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High Spirits

Christmas Eve day was shaping up to be so much fun. My mom and I had just finished shopping for our family and friends. She was dropping me off at the skating rink for a Christmas bash from three to five o'clock. My friends Riana, Layah, and Imani were all waiting for me by the front door. Of course, my mom lectured us about being careful, even though her friend Miss Pam, who was one of the owners, promised that she'd keep an eye on us. We also had strict instructions that when the DJ announced the last song, to start getting our stuff together right after that. That would be easy since all of us brought our own skates, and we wouldn't have to stand in long lines to turn in rented ones.

Mom rolled her window down to say hello to Miss Pam. “Hey, girl. Thanks for letting Carmen and her friends hang out today. They know how to behave and what’s expected of them.” Then my mom gve us a look. “Right, ladies?”

“Yesss,” we all said together, anticipating jumping out of the car.

“Girl, you know I can handle things. Plus, I know that Carmen Browne and any friends of hers behave like such *ladies*,” Miss Pam said, winking at us.

As soon as Mom pulled off, we darted inside to begin our party time. It wasn’t that we planned to do anything wrong that would displease our parents; it’s just that me and my girls couldn’t wait to just hang out with each other. Before we put our skates on, we decided to exchange Christmas gifts.

Imani went first. She handed all of us a cute, small, square box. Inside was a wallet that turned into a purse, if you put on the long strap. They were in the cutest colors. I had a pink one. She gave Riana purple. Layah had orange, and then Imani pulled hers out. It was bright gold. I took my money out of my back pocket so fast and put it in my new gift.

We all said thank you, and she said, “Just a little some-thin’ I wanted to give you guys to carry, because you carried me these last few months when I was trippin’. It’s great to have y’all as friends.”

Then it was Layah’s turn. She gave us airbrushed sweat-shirts with our names on the back! They were *sooo* cute. We agreed to go to the bathroom and put them on as soon as we were done exchanging gifts.

“I thought it’d be fun to look alike,” Layah said.

Riana handed us pretty gift bags from Bath & Body Works with fragrances inside. She gave us each the same one, Warm Vanilla Sugar. I loved splashing on my mom’s sprays. Now I’d have my own. *But how will I keep my little sister Cassie out of mine?* I wondered. Smiling, I realized I could share.

“I thought it would be cool for all of us to wear the same fragrance,” Riana said. “Now we can really be sweet.”

My gift was last. I handed a small jewelry box to each of them. They didn’t even notice the shiny new chain that I was wearing. It was an adorable necklace that said, “Best Friends Forever.” They opened their boxes . . . and all three of them loved it.

“We’re best friends for life,” I said.

We ran to the bathroom to put on our sweatshirts and necklaces, giggling and discussing how excited we were to have each other as friends. Sometimes it was difficult dealing with different personalities. But nothing could break us up.

Just as quickly as I thought that, I saw my friend Spencer and Hunter enter the skating rink. Spence, as everyone called him, had a big smile on his face. He looked happy to see us, and it was cool seeing him. He came over and spoke to us. Then he asked me to skate a few times around with him. Sounded good to me. I gave my friends a quick wave good-bye, and I noticed little frowns on their faces, but I couldn’t let them “steal my joy” as my grandma always said.

We skated around side by side. The DJ was really jammin’.

He went back to his buddy and I went back to my girls. When I skated toward Layah and Imani, they skated away. They waved at me and gave each other high fives. The nerve. I was glad I was past taking things personal. I came. They left. So what. No big deal.

Just then I saw Riana a second too late. Tripping, I ran into her, nearly knocking her down.

“Girl! Carmen, you almost made me drop my nachos,” she said to me in an evil tone.

“It was an accident. I’m sorry. What’s wrong with you, Riana? Please tell me you’re not mad at me for skating with Spence.”

“No, I’m cool with that. It’s just. . . .”

“What?” I asked, hanging on for her next word.

