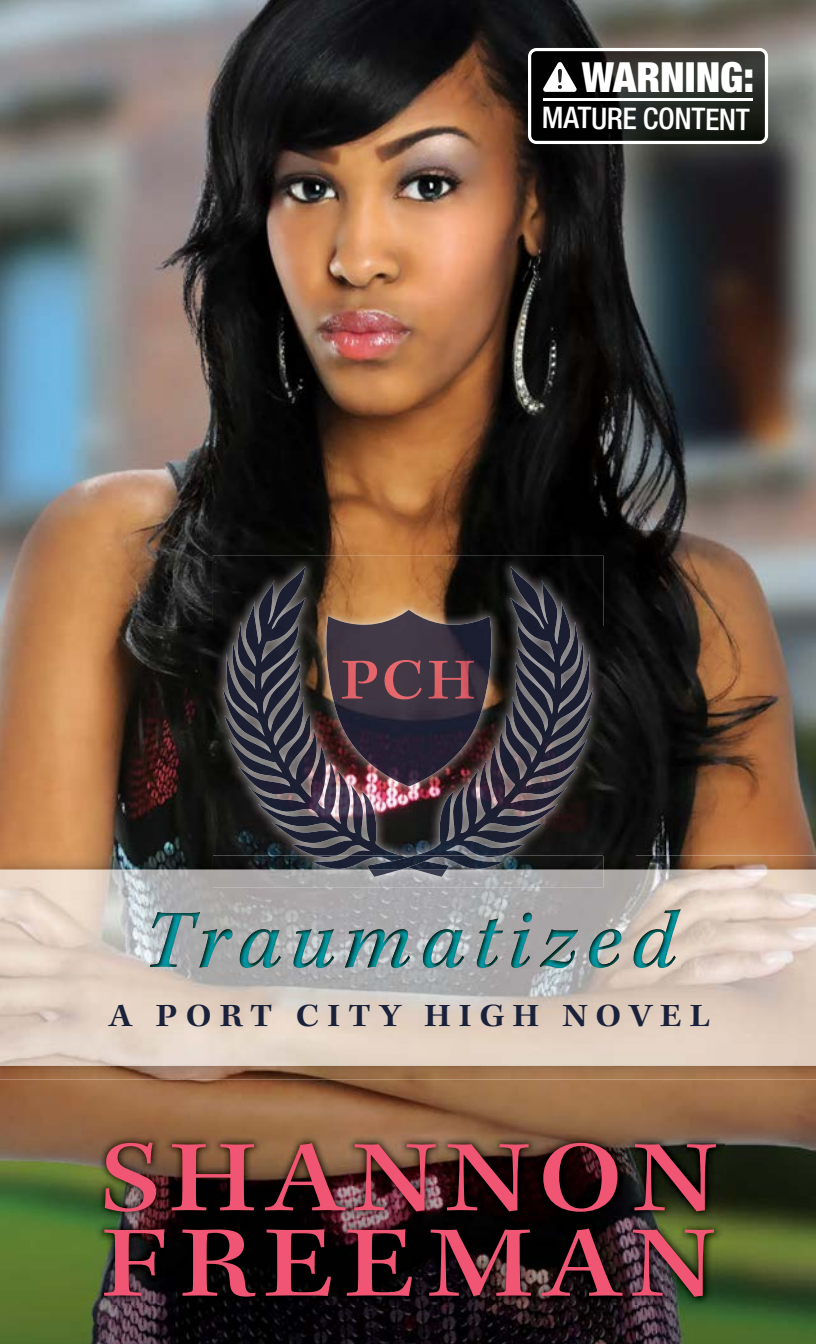


Traumatized

A PORT CITY HIGH NOVEL

SHANNON FREEMAN

TRAUMATIZED

Prologue

On 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 isn'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

they had at PCH, but others took time to laugh at their younger selves.

There was such a mad crush that Shane, Marisa, and Brandi had to wait for the group to clear out a bit.

"Oh no, look at my hair on that homecoming picture. Those bangs are awful," one girl said, laughing.

"I'm not much better. Look at my pants. I used to love those," her friend responded, laughing too.

"Good times," they agreed and headed to the auditorium. The seniors were scheduled to meet with the principal and their counselors.

Brandi and Marisa made their way through the crowd of seniors to see if their pictures had made it onto the wall. To their surprise, they were everywhere. "Look at how many pics we have on here. Somebody loves us. Shane, you have *got* to see these."

"I already did," Shane bragged, blowing air on her nails and shining them on her shirt.

"Wait a minute. You did this?" Marisa asked, confused. "When? We were together all summer."

"I have my ways," Shane told them. "I made this for our ten year class reunion. After this year is over, I'll make a separate board showing us all as seniors. Mrs. Monroe is going to have them all laminated for us. It will be awesome."

"No, it *is* awesome," Brandi corrected her. "I can't believe you did all of this, Shane."

When they arrived in the auditorium, there were several kiosks strategically placed on the stage, and lines of students had formed on the stairs leading up to it. This was the first year they were able to print their schedules, obtain information about their credits, and get recommendations on which college scholarships might be

right for them based on their records. This was a much different registration than they were used to in the past. These were young adults taking care of their business. The girls fell into line with the rest of the seniors, eagerly waiting to see what their paperwork would reveal about their all-too-near futures.

As they looked around, they remembered back when they were freshmen. This same group of students had to be quieted numerous times when receiving their homeroom assignments back then. Now they moved like a well-oiled machine. What a difference three years made.

CHAPTER 1

Old School Rivalry

The football team gathered around and listened as Coach Davis lectured them on acceptable behavior during the week leading up to the big game with their all-time rivals, Riverdale High School.

