



THE ACCIDENT

*Prologue*

As Marisa, Shane, and Brandi prepared for Marisa's *quinceañera*, they knew that everything had to be perfect. After all, she was about to turn sixteen soon. Normally, that was way too late for a *quinceañera*, but with all the drama the previous year, all of her *quinceañera* plans had been put on hold.

When her father was in jail, planning her *quinceañera* was the last thing she wanted to do. Who would dance with her? Who would lead her transition into

adulthood? After all the court costs, who would pay for it? No, she had to wait, and there were only a few more days before she was officially not fifteen anymore. She had to pull this quinceañera off immediately.

In Marisa's culture, the only thing more important than a girl's quinceañera was her wedding. Luckily, Marisa's modeling jobs had helped her family get back on their feet, and now her own money was helping pay for the celebration.

Her family contributed as much as they could. They knew the situation wasn't ideal. No matter how much she protested, her uncles and aunts continued to slip money into her hands whenever they saw her at family gatherings.

"*Tía*, I can't accept your money. You know I'm working now. I can pay for my own quinceañera."

Her mother's sister would hear none of it. "Take it, *mi hija*. A girl does not pay for her own quinceañera. Her family pays

for it. We are all doing whatever it takes to give you the celebration you deserve.”

“*Muchas gracias, Auntie.*”

“*De nada.* Now put that money away. And use it wisely.”

Marisa always put the money her family gave for her party into a special savings account. She watched it grow. When she knew she had enough money, she and her mother started planning. With the help of her sisters, everything was in place. It was sure to be the best quinceañera Port City had ever seen.

“I want a quinceañera,” Shane said, holding the balloons in place that dangled from the ceiling. They were trying to spell Marisa’s name in huge balloon bubble letters, but it was proving to be harder than they had initially thought.

“Your mom’s white, your dad’s black. That’s enough culture for you. Can you let us Hispanics have our own celebration?”

Now hold still,” Marisa fussed at her. Marisa’s nerves were getting to her. She knew there was going to be a large crowd of people. She just wanted everything to be perfect. She worked so hard for this night, and she had looked forward to it for her entire life. The day had finally arrived. She was crossing over into womanhood.

“Hey, y’all!” Brandi shouted, walking into the venue with Young Dub.

“You are *so* late. You said you were going to be here an hour ago,” Marisa scolded her best friend. “Why you always on BPT?”

“Don’t hate ’cause it takes my chocolate people a little longer than y’all. And you should be thanking me ’cause I swooped up your entertainment for the evening. Who else can get Dub to rap pro bono?”

“Whatever,” Marisa responded, turning her attention to Young Dub. “Hey, Dub. Thank you so much for doing this for me.”

“Aw, you know I got you, Mari.”