“I wish Hunter would say something to me. He just waved and left.”

“Did you say anything to him?”

“I shouldn’t have to. Spence came over to you.”

“Forget him. He’s not the only boy in the world. Let him see you having a good time, girl. One thing having a big brother has taught me, and you should know this ’cause your brother’s the same way; boys are a trip! This is girlfriend time now anyway. You ready?”

“Yeah, let’s do this. You’re right. If he doesn’t wanna talk to me, I am not tryin’ to chase him. Let’s go.”

It’s funny how I told Riana that this was girlfriend time, but the first person I skated with when I got here was Spence, I thought to myself. Maybe it was friend time.

Riana and I skated right into Layah and Imani. This time Riana and I got our feet all tangled up together in the excitement. The four of us ended up on the hard floor. Immediately, everyone started cracking up . . . except Layah.

“Oww! Get off of me!” she said rudely. “Y’all need to watch where you’re goin’!”

Layah and Imani skated away.

“What’s her problem?” I said to Riana, hoping she knew what was up with Layah.

Layah was smiling one minute. Then the next she had an attitude.

Riana and I went to the concession stand to get something to drink, and Miss Pam asked if we were enjoying ourselves.

“Miss Pam, our friend Layah has an attitude, and our other friend Imani just skated off with her,” I said.

“Well, I trust that you ladies can work it out,” Miss Pam said, smiling.

“I hope so,” I said, sighing.

Riana replied, “Let’s go talk to them, Carmen.”

I hoped Layah wasn’t upset because of Spence. Why couldn’t we stay cool? We had just made a pact to be friends for life, and now this. My older brother Clay said that girls always “keep somethin’ goin’.”

When we didn’t see Layah or Imani in the rink, we decided to check the bathroom. One of the many points in my mom’s lecture before she dropped me off was, don’t go to the bathroom alone. She said that at least two of us should

always be together. Like a buddy system.

We opened the door and there they were. Imani had her arm around Layah, as Layah leaned against the wall holding her stomach. *She's probably faking*, I thought. "You know what? I'm not trying to be mean or anything. But I don't understand you. Why do you have to spoil everything? Everyone is trying to have a good time. You know we didn't mean to fall on you. What's up with you?"

Imani blurted out, "She started her period."

"What? Her period?" I asked, shocked.

Layah said, "I started my period! And I don't know . . . but I just feel weird . . . my stomach hurts! How would you feel if your cycle started at a skating rink?!"

"For real Layah? You started your period?" Riana asked, patting Layah on the shoulder.

"Yeah, Riana, I did."

Then Miss Pam walked in.

"Girls, is everything okay?" Miss Pam asked.

We all looked at each other, unsure of what to say.

"Umm . . .", I muttered.

"Talk to me. What's going on?" Miss Pam questioned.

"Well, Layah just started—" Imani blurted.

"Imani, I can talk for myself. Miss Pam, my period started."

"Honey, was this your first one?"

"Yes," Layah replied.

"Were you already prepared with sanitary napkins?" Miss Pam asked.

"No, but my grandmother told me what to do if it hap-

pened to me in a public place. So I checked the sanitary napkin dispenser, and put my money in and got a napkin. My grandma said that if I couldn't get a napkin, then to just use toilet paper or paper towels until I could get what I needed," Layah said.

"Well, Layah, it sounds like your grandmother prepared you with information," Miss Pam said.

"You need to give your grandmother a call to let her know what's going on," Miss Pam said as we walked toward her office.

Even though I thought we had everything under control, I was glad that Miss Pam was there to help.

After Layah called her grandma we continued our celebration. I put aside being angry at her. Now I wanted to trade places with her.

"I can't wait for my cycle to start," I said. "I'm ready to be a woman."

"Me too," Riana chimed in.

"Me three," Imani said, being silly.

"Please. Y'all just don't know. Just wait. It's not all that."

