~~ looked up from watering down the dirt with a hose. “They have some in one of the bins in the shed.”

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Evie 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 strong smell of peppermint. She noticed a girl in the shed, reclining casually on the top of three stacked plastic bins. Her legs were crossed at the ankles, as if the supply shed were her very own parlor. Evie often escaped the sharp rays of the winter sun by taking short breaks in the

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cool shade of the supply shed, so the girl's presence wasn't that alarming. Evie glanced over at the girl. She was wearing tight, high-waisted beige riding pants with black leather riding boots that looked so polished they must have just come right out of the box. The girl 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 an amber colored pendant hung around her long brown neck and rested right into her ample cleavage. And Arturo thought that *she* had dressed inappropriately on her first day!

"Hey," Evie said as she started to pass her.

The girl offered a slight smile, but nothing else. Her cigarette, positioned between her thin, delicate fingers, was causing the peppermint smell. Evie knew that Turdo would *flip* if he caught this girl smoking on the grounds, especially in the supply shed. She didn't necessarily like playing horse reserve monitor, but she figured she'd clue in a clueless 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 bucket 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. "Turdo," she smiled. "That's the little name we gave him."

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The girl looked at Evie with a blank expression on her face.

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 arm 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 as if each were a question, typical San Fernando Valley speak that somehow had made it down the Conejo Grade and into Rio Estates. This Josephina person 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. He loosened his embrace around Josephina, and she took back her cigarette.

"Just some gloves." Evie held them up to prove that she wasn't 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 arms. "Turo," her tone sounded whiny. "*Cuidado.* You're gonna wrinkle my cami?"

Arturo pulled back. The girl looked at Evie blankly, 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 *chisme*. "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 best friend?" The girl's dark eyes widened. "I would have never imagined that."

"Uh, yeah," Evie said. "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, that Dee Dee was, indeed, a very, very dear friend, her ADA.

"I just met Dela," she said as she held out her hand. "I'm Josephina? From Las Hermanas Senior Committee?"

Dee Dee had mentioned the Las Hermanas Senior committee to both Evie and Raquel. The committee was made up of high school seniors who had a small say as to whom would be selected as a new *Hermana* for the incoming year. Dee Dee had the best

resume possible, but it always helped to have a good connection. Could Josephina possibly be one for Dee Dee?

“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 an adult she was trying to impress. Had she committed a major faux-pas by leaving the glove on? Oh, she hoped it didn’t lose points for Dee Dee.

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“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 commenting on a pet’s poop just as bad as telling a parent that his or her child was ugly?

Just then, Tori 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.

“Tori,” 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,” Tori protested.

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

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

Evie and Tori headed towards the manure pile.

“Who *was* that?” Tori 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,” Tori laughed. “What’s her name?”

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

Evie thought of the Sangros – Alejandra, Xiomara, Fabiola and Natalia. Did all things flashy and bitchy have first names that ended in ‘A’? What a minute, Evie’s given name was Evelina and Tori was actually Victoria ~~and, of course, Dee Dee was Dela~~ Oh, *never mind,*

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## Chapter 10

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When Evie woke up on that first Saturday in February, ~~the~~ inner Flojo ~~in her~~ just wanted an afternoon devoted to complete chill. She had worked a full three weeks at the SCHR, and she still had to go a fundraiser for the reserve later that night. Yes, chill was in order. She lay in her bed blissfully devoid of duties or obligation. Nothing would get her out of bed, nothing, except 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, and there was no way she was going to miss out on some choice waves this Saturday. She slowly got out of bed, slipped on her Sanuk Fur Real flojos, and looked for her bathing suit. No doubt she'd also have to wear her full-length winter wetsuit, but once she got out of the water, she liked to peel her suit down to her waist so she could brown her shoulders and belly. No matter what time of the year, it was mandatory she stayed tan. How could you be a surfer girl and not look like one?

"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.

What she called  
Stupid  
chores  
have

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

"No, Evelina," 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, 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 once was bikini tops and towels covered with sand, were now jeans and tennis shoes embedded with mud, straw, and bits of hay. "But not until later today, right?"

"~~Yes~~" 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, Evelina," 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."

Evie 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. *new*  
*She found place mats she liked but* “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 cushion to another 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 three and a half 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.”

*Threatening*

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

*Consult?* When did her father start talking like that? Obviously, he had 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 she flipped open 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. Tyl.

Evie stomped up to her room, tossed her cell phone onto 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 her CD player. 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 wanted to go surfing so badly, maybe you should've gotten up earlier," Raquel teased. "Isn't that what real surfers do? What is it called? 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-Reyes Alarcon," Evie sighed, referring to her civics teacher. "He wants me to put in at least fifteen hours a week."

"That's rickulous!" Raquel.

"What's rickulous?" Evie asked.

"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, Turdo, 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."

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

"*Please*, the thought of Turdo in any intimate setting is just too repulsive." Evie clicked off her CD player. 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, *and yawned again* "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. Not yet." Evie instantly felt left out. "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 gotta shower and shampoo. She yawned *again* "Angelina's still gotta give me a bikini wax."

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"You have your *housekeeper* wax you?" Evie exclaimed. "That is so not right."

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Raquel laughed. "Ha, I'm just fucking with you." She yawned *again*. "Oh, man, Davey and I got so lit last night. You know, I think I'm getting my tolerance up. I was able to pound a six-pack away last night."

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"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. "Wait until she finds out about all the free ad-bevs I hooked up for your party."

*hypheer*

"God, Raquel, you have such a one track mind lately," Evie frowned. "My party isn't until the end of this month and she'll be back at school by then. Besides, Sabrina's not the party <sup>put</sup> type. You know that."

"Are you kidding me?" Raquel asked. "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 UC Santa Barbara, 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 *boozer*. Big difference."

"E-ve-iiina..."

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

"Hold on." Evie put her bedroom landline to her chest. "*Que quieres*, Lindsay?"

"Can you help me?" Lindsay called out. "Your mother and sister are coming back soon, and I'm trying to get Sabrina's room ready."

"My mother already left?" Evie asked.

"Yes, to the airport, to get Sabrina."

"Then she won't be back for a few hours," Evie called back. LAX, the Los Angeles International Airport, was a good three hour roundtrip journey between Rio Estates and Los Angeles.

"No," Lindsay said. "She's picking her up at the Santa Barbara airport."

"Santa Barbara?" It was unusual that Sabrina would fly into Santa Barbara, a small commuter airport used primarily by jet-setting UC Santa Barbara students, ~~Silicon Valley~~ businessmen, or maybe Oprah, who evidently had a house in nearby Montecito. Santa Barbara airport was only twenty-five minutes from their home. Her mother would be back soon. "Why is she picking her up there?"

"Hel-looo?" Evie could hear Raquel on the other end of the landline.

Evie brought the receiver back to her ear. "Oops, sorry."

"Did you call to talk to me or to Lindsay?" Raquel asked.

"Hey, I better call you later," Evie told Raquel. "I gotta go."

"Uh, I figured that," Raquel said before clicking off.

Evie got up from her bed to help Lindsay.

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna visit?" she asked as she walked into Sabrina's bedroom. Lindsay <sup>was</sup> smoothing out the cream-colored comforter that lay on top of Sabrina's queen-sized bed.

"I don't know how long," Lindsay said. "You should probably ask your parents."

Evie looked around her sister's bedroom. Sabrina kept everything in impeccable order. Her room was so tidy and in tiptop tight shape that you could practically bounce a quarter off the whole space -- whereas Evie's bedroom was constantly under construction. She did, however, pride herself in the orderly fashion she maintained with

her flojos. Three rows of flojos (seventeen pairs in all) were lined up on her closet floor. The first row contained the flojos with the heftiest price tag, the second row (the shortest row) was all about comfort, and the third row contained flojos with jewels glittering from the straps. *Que Kimora*, no?

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

"Are you serious?" Evie looked over at the photos. She had just opened Sabrina's vinyl CD carrier case, a relic before iPod nation took over, and winced at her sister's taste in music. From Classical Piano to World Music, Sabrina listened to ugh-dult music. How could she and Evie possibly be related?

