

## CHAPTER 1

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### D a n i

I should have never been born. That's what my daddy said before he shut the door. I never saw him again.

True, I was only three, but I can still see his long black hair fall into his face. He pushed it back with one hand as he opened the door with the other. He spit words out in Spanish. I don't know what he said, but Mom cried and yelled, "You better not come back." So he didn't.

Mom took me in her arms. Her skin looked black against my chubby brown legs. She said we could do this, just the two of us. I believed her.

We moved a week later. Mom said we didn't need three bedrooms. She said smaller was better. I believed her.

By the time I was seventeen I knew she had lied. We moved because she didn't want Daddy to find us. She also needed a cheap place.

But I didn't care. West Street was my home and I was just happy to have my own room while Mom shared her room with Benny. Benny is my baby brother. When I was sixteen Mom thought she had a thing going with her white boss at Ted's Rest Hotel across town. It was going to move us out of here. The minute he found out Benny was on the way it was over. Mom cried for weeks. She cried, "We're stuck!"

I just held her and said, "Mom, why do you want to get out?" When she didn't speak I said, "You always said this was better than where we were before."

“You’re right, Dani.” She took my hand and wiped her tears. “It is better. I just want more for you, baby.”

“More?” I looked at my mom. Her dark skin was smooth and beautiful. She didn’t have a muffin top like I did. I kept waiting for my baby fat to go away. I was in for a long wait. I would never look like Mom. I could see why men liked her. Why they wanted her. But for the first time I saw some gray beginning to color her hair.

“You got to finish school!” Mom looked at me as I rolled my eyes. She always went back to the school thing. “Dani Garcia, don’t you roll your eyes at me!” She pointed her finger in my face. “You want to be stupid and let others decide for you?”

“No, Mom,” I said, just like always. She looked at me and smiled.

“Whatever happens, school comes first!” Mom said it like she meant it. I believed her.

Then along came Benny. His blue eyes shocked both of us. So I called him my white brother. I guess he's not much whiter than me since my dad was Hispanic.

I hated it when people tried to talk Spanish with me since I didn't know any. Just because I looked like a Garcia didn't mean I could *say* anything. Kids teased me when I was younger, calling me stupid. They backed off when I learned to cuss them out in Spanish. They didn't ask me to speak Spanish again.

At seventeen I was facing my last year of school. I was facing graduation. Easy, right? Wrong!