All I could think about on the ride home was, *God, when is my time coming?*



Christmas morning I awakened to a busy household. Since I was getting older, the excitement of getting toys was gone, but I was hoping for a few outfits. I was excited to sleep

in, or at least I thought that was the case, until Cassie woke me up. We shared her room while my grandparents were visiting.

“Carmen, you gotta come and see! You have a whole bunch of stuff under the tree. You better get up, girl.”

My family and I said “Merry Christmas” to one another.

I thought Cassie had made a big deal out of nothing. But she wouldn’t let me sleep. I saw a big box with “Carmen” on it. I had asked for a new computer . . . but it couldn’t be. My dad told me I wasn’t getting one of my *own* just yet. But I couldn’t lift the heavy box with the angel wrapping.

“Go ahead and open it, sweetie,” my dad said as my mom smiled.

I quickly tore the wrapping paper. And it was a computer! This had to be the best Christmas ever.

“Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you,” I said, planting kisses on my parents.

“We’re proud of how you’ve been working really hard to pull up your grades,” Dad said. “I’ll hook it up in your room later. But when it comes to surfing the Internet, Carmen, you’ll still use the computer in the family room for that.

Understand?”

“Oh, yes, Dad.”

I opened the rest of my gifts, which included cute outfits, gospel CDs, and books. Christmas wasn’t about getting, but it sure felt good to receive.

“Well, now that everyone has opened their gifts, I’m going to take about an hour or so in the studio, putting fin-

ishing touches on my project,” Mom said.

I was glad to see her doing what she loved, because for a while she’d been undergoing all sorts of medical tests. Doctors had suspected that she might have breast cancer. It had been a difficult time for our entire family. I was so happy that my mom was healthy.

Later that afternoon I didn’t know what to do with myself. So much was going on around my house. My brother and granddad were outside chopping logs. *Carmen Browne chopping logs? No way.* I could tell that they were bonding, so I didn’t interrupt.

I went to the family room where my dad, who is head coach of the Virginia State football team, was hanging out with a few of his players. They stopped by to wish our family a Merry Christmas. Though I wanted everyone to be happy on this holiday, I wished I could just hang out with my dad. But I had to share him.

Coming from the kitchen was a delicious smell that seemed to call my name, so I headed there to see what was cooking. Cassie had an apron tied around her waist and was at the table busily stirring something in a bowl. That girl thought she could look just as cool as them. My grandmothers were busy chopping and slicing this and that. I asked if they needed another hand, but I was shooed away.

I knew my mom needed time for her project. *But didn’t she say she’d be done in an hour?* I needed to check on her to see if she needed a sandwich, something to drink, an extra hand, whatever. I tapped on her door and walked in.

“Hey, Mom!”

Quickly she snapped, “Carmen, you can’t just walk in, honey. You have to wait for me to say come in. I’m working, baby. What is it?”

“Sorry, Mom,” I responded in a disappointed tone. “I just wanted to see if you needed anything.”

“No, dear. I have everything I need. I’m trying to finish up this piece before dinner, okay?”

I didn’t know why she had to bark at me. It was already past an hour. But I realized deep down she didn’t mean to hurt my feelings.

Okay, Lord, I don’t want to be in a sad mood. Help me out here. That’s when I realized I could find joy just hanging out with myself. Over the past year, I had moved to a new city and had to make new friends. Then I had problems with those friends. I ended up on my own for most of the first semester of middle school anyway.

Since it was Christmas, I decided to read from the book of Luke about Jesus’ birth. I didn’t realize how much time had flown by until Mom came into my room. I had been reading and playing my Kierra Sheard gospel CD for a couple of hours.

“Let’s set the table for dinner, sweetie. What are you reading?” she said, peering around the corner of my bedroom door.

“I was reading about the birth of Jesus. Trying to spend time with God. We do that to get to know Him better, right?”