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

"I think she'd be way more upset that we are moving things around in her room." Evie closed the CD case. "She doesn't like her things messed with."

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

"Hey, Linds," Evie started.

"Si?" Lindsay tacked the photo of Sabrina and Robert back up on the board.

"I just wanna say I am really sorry about the car accident. I mean, the fender bender. I know you went out of your way to protect me and everything, and I hope I didn't get you in too much trouble..."

"No, no," Lindsay said "Your mother didn't have any idea what happened, and she's said nothing to me since that day. But what you did was very wrong, and I am very disappointed in you."

Evie's heart sank.

"You shouldn't lie to me or to anyone, Evelina. I hope these are not habits that you are picking up and thinking of keeping."

"No, no," Evie said. "I was just being stupid. It won't happen again." Evie's stomach twisted with guilt -- she felt badly about the fender bender and that she was gonna have to dole out some b-day dough to pay for it, but she felt even worse that she had let down Lindsay. She had lied to her, and that was just plain shameful.

"Okay," Lindsay looked at her. "I want to believe you. Do not make me out to be a fool."

"I won't. Promise."

Lindsay put her hands on her ample hips and looked over Sabrina's room one more time. The carpet was vacuumed, and her stuffed chenille teddy bear hand sewn by Grandma Cuca was propped against the over-stuffed pillows. The TV remote and Sabrina's silk eye mask were poised politely on the night table -- familiar *cositas* ready to welcome Sabrina when she returned home.

"Well, I think we're done here," Lindsay concluded. "Let's go see if your father needs any help."

Evie followed her outside to the deck where her father should have been in the midst of barbecuing tri-tip on his new Viking Grange grill.

But when they got to the outside deck, Ruben Gomez had yet to even fire up his new Ultra-Premium. He did, however, look the part of an experienced Grill Master. He wore a Q-tip white chef's hat that perked practically two feet in height from his head and a stiff red and white striped apron

"You are ~~s~~ not wearing that," Evie looked her father over disapprovingly as Molesto came trotting up towards her.

"Why not?" her father frowned and positioned his hat to peak higher.

Is it even possible to explain *presentation* to a middle-aged parent?

"Nevermind," Evie leaned over to scratch under Molesto's collar.

Her father looked down at Molesto. "I think he knows Sabrina is coming back today. He's had this energy, excitement, all morning."

Deleted: "Hmmm..."

Was Evie the only one who *wasn't* excited for Suprema's homecoming?

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

"Why aren't you using your new grill, the Grill Grandioso 3000?" she asked as she took a seat on a deck chair and helped herself to some white corn tortilla chips.

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

"I can go get some propane," Lindsay offered.

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

"Camping?" Evie squinted her eyes at her father. It was now nearly one in the afternoon and the sun was blazing. "Yes," her father said. "We used this grill when we used to go camping at Leo Cabrillo? How can you not remember?"

**Deleted:** How utterly cool it would've been to be surfing with Alex and then watching Los Olvidados play at the Seaside Park street fair. Stupid Sabrina, her little melt down just effed up her whole day. ¶

"Easily," Evie joked as she crammed more chips into her mouth. Leo Carrillo was a state beach between Malibu and Rio Estates, right off the Pacific Coast Highway. The highway divided the hiking trails of the canyon and the sandy coastline of the beach. Depending on what side of the highway you were on, Leo Carrillo truly offered the best of both worlds. Evie realized it had been years since she had thought of Leo Carrillo.

"Those were some good times," her father continued. "Remember you and Sabrina would take the boogie boards out and would be in the ocean all day? We couldn't get you out of the water for nothing. You girls were so waterlogged that looked like those Californian Raisins when you finally came out."

"Dad," Evie pressed her lips together. "We slept in the Vacationeer, and half the time mom would get so annoyed with all the loud campers and the mosquitoes that she'd drive me and 'brina back home so we could all sleep in our own beds for the night. I wouldn't exactly call that camping."

"But you still came back in the morning." Her father refused to let his positive memories be swept away under Evie's moodiness. "We'd spend the whole day at the beach together. It was so fun. You and your sister were inseparable."

Evie looked at her father struggling with the Weber grill. It was not getting any cleaner.

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna stay?" Evie asked her father. Molesto had now rolled over. He wanted his belly rubbed, and Evie obliged.

"I'm not quite sure. You might want to ask your mother." Her father added more lighter fluid to the coals and then re-read the charcoal bag "You know, we might be eating a little later than planned. I hope Sabrina isn't too hungry when she gets here.

Molesto's ears suddenly pricked up and, as if on cue, the purr of Vicki Gomez's Mercedes followed. He rolled over onto his feet and took off towards the drive way.

"They got back quick," Lindsay looked at her watch.

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

"Tell 'em I'll be right there," Evie's father called out as the flames from the grill roared higher. "I don't think I can leave this... right now."

Evie came around the house and got to the driveway just as her sister was getting out of her mother's Mercedes. She was immediately taken aback by her sister's appearance. Sabrina looked different, *very* different. For one thing, Sabrina worshiped sunshine like Evie. She poo-pooed any surtan oil that contained the socially deadly SPF. But now Sabrina was pale, almost a pasty white pale. The dark roots of her blonde hair were practically an inch deep and exposed a form of laziness that Evie had never known existed within her sister. The Sabrina that Evie knew would never walk out the front door of her sorority house, let alone take a trip, looking the way she did. She was one of those

**Deleted:** "Do you even know what you're doing?" she asked.¶  
"E-ww." Lindsay shot her a look as she arranged utensils on the patio table.¶  
Evie knew she was sounding bratty, but she couldn't help it. She was still annoyed that she had to waste a full day confined to Camp Gomez.

**Deleted:** "Yes, Evie. I do know what I am doing." Her father didn't mind her sass. "It's pretty simple. I just have to get the coals going, which... might..." He read the instructions from the bag. "Take a little bit longer than I thought." ¶

**Deleted:** "He looked over at Lindsay. "Hey, Linds, did you make your salsa? The verde picante? It'll go great with the tri-tip."

**Deleted:** *Si, si* Lindsay brushed off a few scattered eucalyptus leaves from the deck chairs with a kitchen towel. "I also made avocado pie, Sabrina's favorite."¶  
"You didn't use any of my mom's organic Rancho Palmillo avocados, did you?" Evie asked as she scratched Molesto's belly.¶  
"Ah, no," Lindsay said. "I couldn't if I wanted to. She keeps her avos under lock and key with her Bunco winnings."

fashion femmes who *had* to make sure that her sunglasses matched her toe polish before  
*even thinking of* a midnight run to the 7-11.

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"Hey, Sabrina..." Evie started as she walked towards her sister. She suddenly felt guilty about her earlier resentment. Sabrina looked frail and lonely.

"Hey, Eves," Sabrina said. She clung to the strap of her shoulder bag as if it were a life preserver. Moleto was eagerly wagging his tail at her feet, but she didn't even  
*acknowledge him*.

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"Where's all your stuff?" Evie asked. She noticed that their mother didn't pop open the trunk and that there was no luggage in the backseat of the Mercedes.  
*to unload any suitcase*

"I only have my carry-on." Sabrina tugged at her large shoulder bag. "I didn't pack a lot."

"Why not?" Evie asked. "How long are you staying?"

"*Evie*," Her mother came around her Mercedes. "Enough with the questions."

"Senorita Sabrina!" Lindsay came from the backyard soon after Evie. She extended her tanned, wrinkled arms to Sabrina. "Oh, look at you!" She gave Sabrina a long, hard hug. "*Ay, que flaquita!* Oh, I'll take care of that!"

Sabrina didn't say anything. She just stood there enveloped in Lindsay's embrace, like a limp, lifeless rag doll.

"I'm going to make my special *fideo* for you," Lindsay chatted excitedly as she took Sabrina's bag and slung it across her own shoulder. "I'll make it with fresh tomatoes from the garden."

