



TRAUMATIZED

Prologue

*O*n the first day of school, Shane, Brandi, and Marisa stood looking at Port City High School as if they were seeing it for the first time. It seemed a lifetime ago that they had arrived at PCH. Now, after all they had been through, they were still together.

“Our last first day of school at PCH,” Brandi said excitedly.

“How can you be so happy about it?” Marisa asked. “We have had some good times here, and now it will be over in less than a year.”

“Well, at least we have college. One

year at Port City College, and then we can go our separate ways,” Shane said, taking a deep breath. “Right?”

“Yeah,” Brandi and Marisa agreed with their best friend.

They had all wanted to go away to college, but they couldn’t decide which university would meet all of their individual needs. They decided to stay in Port City for one more year and take their basic college courses together. One thing about Port City College that people from the area loved was the ability to transfer credits to larger universities. Knowing that, the decision to navigate through the first year of college together, instead of separately, had been a no-brainer.

“Look, we are on the last leg of the homestretch, and I’m ready to experience it all,” Brandi told them. “And as head cheerleader this year—”

“I’m so sick of that phrase!” Shane fussed, turning to Brandi. “How many

times have we heard that this summer? As head cheerleader this year,” she said, mocking Brandi.

“Hey, I don’t say it that much,” Brandi protested.

“Well, as feature twirler this year ...” Marisa said, laughing, mocking her best friend.

“Can I quote you on that, said the editor in chief of the *PCH Gazette*,” Shane said, holding a pen to Marisa’s mouth as though it were a microphone.

“Okay, okay ... I’ll stop saying it,” Brandi groaned, rolling her eyes. “But ain’t life grand? I love being a senior. We are gonna rule the school.”

“Spoken like a true head cheerleader. Let’s go before Brandi can’t get that big ole head through the door.”

“Shane! You know it’s not like that. Seriously, who would have thought I would be head cheerleader? It usually goes to doctors’ daughters or pastors’ daughters,

not, you know, girls from families with ‘issues,’” she whispered, making quotation marks with her fingers.

“Shane’s just kidding with you, B. You know we are happy for you. Nobody deserves the position more than you.”

“Thanks, Mari.”

“Yeah, yeah, what she said,” Shane said playfully.

“Love you too, Shane. Now, let’s go get our senior year underway.”

They walked into Port City High School, and the first thing they saw was a huge wall display celebrating the new senior class’s graduating year. Upon closer inspection, they saw a collage of pictures taken of their class every year since ninth grade.

Many seniors had congregated around the display, reminiscing about the previous school years. Some had tears in their eyes as they remembered all the great times