



DEPORTED

# *Prologue*

*I*t had been an amazing summer—barbeques, swimming, vacations. Who could ask for more? When the flyers were circulated that the first annual Back-to-School Blowout was being thrown by Port City officials, everyone was super-excited. Marisa, Shane, and Brandi had been preparing for two weeks for the Hawaiian-themed party. They ordered the cutest flowered outfits online and made their own grass skirts. They each found leis that complimented their clothes perfectly.

Now they were at Mari's house getting ready for the event.

"I am not ready to see everybody," Brandi announced. It had only been a couple of months since Brandi had been abducted by Steven, a demented childhood friend. In his mind, he thought he was saving her from her family and friends. But he hurt her more than they ever could. She was still trying to heal and move beyond the terror.

"You are going to be fine," Marisa said as her reflection met Brandi's in the tall mirror. "Plus look at all of the support you have. It won't just be me and Shane. Trent and Ashton will be with us too. You know they have your back." They had only met Trent and Ashton last semester. Marisa had fallen in love with Trent, but Trent and Ashton had become like brothers to Brandi. They had helped rescue her from Steven and had remained supportive throughout the summer, taking her to

cheerleading practice and calling to check in.

“Girl, quit trippin’,” Shane said as she came out of the restroom. She had pulled her hair into a bun on top of her head. Her bangs framed her golden sun-kissed face.

“I feel self conscious, like I shouldn’t be showing so much skin. I don’t want to bring attention to myself. I’m going to let the knot out of this shirt,” Brandi decided.

“You will do no such thing,” Shane said. “Show off all that chocolate honey. You look good.” And she did. The contrast of the Hawaiian colors on Brandi’s dark skin made her look like an African queen.

“Argh, I don’t know. I should have gotten the other dress like Mari’s.”

“Girl, I’m about to tie this one in a knot on the side too. I have to show a little leg,” Marisa said.

“That’s more than a little leg. You’re almost six feet tall, woman. That’s a whole lotta leg,” Shane said, laughing.

"That's why Trent loves me. He needs all this woman by his side. Hey, he's texting me. They're outside. Mama, we are leaving!" she yelled.

"*Mi hija*, let me get a picture before you go."

"Mama, Trent is outside."

"Well, tell Trent to come inside," Mrs. Maldonado said. Marisa had really been on her mother about learning to speak English. She had been in classes all summer, and it was finally helping. She was so proud of her.

"He can't tonight, Mama. We have tickets for the first barge ride, so we have to be on time. Just get us girls. We'll take pictures for you when we get there."

"Now you know I'll get my photography on, Mrs. M," Shane said.

"Okay, okay, *uno foto*," Mrs. Maldonado said, snapping their picture. They each gave her a kiss on the cheek and ran to meet Trent and Ashton.