



*Juicy Central*

*Mapnyke*

*Sassy, bold, flirtatious, lonely*

# The Fake Date

*Ayshia Monroe*

Prom? Whatchu sayin', Tia? You sayin' we all gotta show up at prom, Tee-YUH?"

Marnyke Cooper deliberately mispronounced the name of the South Central High School yearbook manager, Tia Ramirez. She knew Tia hated when Marnyke did that, which was exactly why Marnyke did it. Tia had been off Marnyke's top-ten classmates list since a few months before when she'd tried to break up Marnyke and Marnyke's boyfriend, the senior basketball star Darnell Watson.

Half the time, Marnyke forgave Tia. The other half of the time, she didn't.

Right now, she didn't.

"That's exactly what I'm saying, MARNEEK," Tia replied.

Marnyke rolled her well-made-up eyes at Tia's weak comeback. "Then you be trippin', Tee-YUH. Everybody knows prom be wack!"

It was late May, and one of the last yearbook club meetings of the school year. Marnyke wasn't a member of yearbook club—everybody called it YC—by choice. She'd been ordered there as punishment by Mr. Crandall, the mean guidance counselor. He said she'd cut too many classes and skipped too many days.

Most YC meetings, Marnyke tried to be the last one in Ms. Okoro's classroom. Today, though, she'd been the second to show. Tia was already there, of course. She was a go-getter to the max, which

made her extremely annoying. Right away, Tia had tried to get Marnyke excited about the junior-senior prom that was coming up on Saturday night.

“Prom doesn’t have to be—how did you put it, Marnyke? Oh yes. ‘Wack,’ ” Tia responded. She still had a little bit of an accent from her native Mexico. A little taller than Marnyke, with thick dark hair and round glasses, Tia wore the kind of pantsuit that a girl might wear to a job interview. “Prom can actually be fun. Especially if everyone shows up and helps.”

Marnyke shook her head disdainfully. “Maybe where you from, *chica*, prom be cool. But lemme break it down for you. Here it be in the lame cafeteria with el-lame-o decorations. That make it wack!”

More kids had filed into Ms. O’s room for the YC meeting, and they all laughed.

There was Marnyke's bestie, jockish Kiki Butler, who wore her usual basketball kicks, battered jeans, and a T-shirt. There was Kiki's twin sister, Sherise, who was prettier than Kiki but who dressed like a goody-two-shoes white girl. Sherise sat with her boyfriend, handsome Carlos Howard. Like Darnell, Carlos had a gang background but was now out of the life. Just coming into the room was curvy Nishell Saunders in a brown dress and sandals. She was the main yearbook photographer, and, as usual, she had her camera around her neck. Right behind Nishell was class clown Jackson Beauford, and his newcomer friend, Lattrell Chance.

Darnell was missing this meeting. He'd been excused to take his mom to the doctor.

"That's fine," Marnyke thought. "Ain't nothing important gonna happen."

Ms. Okoro, the yearbook advisor and English teacher who everyone called Ms. O, stepped into the fray.

“Marnyke? Tia?” she cautioned in her soft Nigerian accent. “How do you kids say it? Take a cool pill and sit down.”

“You mean ‘chill pill,’ Ms. O!” Jackson shouted.

Ms. O smiled. “Yes. Chill pill. I’m sorry. I still don’t have all the American slang. Anyway, don’t forget the good work we did this year.”

The club had done some good things, for sure. The yearbook had been nominated for a big prize until Mr. Crandall had banned it after a hacked and Photo-shopped picture of his bare behind had been inserted as the centerfold.

“It’s just that Tia think she better than everyone,” Marnyke mused as she took a seat in the second row. “Well, she ain’t better ’n me at gettin’ a man!”

When it came to guys, Marnyke had Tia dusted. She figured that was why Tia, who was on prom committee, wanted her so badly. If Marnyke said that prom was cool, a whole lot of people would suddenly want to attend.

Marnyke was a boy magnet. Petite, with long legs and serious twins, she was the flyest girl at South Central High School. Her waist was tiny, her hair lustrous, and her eyes changed color depending on her mood. She was also a genius at hair, makeup, and dressing on a budget. Today, for example, she wore a gray sleeveless shift dress with strappy sandals that showed off her toned calves. She'd found the dress for ten bucks at a used clothing shop in the Korean section of town.

For Marnyke, thrift shops were a must. She shared a one-bedroom apartment with her big sister, Akira. Their dad

was long gone, and their mother was in prison on drug charges. Akira did okay, waitressing at a fancy downtown joint called Citron. But before her sister had found that job, they'd been regulars at the food bank.

Tia turned around to face the other kids. "Look, I know a lot of you think prom is stupid."

"Not stupid, Tia. Didn't you hear Marnyke? Prom be wack!" Jackson shouted.

"Wack," Tia corrected herself. "I know we can't afford a hotel. I know we can't afford a band. I know the decorations are homemade. But what about school spirit, you guys? Yearbook club has to be a leader. Right, Sherise?"

All eyes swung to Sherise Butler, the official yearbook president who'd been happy to let Tia do most of the work. Barely five feet tall, Sherise had



shoulder-length dark hair, caramel-colored skin, and a very cute nose.

*But she dress like a prissy white girl. Look at her, in them silk pants and frilly top. Little Miz Better Homes and Gardens!*

Sherise seemed torn. “Well—”

“I got me an idea!” Jackson interrupted. “Let’s do prom at the No-Tell Motel on Randolph Street. We can rent the whole place by the hour!”

The kids laughed. Even Ms. O cracked a smile. Just then, the classroom door opened. Marnyke expected to see mean Mr. Crandall storming in to yell at them. He hated when kids had fun, and he hated yearbook club.

Of course, that fake picture of his butt hadn’t help.

It wasn’t Crandall, though. Instead, their surprise visitor was a rangy African

American man in his fifties. He wore rumpled black pants, a shirt, and a tie.

Marnyke didn't recognize him. But Sherise apparently did.

"Big Boss!" Sherise jumped up, rushing to the door. "Everyone, this is 'Big Boss' Dawkins. His print shop did our yearbook. An' it wasn't his fault it got hacked, neither."

Marnyke had never met Big Boss, but like everyone in the city, she knew of him. He'd gone to South Central High School many years ago, and then played Major League Baseball. He'd even pitched for the Dodgers. After he retired, he came back to the hood to open his print shop. It was his shop that had printed the yearbook with the hacked picture of Mr. Crandall's naked rear end.

"Hey, Sherise," Big Boss said. "Sorry to walk in like this, Ms. Okoro."