Riverdale was founded right after integration in Port City during the civil rights movement. The white families who had been rich enough to leave, moved to the suburbs around Port City. Riverdale

was one of the most attractive suburbs for former Port City residents. Since integration, the two towns had been competitors, and a natural rivalry formed between the two high schools.

Nobody knows exactly how or when "pranking" was added to the roster, but it became a thing when the two teams played against each other. Sometimes the pranks went according to plan, but there were those years where they went wrong.

On occasion, parents were called to the jail to pick their children up for trespassing or vandalism. Most parents didn't mind. Many of them had pranked Riverdale when they were in school too. Parents were more often upset by the failed prank than the fifty-dollar fines that accompanied the transgressions.

"Once upon a time, I sat in your seats as my coach lectured me on sportsmanship and taking the high road, but I didn't listen." Coach Davis told his story at the

beginning of each football season. It was legendary in Port City—not many pranks had gone as badly as his. He wanted his team to stay clean.

During his senior year, Coach Davis was supposed to sign with a D1 university, but when a prank on Riverdale High went wrong, he landed in jail instead. It was big news for Port City, and it attracted the attention of the coaches on his future college campus. He lost his scholarship before he could put a toe on the field. He had to opt for a junior college instead, where he was injured during his sophomore year.

Matthew Kincade was the quarterback and captain of the PCH football team this year. He was at the center of the debate over whether to obey Coach Davis's wishes, or whether the team should make their mark by pulling the craziest prank yet. Matthew wanted the team to stay out of any controversy. He wanted the team

to uphold Coach Davis's wishes so they could win state. Matthew looked at Coach Davis as a father. Many members of the football team did. The star quarterback tried to convince the team to listen to Coach. They could potentially win state this year, and that was more important than any silly prank.

"Coach thinks it's a bad idea. We need to listen to him if we want to make it to state," Matthew said to Jaylon Swanson, the running back for PCH.

Jaylon immediately became frustrated with the thought of doing away with pranking. "Man, stop talking about state. What's state got to do with those Riverdale punks? This game doesn't even count for state."

One of the other players jumped in between them as Jaylon stood up to get in Matthew's face. Jaylon had a hot head and became agitated quickly.

"J, just hear me out," Matthew yelled over the other players, who fed on aggression like a snack.

"You better talk fast," Jaylon said, trying to calm himself down.

"This is the way I see it," Matthew said, speaking to them as a group. "If we can come together on something positive, Coach will be proud of us. If we get busted because of a prank, we'll be in the doghouse. Let's not blow it over a stupid tradition."

"But it's a right of passage in Port City," Jaylon argued. "I took all of the hazing handed down by the seniors on my way into high school. Coach asked us not to go there this year, and we didn't. But no pranks on Riverdale? Come on."

"Just trust me, J. Me and you, we gonna take this team all the way to Austin. I'm telling you."

Jaylon reluctantly gave in, but not

without a disclaimer. "Just know if Riverdale strikes first, we striking back," he warned, with his friends nodding in agreement.

Brandi, Shane, and Marisa arrived at school on Wednesday, and the atmosphere was odd. When they pulled into the students' parking lot, they noticed a group of kids huddled around the flagpole in the center of the lot.

"What's all the fuss about?" Shane asked, quickly getting her camera out of her bag.

They hurried out of the car and over to the group of congregating seniors. "What's going on?" Brandi asked one of the freshman cheerleaders on the JV squad.

She pointed up. As if it had been synchronized, Brandi, Shane, and Marisa followed the flagpole with their eyes until they were looking at the school's mascot, a wildcat, hanging upside down by its four

legs. Of course it was a stuffed wildcat and not a live animal, but still …

Marisa gasped. "How could they?"

As Shane snapped pictures, she was interrupted by the sound of Jaylon Swanson's car pulling up. His tires squealed against the pavement. He could be heard before he could be seen. "I knew it! It is *so* on now! This isn't right."

The crowd watched as Matthew Kincade walked over to him. "We still don't have to stoop, man. Just think about it."

"You think about it. We owe our fans more than this. PCH has never gone out like this, and we're not about to now."

Friender was swamped with threats to the Riverdale Rebels. The Internet battle was heating up. That Thursday morning in Riverdale, people woke up to find the mile markers had been spray-painted. Everywhere it read Riverdale, the word "six" was close behind. Everywhere the mile markers said Port City, it read, "goes hard."

The city officials were livid. They were at PCH, questioning everyone. Nobody would admit to any involvement. The night of the game, police officers from Riverdale stormed into the PCH locker room, demanding members of the team be turned over. They showed pictures taken from video footage of three teenage boys who had vandalized public property: Jaylon Swanson, Mario Ruben, and Tyson Johnson.

"Oh no you don't," Coach said, stepping in between his team and the officers. "You aren't taking them anywhere."

"This warrant says we are."

"I know what you're trying to do, sir. I know what you are trying to do!" Coach Davis yelled.

"Sir, if you don't lower your voice, I'll take you to jail with your boys."

Everything in Coach Davis seemed to clench up. "Coach, don't," he heard Jaylon say. "We'll go with him. Tell my mom for

me, please. You know people known to get lost in Riverdale."

"You don't have to worry about that," Coach assured him, looking at the officer. "You all just be quiet. Don't talk until your parents get there."



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Drama is always just a day away ...

A hurricane is heading for the Texas Gulf Coast. Brandi's parents make an early call: evacuate now. But Marisa's father decides to leave at the last minute. The Maldonados pay the price with crazy traffic and long gasoline lines. Shane's family decides to ride out the storm in Port City's biggest hotel. Will they live to regret it?

⚠ WARNING:
MATURE CONTENT

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