"It's okay," Sabrina mumbled softly. "You don't have to."

"Oh, but it won't be a bother."

"But I'm not hungry, Lindsay," Sabrina replied, this time more curtly.

"That's because you haven't had good food," Lindsay said. "Up there at school they don't know everything. But let me —"

"Lindsay!" Sabrina snapped. She rubbed the right side of her temple. "Stop it!" she snapped again. "Just *stop* it!"

Indeed everything just stopped, everything and everyone.

"Oh," Lindsay pulled back from Sabrina. "*Lo siento...*" She turned to Evie's mother for guidance. "I didn't, I..."

Evie looked over at her mother. *WTF?*

"Oh, it's okay," Vicki Gomez tried to assure Lindsay. "No worries," she said as she went over to Sabrina.

It was unsettling to say the least. Sabrina's disposition was usually as bright and perky as her name implied. Evie couldn't recall when she had ever raised her voice to anyone at all, and especially not to Lindsay.

Sabrina bowed her head onto her mother's chest. Her mouth creased downward at the sides, and small tears percolated from the corners of her eyes. Her whole body began to tremble.

"Oh, oh..." Evie's mother said. She seemed at a loss as to what to do. She quickly handed her own handbag and car keys to Lindsay. "Lindsay, here," she said, "I'm going to take Sabrina up to her room."

"*Si, claro,*" Lindsay took the purse and keys as Vicki Gomez put her arm around Sabrina and led her up the stone steps towards the front door.

*Evie's mother*

“What happened?” Evie asked Lindsay as soon as they were inside the house.

“What’s wrong with Sabrina?”

“*Yo no se*,” Lindsay confessed “I never wanted to make Sabrina upset or make her cry. ~~I would rather die than cause either one of you girls pain.~~ I did not want to be the cause of her tears.”

At that moment, Evie’s father, still in his apron and chef’s hat, came from around the side of the house.

“Hey,” he looked around and found the driveway void of a heart-warming family reunion. “What happened to our little girl?”

Both Lindsay and Evie were too stunned to answer.

## Chapter 11

"So what do you think happened to her?" Dee Dee asked Evie.

Evie, Dee Dee, and Raquel had gathered later that afternoon for another impromptu ER/RE! meeting and, again, it was at Evie's request.

<sup>Evie's</sup> Her mother had taken Sabrina upstairs, and the barbeque, of course, was off. Lindsay had gathered up all the food and put it away. Ruben Gomez's enthusiasm, and chef's hat, both came down. Evie had taken the opportunity to leave the house and head out towards the far west end of the Rio Estates country club golf course.

Now <sup>she</sup> Evie lay flat on her back on the meticulously maintained lawn where any passing member might guess that she was just a young girl casually counting clouds or working on their her mid-winter tan with her friends. Oh, if only life in the Estates was that simple.

<sup>Sad</sup> "Like I said," Evie repeated. "As far as I know, she and Robert broke up and she's all upset over it."

"But why?" Raquel held her cell phone with both hands inches above her face as she texted. "I mean, who broke up with who?"

"It's not who broke up with who," ~~Dee Dee exhaled smoke from her flavored Californian Dream.~~ "It's who broke up with whom."

Evie ignored ~~both of them.~~ "She broke up with him" <sup>Evie said</sup>

Dee Dee rolled over on her side to face <sup>her</sup> Evie. "That makes no sense. Then why is she the one who is all sad and crying?"

"I have no idea," Evie waved Dee Dee's cigarette smoke away from her face.

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"He probably cheated on her," Raquel said. "And then she broke up with him after she found out."

"How could you say that?" Evie looked over at Raquel. "You've never even met Robert, and why would anyone ever cheat on Suprema? She's like perfect." <sup>She</sup> Evie was surprised that she would even be cheering for Team Suprema, someone who definitely didn't need anymore PR work.

"Oh," Raquel looked away from her cell phone and then looked at Evie sharply. "So, you have to be *perfect* in order for a guy *not* to cheat on you? Are you saying that's why Jose fucked around on me? I'm imperfect?"

"No, I'm just saying that Sabrina and Robert were perfect for each *other*," Could Evie have stuck her foot any farther in her mouth? "They had been going out for, like, two years or something."

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"Two years?" Raquel's thumbs went back to composing text. "Well, that says it right there. He was probably bored. Big time."

"Could you *stop*?" Evie slapped Raquel's fingers. "That is *so* annoying when I'm trying to have a conversation with you."

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"I'm just shoving it back to Davey," Raquel explained. Despite Evie's irritation, she didn't give her fingers a rest. "We were supposed to hook up today, and *now* he's saying he's not even sure about getting together tonight."

"You know," Dee Dee <sup>W/</sup> continued on the Sabrina saga. "I think there is more to the story. Maybe Sabrina was, like, caught in some illl love affair with one of her professors or something." She sat up almost excitedly. "Ooh, and then the wife who

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<sup>hM</sup>  
like worked some menial job to put her husband through grad school confronted Sabrina at her sorority house, in front of all her sisters. Oh. My. God.”

“You,” Evie waved away more of Dee Dee’s smoke, “read too many of those Mexican soap rags. Between Dee Dee cigarettes and Raquel’s texting she was getting good and irritated.” “I don’t believe you guys. I come to you for help, maybe some advice, and all I get is more novela.”

“Hey,” Raquel said. “We only can guess what’s happening from what you tell us. You wanted our opinion on what we think is going on with Sabrina. It’s not our fault you don’t agree with what we think.”

“I just don’t get it.” Dee Dee lay back down on the grass and slowly exhaled a stream of smoke from the small <sup>slit</sup> ~~open seam~~ formed by her lips. “How could Sabrina break up with her boyfriend and then leave Stanford, just like that? I mean, *yo no se*, it’s like she’s giving up or something.”

Raquel bolted up quickly. “Shit!”

“*Que pasa?*” Dee Dee looked over at her.

“Friggin’ Davey.” Raquel fumed at her cell phone. “He’s *such* an a-hole. First he flaked on me today, and now he’s bailing on me tonight.”

Evie couldn’t help but feel slightly relieved. One less night with Davey Mitchell was one more night of safe keeping for Raquel. Evie had finally seen who Davey

Mitchell was, or at least his silhouette. When he swung by campus to pick up Raquel from school on the days she didn’t drive, he never came out of his matte black truck with the grey primered fenders and the license plate, LOC LFF. <sup>One disturbing adverb</sup> *In Loving Memory*, was stenciled across the truck’s tinted back window in old English script. Directly below *In*

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*Loving Memory* were the names of three of Davey's friends who had died in who knew what kind of way. When Evie had asked Raquel about ~~them~~, she simply shrugged her shoulders and claimed the three friends had been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Evie couldn't imagine dating anyone who had a condensed obituary on the back window of his truck. She also couldn't help but worry. What if Raquel was merely at the wrong place at the wrong time?

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"Hey," Evie suddenly remembered her own evening duties with the reserve.

"What time is it?"

Raquel checked her cell. "Almost six, why?"

"Ah man, I gotta go." Evie stood up and slipped into her satin covered Trovata flojos. She had to meet Tori in less than an hour.

"And where are you going, Miss Thang?" Raquel sounded suspicious. Lately she was usually the one who had to take off somewhere on a Saturday night.

"No where exciting," Evie cracked her knuckles as she stood up. "I'm on reserve duty."

"Ew," Dee Dee wrinkled her nose at the sound of Evie popping her fingers. "I hate when you do that." She put out her cigarette in the grass. "You're going to work on a Saturday night? I thought you had the whole day free."

"I did," Evie said. "*The day*. But tonight I gotta go to some *charro* rodeo."

"You mean a *charreada*?" A smile spread across Dee Dee's face.

"Yes, exactly," Evie said. "How do you say it, again?"