“That’s right, honey. Just like a new friend that you’re get-

ting to know. People can tell you about the person, but until you spend personal time with them, you don't really know them for yourself.

"I owe you a big apology. I'm sorry for being short with you like I did earlier."

"It's okay, Mom, I understand."

"I've been thinking that maybe it's time for you and I to *talk* some more."

"Talk more about what?" I asked, sort of confused.

"Well, sweetie . . . girl things. Menstruation. Cramps. You're at an age where you may be getting your cycle soon. I've tried to explain things to you in stages, when I've felt you were ready. And when you got home you told me one of your best friends just started her cycle yesterday at the skating rink."

"Mom, when did you say you started your cycle?"

"I was eleven, so there's a possibility that yours could begin in the near future. Some girls begin earlier than others. It just depends. Once you get your period, you'll have it for many years. That's the way God designed it."

"Do you still have yours?"

"Yep! And I'm nearly forty. That's why I'm apologizing, because sometimes your cycle can bring discomfort and irritability. I usually have a handle on it. But I let it get the best of me today. I allowed stress and fear of not meeting my deadline upset me. I should've budgeted my time better, so that I wouldn't be working on Christmas Day anyway. This is family time."

I hugged her. “Really, it’s okay.”

“Anyhow, we’ll keep up with your cycle by charting it and marking the calendar, so you’ll know pretty much when to expect it, and you’ll be prepared.”

“Like preparing for a big storm or hurricane?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t want you to look at your cycle as being destructive like a hurricane, or to have a negative view of it. You’ll probably hear some girls refer to it as a ‘curse,’ but it’s not. It’s the way that God designed the female reproductive system to function.” My mom laughed and pinched my cheeks. “But you certainly do need to prepare and have the appropriate supplies.

“Several months before your cycle begins, you may notice a wet, clear substance in your underwear. That’s called menarche. When your cycle actually begins, you may experience cramping at first, or see blood in your underwear, which might appear red or brown.”

“Well, I’m just glad I have you. I feel bad ’cause Layah doesn’t have her mother to talk to.”

“But she has her grandma, honey. God is looking out for all you little ladies. I can’t believe how you all are just growing up on us. I’m so glad that Miss Pam was there to help.”

“Yeah, I was glad too, but I think we could’ve handled it.”

“I know you all are at the age where you feel like you’ve got all the answers,” she said, pinching my cheeks again.

“I love you, Mom.”

“I love you back, Carmen.”

We left my room arm in arm, on our way to set the

dinner table. If I trusted God with my life, He would work things out. I wasn't going to doubt Him. This Christmas wasn't so bad after all.

On Sunday morning both of my grandmothers were whipping up a huge Sunday morning breakfast as we prepared for church. Pancakes, French toast, sausage, Canadian bacon, eggs, hash browns, homemade biscuits, with coffee, tea, and orange and pineapple juice to drink. My grandmas *always* went overboard!

At church Pastor Wright spoke from Galatians 5:22–23 about the fruit of the Spirit. As Christians we're supposed to demonstrate love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. *Me? Do all of that!?*

"Regardless of circumstances," Pastor Wright preached, "and of how we feel, we must obey God's Word. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live for Him. We can't exercise the fruit of the Spirit without that power. He should always be in control."

"Amen!" everyone shouted.

I concentrated on Pastor Wright's sermon. If I let God be in control of everything: how I relate to my parents, my siblings, and friends, I could have peace and not worry—even about my cycle, which my mom said might start soon. Silently I prayed, *Lord, help me to be patient and wait for You to make changes in my life. I know that sometimes I get anxious and want to grow up fast. Show me how to be an eleven-year-old who can have fun and still please You. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

I left church feeling good that day. The Holy Spirit gave me power to live. As we sang the benediction song, “Till We Meet Again,” all the church was rocking. We were uplifting God with our *high spirits*.

