



PCH

The Accident

A PORT CITY HIGH NOVEL

SHANNON
FREEMAN



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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.”

She hugged Dub as she walked by. Time to add the finishing touches to the room's décor. She surveyed her work, realizing that her mother and aunts had done almost everything. The bakery had already set up the cake table. The cake was enormous, resembling an extravagant wedding cake, but Marisa's signature colors of black, white, and hot pink gave it a more festive look.

The fruit table was in place, with a chocolate fountain as its centerpiece. There were skewers of pineapple, banana, strawberry, and marshmallow. The gift table was decorated beautifully, but it was still empty. Soon, it would be overflowing with all sorts of luxuries that would assist Marisa's crossover from child to woman. With DJ Dazed set to spin the music and Young Dub performing, this was going to be a bar-raising quinceañera, one that Port City would be talking about for a long time.

She wanted to soak it all in. She knew that after today, this party would be a memory. “Mi hija, you have to get ready!” Her mother’s voice snapped her out of the moment. “Everything is beautiful. Now go! Your friends are waiting.”

Her mother was right. It was time to get into her first outfit. Her older cousin was there to help her with her hair and makeup. Eva had just turned twenty-one and was possibly the coolest person Marisa had ever met. Being five years older than Marisa, Eva had always been in charge of watching over her when the family had big functions.

She was the best cousin Marisa could ever want. She simply called her *prima*, meaning cousin, and Eva called her the same. They shared a bond, so it was fitting that Eva would be the one to help her on this special day. Eva’s own quinceañera had been wonderful. Marisa could only hope her party was just as great.

“I can’t believe you’ll be sixteen soon, Prima,” Eva said to her as she applied mascara to Marisa’s eyelashes.

“Right? I wish I could have done this a year ago. I was working to get everything in place, but the trouble with Dad and Romero just ...” Her voice trailed off as if she were thinking about what to say next. “I don’t know.”

“Hey, today is your day. Don’t worry about what happened or didn’t happen. You are officially crossing over today. That’s all that’s important.”

“I know. You’re right. Thank you so much for being here.”

“Where else would I be? It’s not every day my little cousin gets presented as a woman in our community.”

Marisa thought about what that meant. It was hard to believe.

“Now that should do it. You look beautiful.”

Marisa looked like she had stepped

straight out of a page in *LaTeen* magazine. She could hear the music playing on the other side of the building. That was the signal indicating the guests were arriving. The more voices she heard, the more fluttering butterflies she felt in her stomach. Her hair and makeup were finished. It was time to put on her white dress and veil.

She looked as though she were about to get married in her beautiful, flowing gown. She could hear the DJ announcing her entrance, and she knew it was time. Her priest was in the reception hall in order to bless her and the family members guiding her transition.

After the traditional blessing, the song “Butterfly Kisses” began to play. She and her father both loved that song. He took her hand and danced with her. When the song was over, Mr. Maldonado removed her veil and replaced it with a beautiful handcrafted tiara from Mexico. She

looked like a princess as her father spun her around the dance floor.

All of the heartache from the year before dissipated with every spin. It was magic. Tears filled her dad's eyes as he danced with her. When the song ended, he whispered in her ear, "You are my first daughter, the oldest, but you will forever be my baby."

"Oh, Papa," she said, giving him a hug and gently kissing his cheek. For that brief moment, they were the only two people in the room. Hand in hand, he walked her to the back of the building, where she changed into her next outfit. This one was more informal. She could hear the music playing. It was the music of her childhood, traditional and rich.

She knew that meant it was time for her to dance with her cousin Berto. He was the best dancer in their entire family. They had been practicing all summer, and she felt ready. When it was time for her to

enter, she ran onto the dance floor confident and beautiful. She started the dance routine immediately. Her solo set the tone for the whole dance.

Berto ran out during the chorus. Everyone knew Berto could dance, but Marisa took everyone by surprise. With every move, she could hear gasps from the audience. As the routine increased in difficulty, her friends and family cheered loudly. She could feel the vibe in the room. Her thin frame defied gravity as she spun around Berto. She ended the routine with an incredible *Dancing with the Stars* move. Both she and Berto were breathing hard and sweating, but they knew they had torn it up.

With the stressful parts of the celebration behind her, Marisa was finally able to focus on her guests. She wanted to kick back and have a good time. Shane and Brandi sat at Marisa's table with her family. Right next to them was a table full



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*Drama is always just
a day away ...*

Shane is bored with school, then she meets the hot new volleyball coach. Suddenly, things are looking up. Brandi becomes co-captain of the varsity cheer squad. Dating a famous rapper is not bad either. And Marisa is the featured twirler during halftime. But after a big win, her crew parties a little too hard.



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