"A *char-e-ada*," Dee Dee repeated slowly. "You're going to one? Tonight? *Que chido!*"

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"What is it?" Raquel asked, still texting

"It's a rodeo," Dee Dee started to explain. "But a Mexican rodeo, with more synchronized competition, and everyone is dressed in traditional Mexican clothing. It's really festive and colorful. Rocio and I used to go there when we visited his cousins in Jalisco." She suddenly got that "woe is yo" look. "But wait, how does going to a *charreada* work into your volunteer credit?"

"You got me," Evie shrugged her shoulders. "But I ain't asking. As long as I don't have to clean up at the reserve, it's fine with me. It's a fundraiser, and Arturo said if any of the volunteers wanted to buy a ticket and go, we could still get credit."

"So are you, like, *buying* your donation or *donating* your money?" Raquel

Deleted: "I don't get it," Raquel smirked.

smirked

Evie ignored Raquel's question. "And this girl, Tori," she continued. "Who I volunteer with, is gonna pick me up," she went on to explain. "We're gonna go together."

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"If I didn't have to write my essay for Las Hermanas, I would definitely invite myself," Dee Dee said. "Charreadas are so much fun. They have live mariachi music and lots of food. You aren't taking Alejandro?"

"I would," Evie started. "But he's decided to drive down to San Diego tonight. He and Gorby, that guy from Buena, are gonna stay the night in S.D. so they can go surfing in Baja tomorrow morning. Dawn patrol."

As soon as she spoke, Evie could already sense Dee Dee feeling sorry for her. *He's going away. Again. Without you. Pobrecita.* She had mentioned to Dee Dee that she and Alex *had talked about going* to go to Baja, but he wanted to go sooner than her work

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schedule allowed. Of course, it bugged her ~~that he went ahead and made plans without~~  
~~her.~~

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"I was actually gonna go with him," Evie lied. "He wanted to do this whole day thing with me, down in Baja, but I gotta go to this fundraiser."

"Plus," Raquel added. "I really can't see your mom letting you cross into Mexico with Alex. No way would Vicki G stand for that."

"Right," Evie nodded. Although Raquel's observation supported her little fib, she resented it slightly. Why did Raquel *always* have to point out just how strict her mother was? Just because Raquel's mother, Kitty, was too busy with her software business, her La Madrinas mentoring network, and hosting her over the top Bunco parties to notice whatever craziness Raquel was up to, it didn't make Evie's mother a complete tyrant.

"But Baja isn't Mexico," Dee Dee pointed out. "Everyone thinks it is, but it isn't. It's really just an extension of California."

"Oh, yeah?" Raquel asked. "If it's just an extension, why do *I* get sweated at the border when my Cabo tan and I are just trying to make our way back into ~~SoCal?~~"

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"Maybe it's not your dark tan," Dee Dee mused, "but maybe your dark, moody attitude."

"Yeah," Evie laughed. "Or, maybe cause you got caught trying to smuggle tequila in your ~~handbag~~ *backpack*."

"Or," Dee Dee laughed too. "Pot in your panties."

"Excuse me," Raquel informed the both of them. "I do *not* drink tequila. That crap is nasty."

"*And*," Evie looked at her. "You don't wear panties."

"You know," Raquel threw Evie a sideways glance. "I *was* thinking of tagging along with you to your little rodeo, but now I just changed my mind, thank you." She went back to texting.

"Oh, yeah, thanks for the offer," Evie smirked. "Now that Davey's ditched you."

"And Alex hasn't ditched you?" Raquel asked.

"Not twice," Evie said. "In the same day."

"Chicas, chicas," Dee Dee interrupted. "How much longer is this juvenile sparring going to continue? If we're done here, I need to get back home and work on my essay."

"No, but really," Raquel said to Evie. "I'll go with you to this rodeo thing. I could be into getting my mariachi on." She stuck out her elbows and flapped them around.

"*Serio*?" Evie asked.

"Why not?" Raquel asked. "Can I catch a ride with you and your horse friend?"

Tori, Evie remembered, was also a classmate of Jose's, and she could only imagine an evening of severe grilling a' la Raquel. She made a mental note to warn Tori - 'Ixnay on the Jose'. But other than that, Evie thought it would be fun to have Raquel to herself for an entire evening. Since Raquel had been going out with Davey, it seemed like forever since they had any QT together on a weekend.

"Of course," Evie said. "You should totally come with us."

"Oh," Dee Dee pouted. "I am *so* jealous. You are going to have *un* blast. *Charro* boys are so fine."

"That's enough for me," Raquel slammed her cell phone shut in defiance. "I'm *so* over Davey."

## Chapter 12

Evie, Raquel, and Tori arrived at the *charreada* just as it was starting, and the small <sup>made</sup> arena of ~~timber and concrete blocks~~ was nearly filled nearly to capacity with families, ~~packs~~ of teenage boys, and glassy eyed men already drunk on Corona. The ~~grandstand walls~~ were draped with oversized *banderas* in red, white, and green, the colors of the Mexican flag and in the bleachers, <sup>miniature</sup> hundreds of more flags were <sup>in fescue</sup> waved by ~~enthusiastic~~ spectators.

Raquel scanned the bleachers. "Damn, ~~(we've never seen so many fiestas in one place)~~ thought we were going to a rodeo, not some freakin' *futbol* game. We ain't never gonna find a seat."

"There's some space over there." Tori pointed towards the ~~left end of the bottom~~ bleachers with her chin. "I'm ~~sure~~ we can squeeze our fat asses in."

"Speak for yourself," Raquel threw Tori a look <sup>like</sup> ~~as she~~ <sup>still had</sup> ~~Not quite true. Last year Raquel~~ had been somewhat of a super *torta* and even with the ~~slimming period that often~~ followed a break up, Raquel couldn't ~~cut loose of a belly that never stayed tucked under~~ her low rise jeans. <sup>as</sup> She ~~carried~~ three large clear plastic bags of kettle corn and *churritos*, as well as three *elotes* slathered in mayonnaise. One bag and one *elote* for each girl, of course. )

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As soon as she sat down, Raquel pulled a small glass bottle of Jack Daniel's from her bag. She took one of the sodas from the tray that Evie had been carrying, looked left, looked right and then topped it off with the whiskey.

Tori eyed the bottle and smiled. "Woman, I like your style."

"Want some?" Raquel asked.

"You bets," Tori held out her cup.

Raquel poured Tori even more J.D. than she had poured herself.

"Want some, Evie?" Raquel waved the glass bottle seductively.

"Uh, no, thanks," Evie winced with disapproval. "Whiskey gives me the runs."

"Ah, poor Evie," Raquel pouted her lips and feigned sympathy as she took a sip of her drink. "*Lo Sient*. I forgot to get some of that fancy ass Veuve for you."

Evie was about to say something to Raquel, ~~but~~ then the first bull rider was released into the arena. <sup>(The whole crowd jumped up from their seats to cheer ~~him~~ on)</sup> Evie, Raquel, and Tori followed their lead, <sup>stried to</sup> ~~but slightly~~ less enthusiastically. It was hard to get up <sup>Corn mald</sup> juggling a lapful of snacks.

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"This is Little Jess from Fontana!" A booming voice blared from the arena's speakers. "And if Lil' Jess can stay on Thunder 'til the whistle blows, well, Jessie is gonna be going home with his own case of tequila, courtesy of one of our proud sponsors, Viejo Gold. Remember, folks when you want the best, you wanna go for the old gold!

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What do you say, *hombres*?"

*Hombres*? Evie found herself cringing. *Where* did they find this MC?

"Give *me* the tequila!" Raquel roared. She held her Styrofoam cup out towards the arena in a military style salute. "The well's running dry!"

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Evie noticed some people sitting near them had turned around and laughed with Raquel. Or, Evie wondered, at her?

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"I thought you didn't drink tequila," <sup>she</sup> Evie reminded Raquel curtly. She knew she was being a buzz kill, but WTF, she didn't have a buzz and she definitely didn't want to get popped by security just for being with others trying to get one.

Raquel ignored ~~Evie~~ and took a big swig ~~ger~~ from her drink.