I Believe

My family trailed my grandparents back to North Carolina. All of us, including my dad's parents, went to my mother's mom's house to celebrate the new year. Even Auntie Chris and Uncle Mark were there. It was good to see them, since we didn't spend time with them on Christmas.

I was so happy for Auntie Chris and Uncle Mark. My parents said that God had really helped them to work things out. Though I was only eleven, I knew that adults always fussing wasn't a good thing. Thankfully it looked like that chapter was behind them. I must admit, I still thought about how mean Uncle Mark was when Cassie and I last visited. However, I was trying to forget it and move on.

We sat around the den drinking hot chocolate with marshmallows. Mom said that we should talk about our plans for the new year.

Cassie jumped up and said, “I plan to be more like my sister. She’s sweet, popular, and cool. And a lot of things that used to bother me about her don’t bother me anymore.”

I just smiled.

Then Clay took the floor. “I plan to do better with my studies. Not just academics, but letting Dad help me more with football fundamentals. I want to be able to execute difficult offensive schemes in high school. I need to be sharper. And I don’t plan to be so stubborn.”

Next my mom spoke up. “I’m going to balance my time better between work and my family. This last project just took a little bit more of my time than I wanted it to, and I will see to it that that doesn’t happen again. Honey?” my mom said, signaling Dad that it was his turn.

“Next year professionally, God willing, I want to win the title that my team came up a game short of winning this year. And Mom and I will spend more time with our parents.”

“That’s right you should honor and treasure your elders,” one of my grandmas said, laughing.

“Okay, I’m next,” I said. “I just want to get along better with everyone. Last year there was so much drama. I just want to do better this year. I want to make my parents and God proud.”

All of a sudden my aunt had a strange look on her face. She grabbed her stomach. Uncle Mark asked her if she was okay.

“Okay, Chris . . . honey, just be calm,” Uncle Mark said nervously.

"I am, Mark. I felt a sharp pain, but let's just wait to see if I feel anything again before I call my doctor," Auntie Chris said. "I'm sure it's nothing."

My grandma said, "Chris, we've got so much baby birthin' experience in this room till you don't have to worry about nothin', honey."

Dad's mom said, "Child, you know that's the truth."

Mom, Dad, and Uncle Mark all started laughing.

We enjoyed the rest of our family time by playing board games and even performing an *American Idol*-like talent show. What a fun way to bring in the new year.



Even though I enjoyed my Christmas vacation, I was excited to start school again. My grades had improved since last semester, and I was ready to start this one on the right track. Riana, Imani, Layah, and I walked through the hall together. We couldn't wait till fourth period because we'd finally have a class together. Health. Everybody knew health was an easy class, so the teacher would probably allow us to chat, once we finished our work. We needed to catch up on our girl talk.

"See you later, girlfriends!" Imani said to us.

"Smooches!" Riana said back.

"Y'all better go on to class with all that!" Layah said sarcastically.

I just cracked up at my friends acting silly.

When we broke up and went our separate ways to class, I was startled by someone who said “Boo!” right behind me. It was Spence.

“Heeey!” I said, pleased to see him.

“Carmen Browne, what’s up?”

“I’m cool, Spence.”

Realizing class would be starting soon, we looked at our class schedules and started putting a little pep in our step. We had first and sixth period together and started walking to our first period math class.

“How was your holiday, Spence?”

“Not too good.”

“Why?”

“My dad came to visit. I live with my grandparents because my dad has had drug problems for a while. Now he says that he’s not on drugs anymore. He wants me to come live with him, because he says he’s gotten his life back together. That caused a lot of problems over the Christmas vacation. My grandparents are not sure if he’s telling the truth.”

“You might have to move away?” I asked, shocked.

Spence was the first boy who I thought was really cool.
And now he has to move?

“You can’t move away,” I said.

“But my grandparents might not have a choice. They said we have to wait until the end of the school year to see.”

“Do you believe that your dad’s okay now?”

