



THE PUBLIC EYE

# *Prologue*

After their annual New Year's party, the girls were optimistic about the year ahead. All of their families were in a good place. Even the Maldonados, who had dealt with some serious issues last semester, were doing much better.

Marisa's brother, Romero, had gotten into some trouble, and their father's sudden outburst during Romero's court appearance had left him incarcerated and facing deportation. If it hadn't been for Shane's father putting his neck on the

line, their story would have ended much differently.

Brian Foster had been the driving force behind Mr. Maldonado's release. He had asked for some favors, and now it was Mr. Foster's turn to make good on the promises he had made to some of Port City's most influential people.

And then there was Brandi's father, who had just gotten out of rehab. The Haywoods were all experiencing some difficulties adjusting to his return, but for the most part, they were just happy he was back home and in a good frame of mind.

"I am *not* ready to go back to school," Shane had declared, lying across the bed and dreading the conclusion of Christmas break.

"Me neither. It's too cold outside, and I just want to stay in bed. Christmas break should be as long as summer break. Wouldn't that be nice?" Marisa responded.

“If it wasn’t for basketball season, I would just homeschool this semester,” Brandi said, laughing.

“Yeah right, we are too fly to be locked up in the house all day,” Shane told them. “I wonder what time Ryan’s picking me up. I need to text him.”

“Dude, how many boyfriends are you gonna have this year?” Brandi asked Shane as they waited for Ryan Petry to pick her up for their date.

“I don’t have a boyfriend. Ryan is just a friend who asked me out on a date.”

“Um-hm, tell me anything. He is kind of cute, though, in a hot-bookworm kind of way. Ashton is going to be so upset,” Brandi chuckled. “Just don’t go anyplace where he may see you.”

“I am not running from Ashton either. He is just my friend.”

“No ... I’m your friend. Marisa’s your friend.”

“Amen to that!” Marisa hollered from

the bathroom, where she was flat ironing her hair.

“Ryan and Ashton drool when you’re anywhere near them. What friends do that?” Brandi asked.

“This is a new year and a new me. I’m just trying to be more open to what’s out there. You know I don’t really date,” Shane told them.

“Oh, so we are on New Year’s resolutions now?” Brandi asked.

“I’m down,” Marisa hollered from the bathroom. “Gimme a sec.” Marisa finished her hair and joined her friends in Shane’s bedroom.

“I already know what I have to do this year,” Brandi told them. “I have to decide where this thing with Bryce is going. I was so sure before, but now ... I-D-K.”

“Yeah, I’m with you, B. Pump your brakes with that one. The thing is, my girl Brandi Haywood can stand on her own