Evie checked the time on her cell phone. The show had just started <sup>she</sup> and ~~Evie~~ worried that it might be a long night. She looked over at Raquel and watched ~~her~~ suck the J.D. and coke through her straw. Seeing <sup>her</sup> Raquel so intent on getting so much liquor in her system bothered Evie. Why did every outing have to have booze involved? Evie

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wondered if she was being <sup>just a bit</sup> hypocritical by judging Raquel. After all, it was because

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Raquel was such a party ~~puta~~, that she was able to secure free ad bevs for Evie's party

and Evie definitely didn't mind that. But then again, <sup>a</sup> it was ~~her~~ birthday party, ~~her~~ a

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sixteener, and didn't it deserve much more attentive party planning than say, just

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another Saturday night out? <sup>Such as booze</sup>

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Raquel peered out through her overgrown bangs and nudged Evie. "Man," she

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Evie, "Check out the *hombres* 'round here! *Que* fine, right Evie?"

Evie looked around and had to admit that Raquel was right. *Charro* boys in their snug *charro* suits were *muy*, how do you say 'FAF' *en espanol*? Plus, tons of other guys were walking around in their own mariachi inspired duds — bolero jackets and tight fitting pencil pants with silver conchas stitched along the side seams. They were kinda sexy, in a mariachi rocker kind of way.

"Damn," Raquel raised one eyebrow and nudged Evie again. She actually

~~removed~~ her lips from her straw to whistle under her breath. "Look at *that* piece of ass!"

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Both Evie and Tori looked over. Tori ~~covered~~ her mouth ~~laughing~~. The so-called piece of ass belonged to none other than the biggest *nalgón* himself, Arturdo.

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Evie almost didn't recognize him at first. ~~She was used to seeing~~ Arturdo at the reserve, cranky and sweaty and wearing a worn out Pendleton and, of course, *those* boots.

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But tonight he ~~looked relaxed and~~ was ~~dressed~~ in black jeans, a black shirt, and a black ~~felt~~ cowboy hat. Has anyone called Pablo Montero? because his costume is missing

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"You've *got* to be kidding!" Evie also covered her mouth and laughed ~~with Tori~~. "That's, like, ~~our~~ boss at the reserve."

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"What, are you serious?" Raquel leaned forward get a better look. "Damn, hook a sister up with some volunteer opportunities. I'm suddenly feeling in a very *giving* kind of mood. Ooh," she lowered her voice. "He's looking this way." She fluffed her long hair over her shoulders and took another swig of her Jack Daniels and Coke.

Evie turned her head to the side, hoping Arturdo wouldn't notice her or Tori. She suddenly regretted bringing Raquel to the *charreada*. Not only was she already getting loud and obnoxious, but she was ~~gonna~~ make a fool of herself in front of Evie's "like, boss". And to top it all off, she was getting Tori drunk. Who was gonna drive them home?

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Unfortun<sup>+</sup>tely, Arturdo did see Evie and Tori. ~~He~~ waved to them. ~~And~~ both offered obligatory waves back. Evie hoped that would be it. Eye contact made, credit *should* be issued. But instead, Arturdo, in all his black-~~attire~~ badness, made his way over to them.

"Hey," he actually smiled. "You two made it. Nice." He placed his polished boot on the rickety aluminum bleacher bench above them and balanced himself on his leg

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Nice? When was Arturo ever happy to see Evie and Tori? It seemed like every time they were at the reserve, he found it necessary to point out everything they were doing wrong ~~than it would be just to do it himself.~~ *He was as bad as Evie's parents.*

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"My name's Raquel," Raquel held her hand up all dainty-like, as if she were actually expecting him to lean over and kiss it or something "I'm Evie's best friend"

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Arturo took Raquel's hand, but merely shook it. "Oh," he smiled, "You're the one who lived in Mexico City."

Evie was surprised that he remembered something she had mentioned weeks earlier. Granted it was the wrong best ADA, but still.

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"Uh, *no*," Raquel raised her eyebrow at Evie, "I'm the *other* best friend." She looked back at Arturo and sipped her drink suggestively. "The *pretty one, La Bonita*."

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Arturo looked at her cup and laughed "You mean the drunk one, *La Boracha*."

*That comment* erupted as LOL from *Evie*.

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Raquel looked over at Evie from the corner of her eyes. "Well it's better than being tagged *Turdo*," she muttered under her breath.

*Oh my God*. Evie and Tori tried hard to contain their laughter to themselves. He could so *not* hear her say that.

"What did you say?" Arturo asked as he tilted his cowboy hat slightly forward

"Hey, Arturo," Evie started. ~~She~~ hoped to distract him. "Thanks for asking us here. It's pretty fun." She looked down towards the arena

*Yeah, right.*

"Well, thanks for buying a ticket," Arturo looked towards the arena, as well. "It all goes to a good cause. A large percentage of the ticket price helps rehabilitate the performance horses that have been hurt. If they don't bet better, well, he paused. "They don't have the best future."

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"What do you mean?" Tori asked.

"I mean, they get put down."

"*What?*" Evie looked over at Arturo, alarmed. "Are you serious? They get killed?"

"Oh, yeah," Arturo answered, in an almost casual tone. "Their owners don't think they're as useful if they aren't performing and making money."

"Wow," Evie looked out towards the arena. A row of horses was forming two lines in an elegant synchronized fashion. "I didn't know that."

Kind?

"Yeah," Arturo said. "See that horse down there?" He pointed to a dark caramel colored stallion just entering the ring. "That's how Chamuco used to be, performing for the charreadas and for the drill team, but now he's old and blind. I don't know what's going to happen to him. He's always passed over during our adoption day clinic."

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Evie took a deep breath and looked over at the horse. She'd had *no* idea stuff like that happened. Sure, Chamuco got frightened easily, and yeah, he was old, but he didn't deserve to be *killed*. Evie felt sad.

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Just then, <sup>her</sup> to Evie's surprise, Josephina walked up to them. Of course, Evie thought to herself, Arturo wouldn't dress up just to impress some fellow cabarelleros on a Saturday night.

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"Turo?" Josephina asked.

Actually, maybe she wasn't asking but rather just saying his name. The way she spoke, one never knew with Josephina

"Ah, Josephina," Arturdo turned to face her. He took his <sup>foot</sup> ~~boot~~ off the bleacher and stood up. His energy immediately ~~changed~~ from relaxed to rigid. "You're back already?"

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"Why? Am I interrupting something?" She eyed Evie, Raquel, and Tori coolly. "No, it's just..." "Oh," Arturdo suddenly seemed even more awkward. "You remember Evie and Tori, and this is their friend..."

"~~Oh~~, Turo, just gave me a pet name," Raquel piped. "*La Boracha*."

Josephina looked at Raquel's cup. "Are you drinking?"

"Yeah, want some?" Raquel held out her cup towards Josephina.

"Uh, no?" Josephina wrinkled her nose. "There are already enough stinky drunks here." She adjusted her tiara, er, metallo ~~gold~~ hair band, and turned to Arturdo. "Turo, I still *have* to use a bathroom and I'm not about to use the filthy outhouses they have here. Can't you take me somewhere?"

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"Somewhere?" Arturdo asked. "We'd have to drive into Moorpark or Camarillo."

"Well, let's go then, anywhere other than here," Josephina looked around.

"There's nothing but obnoxious *borachos* around." She looked over at Raquel and Tori.

"*Pero querida*," Arturdo checked the time on his watch. "We'll miss the *escaramuzas*."

Josephina looked back at him, her eyes demanding the right answer.

"But I don't want you to be uncomfortable," Arturdo looked around and softened his tone. "I guess I can take you into Camarillo. We'll find a gas station or a Pollo Loco

for you." ~~He~~ put his arm around Josephina. "We'll be back," he told Evie ~~and~~ Tori.

"Maybe we'll see you later."

"Yeah," Tori said. "Later."

As soon as Arturdo and Josephina left the bleachers, Raquel dove in.

"Oh. *My* God," she exclaimed. "That girl talks like a total val, and what's with her get-up? Is she gonna go fox hunting or something?"

