



Taken

A PORT CITY HIGH NOVEL

SHANNON
FREEMAN



TAKEN

Prologue

*L*ife was just getting back to normal for Brandi, Shane, and Marisa. The long Christmas break was over, and memories were all that remained. What a crazy time! Shane kicked her drug habit again, and Brandi and Marisa mended their friendship that was almost torn apart by Brandi's first love, Matthew.

Before the break, their first semester of high school had not been what they had imagined. Today, as they loaded up in Shane's mom's Tahoe, they were just thankful that they were all still friends.

“Ouch!” Shane said as Brandi jumped into the car. “You looking all Christmas-present cute today,” she said, laughing.

“Stop clowning. You know I bought this jacket when we went shopping. At least during the winter, our coats and scarves can add a little swag to these boring uniforms.”

“I hate uniforms, especially when it’s cold. I can’t even wear my Uggs. They trippin’,” Shane replied.

“Um, ladies, stop complaining. It’s your first day back at school. You both should be thankful that we are all sitting here. This wasn’t an easy winter break for any of us,” Mrs. Foster said as she pulled up in front of Marisa’s house. Mrs. Foster had suffered as much as any of them. Shane’s little drug experiment and her older sister’s pregnancy announcement had been a bit much for the Fosters.

“You’re right, Mom,” Shane replied.

“Did I hear you correctly, Shane? Did you say I was right?”

“There’s a first time for everything, Mrs. Foster,” Brandi teased.

“Shush,” Shane said, reaching over and slugging her in the arm.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Marisa said as she got into the truck. “Y’all too cool for school. Hey, Mrs. Foster! Thanks for picking me up.”

“Did you just get that? It’s adorable,” Shane said, admiring Marisa’s powder blue jacket.

“Mama gave it to me last night. It was love at first sight. Hey, I’m a poet!”

“You’re also a geek, but we love you anyway.” Brandi laughed as she gave Shane a high five.

“Don’t be j,” Marisa said as she laughed along with her friends. “Jealousy doesn’t become you.”

Mrs. Foster pulled up in front of Port City High. “Well, ladies, enjoy yourselves today. Remember, high school is the best time of your life.”

“Mom, you have to stop saying that. Surely life will get better than this,” Shane said dryly. It was hard for her to believe that these were her best days. She had so much more planned for herself.

“Just keep saying good morning, Shane. Just keep saying good morning.”

“Bye, Mom,” Shane said, rolling her eyes. It was probably the thousandth time that she had heard that phrase. A quick exit was necessary when Mrs. Foster started dropping nuggets of wisdom on them.

The girls jumped out of the truck and were greeted by cold winter air that contrasted sharply with the warmth from the heater.

As they walked into the school, they were ushered into the auditorium for a welcome-back program.



CHAPTER 1

Marisa

Crowded hallways, clanging lockers, and students running in all directions, it was the background music of high school. Marisa soaked it all in as she hurried from class to class. She settled into her science class, and her teacher began to address the requirements for this half of the school year. Marisa's mind wandered off to the first semester. She thought about Brandi's middle school boyfriend, Matthew Kincaid. She and Brandi had almost ruined their friendship over him. The ironic part was that after all the dust

had settled, Brandi had given her approval for Marisa and Matthew to date, but he had already moved on to some other girl.

Marisa was a bit relieved. When she fell in love, she wanted it to be with someone whom her friends could be comfortable around. A relationship with Matthew would have been anything but comfortable.

She thought back to how it started, so simple, so innocent. They were just two friends who were thrust into six of their seven classes together. It's no wonder they were feeling closer than normal, especially with his parents looming divorce and her beef with her arch nemesis, Ashley. As she looked around the room, she noticed that Matthew wasn't there. He hadn't been in any of her classes so far; however, she had seen him in the hall that morning. *He must have gone home sick*, she thought.

Marisa's last class was Theatre Arts. She learned that the school play was in April, and tryouts were in two weeks. She

had been in drama in middle school and had always excelled. But now she was in the big pond. She had never had small parts before. She wondered which play it would be. No matter what, she was going to work hard. She was determined to have the part she wanted memorized in time for tryouts.

When drama class was over, she looked for Shane in the crowded hallway. Since school was letting out it was nearly impossible to find anyone. Second semester was always so different. There was no more twirling practice to run to. She was a regular girl now, not one who would be on the field Friday night in front of the hundreds of football fans.

This play was just what she needed. It would take the place of twirling. Her mama always told her, "*Mi hija*, an idle mind is the devil's playground." It was one of the reasons she stayed as busy as possible: school work, extracurricular activities. Plus

she still found time to study the modeling world. Marisa had exotic beauty that came from her Hispanic background, and she was getting taller every day. People always told her that she would be a great model. She wanted to prove them right.

Just as she was being pushed through the hallway by the natural flow of students attempting to make a quick exit from school, she ran into Matthew and a cute little freshman that she had seen around school. *Not another one*, she thought.

“Hey, Matt,” Marisa said nervously. She was uncomfortable, but for some strange reason, she felt nothing for this guy that she was willing to risk her friendship with Brandi over only a month before.

“Hey, Mari! How was your first day back?”

“It was straight. I thought that you went home today. I didn’t see you in any of our classes.”

“Oh yeah ... the counselor called me

out of homeroom and gave me a new schedule. I don't have any of the same classes anymore," he said while trying to avoid eye contact.

"Oh, that's strange," she said, noticing how uncomfortable he was. The girl on Matt's arm cleared her throat and gave him a nudge, breaking up their conversation.

"Oh, my bad," Matthew said. "This is Lauren."

"Nice to meet you," Lauren said as she looked Marisa up and down, slowly sizing up her former competition.

Marisa felt sideswiped. Did this girl know about her and Matt? Surely he hadn't confided in her. "Nice to meet you too," Marisa said, looking her directly in the eyes, letting her know that she didn't shake her.

Matthew could obviously feel the tension and decided it was time to make a quick exit. "All right, stay up, Mari. We have to get going."