“I’m not sure. My grandparents are all I’ve ever really known. Yeah, they’re older and stuff, but that’s okay. Grand-

dad does so much with me. Unfortunately, my dad's a stranger to me. I know that my grandparents are disappointed with their son. They said they didn't raise him to be like that."

I just sort of looked at Spence, not knowing what to say as we headed into math class. I felt really bad for him. It even made me think about my brother Clay and how he was adopted into our family. At my desk I prayed silently, *Lord, be with my friend. I hope his dad is really better. But since he wants to stay with his grandparents, would You make that happen? Maybe he could just visit his dad on the weekends or something. I know You can work it out. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

When class ended I tapped Spence's shoulder. "Spence, I hope everything works out. I'm praying for you."

He just smiled. I was so glad to learn to care about other people's problems.

The first day back to school was flying by so quickly. The teachers were merely going over the new curriculum. When it was lunchtime, I got to eat with my crew.

Imani said, "You guys know what health class is about, right?"

"Yeah, the permission slip that our parents signed said that we're talking about periods and stuff," I replied.

Riana said, "My brother told me that our teacher, Miss Wade, is mean. All that talking and stuff we thought we were going to be able to do? He told me that we could forget that."

As we put our trays up, gathered our stuff, and walked toward health class, the four of us were *not* excited. We didn't want a mean teacher, especially to talk to about our changing

bodies and other personal things. On top of Miss Wade being mean, there was another surprise awaiting us when we walked in her class. Our names were posted on the desks. Assigned seats! We weren't babies. In sixth grade, the teachers let us choose our own seats, as long as our conduct didn't get out of hand. Miss Wade lived up to her reputation.

"In this class you can't sit *just* anywhere," she said, ordering us around. "Find your name and have a seat. We have work to do."

"All you had to do was tell us," Layah said under her breath.

"Did someone say something smart?"

She had really good ears. She was not somebody to play with. I hoped these fifty minutes would go fast like the morning time.

"Did everyone get their permission slips signed?" She scanned the room as everyone nodded. "Okay, great. Pass them forward. There's a special textbook on your desk. Open it to page twenty-four. I'm going to go over a few key points about menstruation, and then I'll take questions. With everyone's participation, we can have a great learning experience."

I sighed. Imani was frowning. Riana and Layah looked bored like the rest of the girls in our class.

"Let me read the title . . . *Menstruation in Adolescent Girls*. Menstruation *usually* starts around the ages of twelve or thirteen, but it could start as early as age seven. Some girls might begin as late as age sixteen."

"I wish that was me," Layah blurted out.

Sixteen? Lord, that's when I'll start driving. My mind was racing a million miles an hour.

"Hold your comments until it's time," Miss Wade said.

Miss Wade said that the beginning of a girl's cycle is called the menarche. "Ladies, you might notice a wet and clear substance in your underwear up to six months before your cycle begins."

"I never heard that word 'menarche,'" some girl yelled.

"Okay, ladies, no more outbursts. I'll take comments and questions later. A menstrual period, cycle, or whichever term you choose, is a part of the female reproductive system. Every month the female body builds up a lining in the uterus. When the body determines that the lining is not needed, then it automatically sheds it. That shedding of blood is your period. Your period might come between every 22 to 35 days. When your cycle actually begins it may appear brown or red. This may vary from person to person. The first period is usually not a heavy one. It may be just a few drops of blood. So just because your period doesn't begin like your friend's, don't be alarmed. Everyone is different. Some of you girls might not have regular periods, especially in the beginning, and for some it may be there every month from the time that you start. Either way is normal. Everyone's body needs to take awhile to establish their regular menstrual cycle. And, girls, this is why you need to use a calendar to keep track of it. Some people refer to that process as *charting*."

She told us that menstruation might be accompanied by several symptoms. Cramps in the lower abdomen. Bloating in

the tummy. Tender breasts. Headaches. Being tired. Mood swings and food cravings.

“Now the floor is open for questions and comments, ladies.”