"Oh, she always dresses like that," Tori said. "She keeps her horse at the reserve."

"What's her name again?" Raquel asked. "Horsa-phina? Talk about an Ugly Belly ~~and she~~ was all getting in my face as if I wanted her man or something."

"Well," Evie started. "You *were* flirting with him."

Tori almost choked, laughing. "Arturdo and Horsa-phina! Perfect! A match made in manure. I can't stand either one of them."

"And how whipped is that Turdo?" Raquel observed. "My mack is *dry*, ay, ay."

Bleh, Tori waved her hand aside. "He just doesn't wanna argue with her. She can be pretty high maintenance."

"Or maybe," Evie suggested. "He wants to be, like, 'My Super Sweet Boyfriend.'"

"Please," Raquel said. "No guy is *that* sweet."

"Alex is." Evie didn't have to think for a second.

"Oh, yeah?" Raquel looked at her. "And where is Prince Charming now? He's in San Diego probably hooking up with some surf honeys as we speak. Has he even texted you in the last hour?"

"Of course," Evie lied.

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She knew what Raquel said was far from the truth, ~~but didn't want her thinking~~  
~~otherwise~~ <sup>took a sip of her soda and</sup> Evie watched Arturdo and Horsephina walk from the grandstand arena

<sup>He</sup> towards the exit. Arturdo took off his jacket and covered Horsephina's bare shoulders with it. Even though Arturdo was one of her least favorite people, Evie couldn't help but feel a twinge of envy. She couldn't remember the last time Alex had been so chivalrous with her or the last time they had actually gone on a date. Yeah, they surfed all the time, or at least they used to, and sometimes they'd split pancakes at Pete's Breakfast House or a burrito at La Gloria downtown, but those weren't really dates. Now with her volunteer duties, Evie wasn't even able to do those simple things with him, and it wasn't like he was making any effort to initiate any romance.

"*Vamos a ir hombres*," Raquel imitated the announcer.

"I heard that," Tori echoed Raquel's sentiment. "Now that Arturdo is gone, we can bail. Just lemme finish my drink."

Evie looked out at the horse that Arturdo had pointed out to her in the arena.

"Hey, Eves, you got your learner's permit on you?" Tori tapped the remaining ice from her cup into her mouth. "Maybe you should drive."

"Uh, yeah, I can drive," Evie offered dryly. Normally, she would have been excited to practice her driving, but her mood suddenly felt damp.

Raquel swirled the last bit of ice in her cup. "Okay, I'm ready to go."

"Wait," Evie said. "I wanna see more <sup>of</sup> this horse. ~~He~~ reminds me of this one at the reserve."

<sup>She</sup> Evie looked out to at the arena and watched the brown stallion trot to the center of the ring. His rider, a young girl in a cream colored Victorian dress, tapped his side with a

riding crop. He instantly lowered his head as his front legs bowed in a courtesy. This, of course, garnered a tremendous applause from the adoring crowd. They were totally *encantada* with him.

"Aw," Raquel clicked her tongue. "He is *so* cute! Wouldn't you love to have a pony like that, Evie?"

"Yeah," Evie answered. The spotlight shone on the horse ~~and~~ Evie walked down the bleacher steps to get a better look. Yes, he was the color of caramel, dark caramel and the hair on his mane was slighter lighter, but it was his eyes that captivated Evie. They were large, perfectly ~~but~~ round, and so ~~gentle looking, somewhat like the eyes on the~~ stuffed animals on Sabrina's bed. Ooh, Evie's heart got all gooey. Whether he could do tricks or not, ~~Evie~~ she didn't care. And just like the crowd around her, ~~she~~ Evie was completely, totally *encantada*.

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### Chapter 13

"Brina?" Evie tapped softly on her sister's bedroom door. When Sabrina didn't answer, ~~Evie~~ she knocked again and ~~then~~ held her ear to the door. But ~~she~~ Evie heard nothing, not even the hum of ~~Sabrina's~~ Sabrina's TV or ~~her~~ computer. ~~Evie~~ she was about to ~~knock~~ knock one more time, but decided to give it a rest. She ~~reluctantly~~ reluctantly walked to the end of the hall and ~~towards~~ towards her parents' bedroom. Their door was ~~wide~~ wide open.

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"Mom?" Evie stood at the doorway.

"Come in, Evie," her mother was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her hair was wet from <sup>her</sup> the shower after her morning swim, and she was drying it with a towel. "*Que te molesta?*"

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"What's wrong with Sabrina?" Evie asked her mother <sup>for her</sup> as she entered the room and took a seat on the linen chest at the foot of her parent's bed. "I knocked on her door, but she's not answering. And it was the same thing last night, when I came back from the rodeo."

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"She's probably still sleeping," her mother <sup>answered</sup> said. "It's early."

"Early? It's already 9 o'clock." It was unusual that Evie would question someone else's sleeping habits. Until Sabrina arrived, Evie was the sole snoozer of La Familia Gomez.

"She's going through a tough time," her mother sighed. "It's something we all go through. Heartbreak ... loss, <sup>g</sup> ~~change~~." She looked at Evie and smiled weakly. "But your sister is going to be fine. She has so much love around her, how could she not get better? And all she really needs is some fresh air and some good old-fashioned Pilates."

<sup>itales</sup> "Good *old fashioned*?" Evie asked

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"You know what I mean," her mother ~~answered~~ <sup>answered</sup>, "I'm gonna try ~~and get her to go~~ with me tonight. Why don't you come?"

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"Nuh, uh. *No way*," Evie said. "The only way I'm *ever* gonna stretch like they do in Pilates is gonna be after some major Rip Van Winkle nap."

"E-ve-*liina!*" It was Lindsay calling from downstairs.

"You better get down there," her mother turned her head over and rubbed the back of her head with her towel. "It's her day off, but she came in just to help you with your driving. Evie. Don't forget to thank her."

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"I know. I won't." Evie got up slowly and looked at her mother's hair. "Why don't you just use the hair dryer?"

"Ever since I went blonde I try not to," her mother replied, "I don't want anymore damage done to my hair." She swung her head up and looked at Evie. "Hey, why don't you practice in my car? Would you like that?"

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"Uh, the Benz?" Evie asked. She was *not* about to go there again. "No, it's okay," she told her mother. "I'm already sorta used to Lindsay's car. I mean, it's the only car I've been using, besides when I'm with dad and using his."

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"What?" Her mother frowned as if she didn't understand. How could anyone turn down her classic burgundy Benz? "No, really," she continued. "As long as you stay in the front and don't leave Camino del Rio, you can go ahead and practice with it."

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"No, I'm cool," Evie's stomach slowly made a somersault. "I'd rather just practice with Lindsay, in her car."

"Well, okay." She went back to drying her hair.

Evie went downstairs to meet Lindsay in the kitchen. *Why*, she wondered, would her mother offer her Mercedes? That was something her mother would *never* do, unless, say, maybe things were pretty bad with Sabrina. Maybe she was using her car as a distraction? It was just a bit suspicious.

Deleted: Maybe she was testing Evie?

"*Estas listas?*" Lindsay asked as she took her car keys out of her purse and handed them to Evie.

"Yeah," Evie took the keys from her. "I'm ready."

The last time she had been behind the wheel in Rio Estates was that fateful day when she had gotten in that (que to lower voice) *accidente*. Evie felt the odd sensation of an unwanted *de ja vu*. But today would be different, she hoped. For one thing, she wasn't going to be distracted by a phone conversation with Dee Dee, and for another, it was a Sunday. According to Lindsay, Jesus put in double time as a co-pilot for those needing extra guidance.

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"Now," Lindsay fastened her seat belt after she got into her car (License plate JK L29K; and only one bumpersticker, Radio Lazer) with Evie. "What's the first thing you do?"

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Evie reached for the radio dial. "Make sure I got some tasty tunes on?"

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"Evelina!" Lindsay tapped her hand.

"I know, I know," Evie teased as she checked the rearview mirror and side mirror.

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"Safety belt first and then make sure all mirrors are adjusted correctly to the driver's height."

"*Correcto*," Lindsay pulled down her car's sun visor and put on her sunglasses. It was just a little after 9 a.m., but the sun was already reflecting off the hood of the car.

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As Evie backed out of the driveway and onto Camino del Rio, she felt a little shaky. She took a deep breath and told herself that she just had to relax.

"*Ay, no te ocupadas*, Evelina," Lindsay patted her arm. "Don't worry so. You're doing so well with your driving. Much better than when Sabrina was learning."

Evie suddenly sat up in her seat.

"Really?" she asked. "You taught Sabrina to drive, and she sucked?"

"I did *not* say *that*," Lindsay frowned. "She was just very nervous and timid. You are I don't know, more of a go-getter."

"Really?" Evie suddenly felt gleeful.

Lindsay shook her head and looked out the window. "Ay, I don't know what's going to happen to Sabrina. She is still so sad"

"My mom said it's just a matter of time," Evie said "She's just depressed"

"I don't know," Lindsay said, "She doesn't eat, and she just sleeps all the time."

She looked out the window. "It's a sensitive time, and you should try to be extra nice and helpful."

"I *am* helpful," Evie frowned at Lindsay "All the work I'm doing at the reserve. I do a lot, Linds."

"I know, *mi'ja, claro que si*," Lindsay said "I know you've been working hard, Everytime I pick you up, *ay*, you look so tired"

"Yeah, I am Very tired" Evie felt the need to state her case one more time. "And even when I'm not at the reserve, and I have to go to fundraisers and stuff" Okay, so she had only been to one fundraising and it was far from being burdensome with work, but even Arturo had said her attendance, her ticket, helped the cause "Just last night I went to a charro rodeo."

A charreada?" Lindsay asked. "Oh, we have them all the time in Mexico. My cousins were *escaramuzas*."

"Really?" Evie turned Lindsay. "I've heard that word before. What's that?"

Lindsay reached over and gripped the steering wheel. "Keep your eyes on the road, Evie. Escaramuzas are team riders, women. A charrita is actually a cowgirl."

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"Oh," Evie nodded. "So, I went to one last night and it was *so* cool. They did these tricks--."

"*Suertes*," Lindsay interrupted. "They are called *suertes*."

"Oh, right," Evie said. "How come you've never told me about *charreadas*?"

"~~Evelina~~, how would I know what might interest you?" Lindsay said. "You are so finicky. One day it's surfing, and now it's suddenly horses? What are you going to do now? Trade in your flip flops for *botas*?"

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"I've *always* been into horses," Evie ~~asserted~~. She looked down at her Rainbow flojos. She wasn't about to trade them in for cowboy boots just yet.

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"For today, let's just concentrate on the driving," Lindsay said. "The sooner you learn to drive, the sooner --" She stopped herself.

"The sooner what?" Evie looked over at her.

"The sooner you get to drive," Lindsay simply replied.

"No, you were gonna say something else," Evie insisted. "Is it about my car? Are my parents gonna get me my Beetle for my birthday? They are, right?"

"Turn here," Lindsay ignored Evie's question and pointed to Calle Boca *Grande*. "Evelina, remember to use your signal *every* time you need to make a turn or get into another lane. Give the other driver enough time to know what you plan to do."

"Why?" Evie asked. "So they can speed up and block me?"

The sedan suddenly jumped forward.

"And you don't need to hit the brake all the time," Lindsay said. "Keep *both* hands on the steering wheel."

"Oh, I'm *never* gonna get this!" Evie groaned. "I'm not gonna get my driver's license by my birthday."

"You can get your license anytime," Lindsay said. "You don't have to get it by your birthday."

"If I wanna drive away from my party in Cherry Bomb, I do," Evie said.

"*Cherry bomb?*" Lindsay looked at her. "*Que es* cherry bomb?"

"That's what I'm gonna name my car," Evie told her. "Cool, huh?"

"Where are you getting this idea that you're getting a car for your birthday?"

Lindsay asked. "And I thought that you may not get your party."

"Who said that?" Evie asked. "Did you hear that, like, recently?"

"I thought I heard you your mother talking to your dad and--"

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"And what?"

"I don't know, I don't want to say anything," Lindsay got flustered. "But I thought I heard them talking about going up to Sabrina's school and I thought they were talking about that same weekend."

"*What!*" Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. "*The weekend of the 29<sup>th</sup>?*"

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*My birthday weekend?* You are *not* serious!"

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"Mi'ja, don't..." Lindsay reached for the gearshift. The car instantly stalled.

"Oh, man," Evie realized that she had shifted too slowly. *but that was nothing compared to the fact that it looked like her party may not happen.* "I'm *never* gonna get it."

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*truly*  
*you r never going to get what?*  
"*What* aren't you *never* going to get?" Lindsay asked

"Take your pick," Evie answered glumly.

## Chapter 14

“You should have been there, Alex,” Evie went on about the charreada as he drove her to the reserve the next morning. “It was amazing. The horses were so beautiful. They really are these incredible animals. God, I feel like such an idiot. I mean, I’ve been doing all this work at the reserve, and I guess I really had no idea why. I know why I need to work at the reserve, but I had no idea *why* my help was even needed. I can’t believe people would just give up on a horse, their pet. Do you know what I mean?”

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“Uh, huh,” Alex said, but it seemed as though he wasn’t really listening. “So, I don’t get why you skipped Baja just to be out drinking it up with the girls.”

“I wasn’t drinking it up,” Evie said. “Didn’t you just hear me? That was Raquel and Tori’s deal. And you know I had to go, to get the credit. It just happened that it turned out to be really cool, sorta educational.”

“Educational?” Alex looked at her. “What’s next? You’re gonna join Math-letes?”

“You know, if I didn’t know better,” Evie threw him a sideways glance. “I would say you were jealous.”

“Jealous?” Alex frowned. “Jealous of what?”

“That I’m doing different things, learning about different things.”

Alex looked at her and smiled. “Eve, no, I am not jealous. For reals. I’m actually glad it turned out okay for you. It just would have been cool if you had come to Baja.”

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“Well,” Evie looked back at him. “It would have been *cool* if you could have waited and planned the Baja trip on a weekend that I could actually go.”

When Alex pulled up at the reserve, Evie was unusually excited about her workday. She wanted to find out more about horses and *charreadas* from Arturo. But when she reached the stables, Tori had beaten her to the punch with follow up *charro* chit-chat.

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“So, did you and Josephina have fun at <sup>Saturday night</sup> the ~~charreada~~?” Tori was asking Arturo.  
As Evie walked over to pull out flakes of alfalfa and oat hay.

“Oh, yes,” Arturo said “I love *charreadas*. They have them all the time in Pico Rivera, but I rarely get a chance to get out there. My father is a *charro*. So are my brothers.”

Deleted: smiled again, uncharacteristically.

“And they do all those tricks?” Tori asked

“They aren’t called tricks,” Evie joined in. “They’re called *suertes*.”

“Right,” Arturo looked at Evie, slightly surprised “You know, the Mexican *charro* was the first cowboy. Not that many people know that.”

“Really?” Tori nodded enthusiastically, and it made Evie a little suspicious. It wasn’t like her to be so conversational with Arturo. “That is so cool,” Tori went on. “How come you aren’t a *charro*? I mean, you totally could be one. You know so much about horses and stuff.”

“It’s the “stuff” part that is really isn’t my thing,” Arturo confessed. “I didn’t follow the *charro* tradition. Besides, my whole family is still back in Colorado, and they all practice and perform together.”

“You came out to California by yourself?” Tori asked

“Yeah,” Arturo answered. “I moved out here because I really wanted to go to

Thatcher.”

"And you left behind your whole family? And all your friends?" she asked.

"Whoa," Arturdo laughed and up held his hand, faking protest. "I didn't know I was the subject of some in-depth interview. Is this part of your extra credit?"

"No," Tori laughed lightly. "I was just wondering, that's all."