We sat there looking at each other.

“Ask me something, ladies . . . anything.”

Nobody wanted to ask questions. My mom had explained everything to me. But I figured I’d ask questions for a girl who might’ve been afraid to ask. So I slowly raised my hand. I glanced at my friends. I’m sure they were wondering what I would say.

“Yes, Miss Browne, your question.”

“Miss Wade, what did you say again about shedding a lining?”

“I’m glad that you want me to clarify that. During a menstrual cycle your body rids itself or sheds a lining in the uterus that is not needed. It’s a very natural occurrence.”

Another girl asked, “Am I going to have a period the rest of my life?”

“No, a woman’s cycle usually ends between the ages of forty-five to fifty-five. Again, that varies from woman to woman.”

“How long does a period last?” Imani asked.

“Generally between 3 to 7 days.”

“Okay, I have a comment,” Layah said raising her hand.

“Go ahead.”

“Girls don’t have to stop playing sports. We can even swim while we’re on our periods,” Layah said confidently.

Miss Wade said, “That’s exactly right, Layah. You can do everything normally. You just need to make sure that you have a sanitary pad that is comfortable for you. You can find them at any grocery or drug store. If you happen to be near a public bathroom, most of them have machines that dispense individual pads. I brought a few samples for you all to see.”

Everyone turned toward the table beside Miss Wade’s desk. It was hard to imagine actually wearing a pad.

“What can I do to help my cramps?” a classmate asked.

“A number of things. You can exercise. Avoid extremely cold foods like ice cream. Salt and caffeine aren’t good either. Hot tea works for some people. There’s over-the-counter pain medication as well. Sometimes just lying down can help. If you have any more questions, I’m sure your parents or guardians would be interested in you talking with them about this.”

With that comment, Miss Wade brought the question-and-answer session to a close. We were done for the day. The class actually turned out to be a very interesting one. Everyone became more comfortable the more we talked. Miss Wade wasn’t so bad after all.



Two weeks later, my girls and I went to Imani’s house for a sleepover. My mom hung around and talked to Imani’s mom for a while. Riana’s mom did too. Those three ladies had their own little party. Riana and I were happy when our

moms left so the *real* party could begin. I said good-bye to my mom with a big hug and a kiss.

Imani's mom ordered pepperoni pizza, sausage pizza, buffalo wings, and nachos. We were ready to feast and watch a good movie.

Imani flipped the channel to a movie that I knew I wasn't supposed to be watching, but I felt weird and didn't want to say anything at first. I didn't want to seem like the "little baby" and ask Imani to turn. I just sat there squirming, listening to bad language. Finally, I spoke up.

"Imani, can you change the channel? I can't watch stuff like this."

"Yeah, right, *baby*. You're not at home. That's the *purpose* of a sleepover. Here you can do things that you can't do at home."

"Ummm. I don't agree with that, girl. We've been there and done that, before Riana and Carmen and I even knew you, and it got us in a whole lot of trouble," Layah said defiantly.

"Yeah, Imani, turn. We shouldn't be watching it," Riana chimed in.

"Uh, then y'all shoulda stayed at home. Over here we watch what I want to see," Imani said, looking at me eye-to-eye. "It's my house."

I got up.

"Where are you going?" Imani demanded to know from me.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to tell your mom what you're

doing. I'm going to call my mom and ask her to come and get me. You can get in trouble by yourself."

Layah and Riana got up and followed me.

"Now, all y'all want to leave like that? Fine then."

Before we could leave the room, Imani stood in front of me. "Okay, okay, okay. It's just that we don't have to always look at baby stuff. I didn't mean to make anybody uncomfortable."

The four of us did a group hug.

I was proud of myself. In health class I spoke up for any girls who may have been afraid to ask questions, and at Imani's sleepover, I took a stand because it was wrong to watch inappropriate movies. It's good to stand up for what's right. That's what *I believe*.