Evie couldn't help but feel a bit curious too. Arturdo was a senior at Thatcher and only a few years older than she and Tori. She couldn't believe that someone would move halfway across the country just to work with some horses. She loved to surf, but she couldn't imagine moving to, say, Hawaii, just to be closer to some choice waves. But then again, after that cute little caramel colored horse she had seen at the rodeo, oh, who knows. He was just ~~too~~ adorable.

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"But come on," Tori tilted her head and looked up at Arturdo. "Don't they have horses in Denver?"

Was she actually flirting with him?

"Of course," Arturdo furrowed his brow. "But Thatcher is one of the best equine schools in the country, and if I wanna study veterinary medicine at UC Davis, I need a high school that would give me the best transfer. I'm starting Davis ~~in the~~ spring." *I wanna go to Davis*

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"Hey, Grandma Chablis goes to UC Davis," Evie said. "Wow, you might see her there."

"Chablis?" Arturdo asked

"I mean, Chavella," Evie said. "We call her Chablis cause she teaches viticulture Wine making."

Deleted: "Evie said."

"Uh, yeah," Arturdo smirked. "I know what viticulture is."

"Turrro!"

It was Josephina calling out for Arturdo. Evie was surprised they hadn't heard her car (~~like a late PRINCESS~~) pull up.

"We're over here," Arturdo called out over his shoulder. "In Blackie's stall."

Josephina stood at the doorway in a form-fitting plum colored satin halter dress, beige fishnets that shined against her tanned legs, and spikey knee-high black leather boots. She topped off her whole look with a black velveteen derby hat.

"You're not done yet?" she asked Arturdo. Her annoyed tone was less Valley-esque and more demanding. "I thought you made the reservations? At seven?"

"Uh, ~~hello? How are you? How has your day been?~~" Arturdo teased Josephina for ~~not greeting him before she got demanding~~. He dropped enormous pills into the selected buckets. ~~feed~~

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"Arturo," Josephina checked her slim gold wristwatch. "It's time to go." She ground her boot heel into the gravel. "I don't want to be late. If we don't get there on time, we might as well not go at all."

Josephina Arturdo ~~stopped what he was doing and~~ exhaled. "We'll make it. I'm the one who made the reservations, remember? And we're only 25 minutes away."

~~but~~ "I guess Evie and Tori can take over," Arturdo suggested as ~~(he looked at Evie)~~

Deleted: Evie wondered if Tori felt as suddenly uncomfortable as she did. ff

"You don't mind, do you?"

"Uh, no," Evie said "I don't mind."

What could she really say? He was the boss, sorta.

Arturdo turned back to Josephina. "I've got my shirt in my truck. I'll go change."

~~Si, si~~ "Okay, okay," Josephina checked the time again. "But do it quickly."

she

"I hope I didn't interrupt you guys," Josephina looked over Tori and Evie as Arturo went out to his truck. ~~"It always seems...?"~~

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"Huh?" Evie asked. "What do you mean?"

"When I walked up," Josephina started. "It's like you guys were in a middle of a conversation? It seems like every time I see you two with Arturo, I am barging in on something."

"No, we were just being silly," Evie felt awkward. The last thing she wanted was Horsaphina *hating* and then complaining to Arturo about it. She looked over Horsaphina and assessed damage control. "You look really pretty. Are you going somewhere fancy?"

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"Oh, yeah," Horsaphina agreed as she smoothed out her dress and adjusted the gold mesh bracelet on her wrist. "Arturo's taking me to Koi."

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"Koi?" Evie asked. She had no idea what Koi was. Was it a club? A lingerie boutique, as in *Coy*? Maybe it was a mispronounced Native American name for another horse reserve?

"The Teppan Grill?" Josephina smiled when she noticed Evie's confused expression. "They seat you in groups of twelve, and if we're late? We'll get a regular chef, but I want Mayru. He's the owner?"

"Oh, right," Evie nodded.

"I can't believe you've never been there," Josephina said.

Neither Evie nor Tori said anything.

Josephina looked around with an air of disapproval. "Don't you guys ever get tired of working here?"

"Nuh uh," Evie said. "Not really." It was half true.

"Me neither," Tori agreed with Evie.

"Well, I would," Horsaphina stated. "I don't get it. Arturo spends so much time here. But then again, you two *have* to be here? Right?"

"Not really. We're volunteers," Evie pointed out. "I mean, I could have picked any organization for work."

"Hmm - mmm," Josephina wasn't convinced. "That's not what Arturo told me."

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"What are you talking about?" Evie asked.

"He said that your school counselor called to ask if the reserve still had room for you? And they didn't? Arturo had already made out the whole schedule for the year, and he's very organized that way. But when he told them no, your counselor went over his head and straight to Lynn, she okay'd it."

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"Oh, I didn't know that," Evie said. No wonder Arturo had been tough on her from day one.

When Arturo re-appeared, *Evie looked up* wow. What a difference a nag makes. He had changed from his worn out old blue and green Pendleton work shirt to a grey button up shirt. His hair was slightly combed back, and Evie noticed that he had put on the slightest hint of a scented cologne, (eucalyptus and woody). Did he always wear cologne? Maybe she just hadn't noticed before. She did remember that Alex used to wear cologne (sea breezy and fresh), at least, for the evenings when the Flojos would all go fancy party crashing or something. Evie sighed to herself. But that was all so last semester, and in a distant galaxy so far, far away.

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"Arturo," Josephina scowled at his boots. "You *cannot* wear those to Koi. They have a dress code?"

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"Josephina," Arturdo started. "There is nothing wrong with my boots." He looked at the ones she was wearing. "You're wearing boots."

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"Yes, but mine were, like, four hundred dollars?" Josephina rebuffed. "They're not some Red Wing work boots from, like, Gordon's Western Wear."

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"Josephina," Arturdo pursed his lips. "If you want me to change it's only going to make us even more late. Is that what you want?"

It seemed obvious to Evie that Josephina was working his last nerve.

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"What *ever*?" Josephina just looked up at the sky, seemingly surrendering control.

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As soon as they left, Tori turned towards Evie and smiled smugly. "Pretty smart of us, huh?"

"Smart of us, what?" Evie asked.

"Kissing Turdo's ass like that, pretending we were all into the rodeo and working here and stuff," Tori said. "That part about your Grandma Chablis just about killed me."

"But I *did* like the charreada," Evie insisted. "And my Grandma Chablis does go *teach* to Davis. What are you talking about?"

"I don't know about you, but I'm behind with my hours. I've been late sometimes and Turdo subtracts even the minutes. If I don't get the credit I need, I'm gonna have to retake one of my other classes. I'm thinking if I get on Turdo's good side, he might be cool letting me slide. You have all the hours you need?"

Deleted: She hadn't really sat down and looked over all her hours.

"Uh," Evie hesitated. "Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think I'm pretty much on the right track" She hadn't really sat down and looked over all her hours and she just assumed that when she showed up that her attendance counted for a full shift. The way her body ached she at least *felt* that she had put in her share.

“Yeah,” Tori went back to work. “I’d hate to be doing all this for nothing.”

Evie watched after Arturo and Horsaphina as they headed for his truck. He held the door open as he waited for her to get in the passenger seat, and then went around the front of this truck and got in.

When Arturo’s truck finally drove off and was out of sight, Evie excused herself.

“Man, you better be right back,” Tori warned her. “I ain’t gonna do all this alone, like last time.”

“No, I just gotta make a call,” Evie said as she went to get her backpack from the supply shed. She pulled out her cell phone and speed dialed Alex’s number. While she waited, she thought of Arturo. He wasn’t such a bad guy. So he was a bit of a dick-tator at first, but Evie thought it was pretty cool, no *very* cool that he cared so much about what he did at the reserve. She realized it might be time to take the ‘d’ out of Arturo’s name.

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Again, she got Alex’s voice mail.

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“Hey, Alex It’s me,” Evie started “Hey, I’m wondering... this coming weekend.

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Do you think we can go out? Like not surfing, but go out, *out?* Do something different?

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Okay...” She didn’t know what else to say. “Sp just let me know.”

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