



**Juicy Central**

*Mapnyke*

Sassy, bold, flirtatious, lonely

# Keepin' Her Man

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[ chapter ]

**1**

Marnyke and Kiki sat at their usual table. It was study hall, their last class of the day. Kiki was trying to finish her math homework before it was time for yearbook club. Marnyke, of course, was not studying.

“What you doin’ tonight, Kiki? Homework, right?” Marnyke asked.

Kiki smiled. “Yeah, probably,” she admitted. “After YC, that is. You’re going, right?”

“To yearbook club? Not tonight,” Marnyke said. “I’ve gotta get ready. Goin’ over to Darnell’s place later.”

Kiki shook her head.

“His mom’s gonna be gone, Kiki.”

Kiki set her pencil down. “Oh, yeah?” she asked.

Marnyke nodded. “Uh-huh,” she said, flipping her pencil back and forth nervously. “I’m startin’ to think, you know, that it’s time.”

“Do you trust him?” Kiki asked. “You haven’t been together long.”

Marnyke smiled. “Long enough, I think. I think it’s just the way of things, Kiki. I gotta do it. I’ll lose him if I don’t.”

“What do you mean?” Kiki asked.

“I mean, I think that’s why he’s been so distant lately,” Marnyke replied.

The last bell rang before Kiki could respond. Marnyke grabbed her purse and stood up carefully. “Damn,” she groaned.

“What?” Kiki asked with concern.

“Oh, these shoes. It’s my first time wearing ’em for a whole day.”

“That’s what you get,” Kiki said. “Look at those things! How can you even walk?”

Marnyke put her hand on Kiki’s shoulder. “We can’t all look cute in sneakers,” she said. “Some of us have to try a little harder than others.”

“Well, I can’t be your crutch. *I’m* going to YC, remember?” Kiki said.

“I know, I know. I don’t like to be seen with you in the halls anyway,” Marnyke joked. “Go on. I’ll holler at ya later.”

“Later,” Kiki said with a smile. Then she hustled out of the classroom and down the hall.

Marnyke, on the other hand, took small, calculated steps. The problem was the right shoe. It had started hurting second period. The whole back of Marnyke’s right heel was rubbed raw.

But this wasn’t her first time in tough heels. She knew how to pull it off, even if they were killing her. She’d walked

twenty city blocks in shoes worse than these before. The key was to walk slowly and take small steps. Swing your hips. That way no one notices the limp, they just see how good you look.

The shoes looked amazing. They were shiny, strappy, and cherry red, with a three-inch heel. The straps went up high on the ankle and looked great with skinny jeans. Marnyke got them at the discount store on Seventh Street. It was her favorite shop. The buyer there knew what she was doing, and the prices were solid.

Marnyke loved their stuff too, because she'd never seen anyone at school wearing the same things. And that's how Marnyke liked it. Style mattered, and Marnyke definitely had style. So did her red, strappy shoes.

She just had to break 'em in. She grabbed her huge sunglasses out of her

bag and put them on. You never knew who was watching. She threw her notebook and pencil into her locker and grabbed her jacket. She was out of there for the day.

Marnyke felt a little bad about ditching YC today. It was almost the only thing about school she liked. Everyone would wonder why she wasn't there. She didn't care. She tossed her jacket over her shoulder and moved with the crowd of students toward the exit.

There was a bus that went from the school to her neighborhood, but Marnyke liked the subway better. She walked slowly to the subway entrance. Then she leaned on the handrail a little as she went down the steps.

Once underground, she felt relieved. She could give her feet a little rest when she got on the train! Her train arrived and slowed to a stop. She spied a seat

and moved toward it quickly. No way was she going to stand.

The steady sway of the subway always relaxed her. It felt good to be moving away from that stupid school. Plus, someone left a fashion magazine on the seat next to her. It was a good one too, about an inch thick. Marnyke grabbed it and stuck it in her bag. She wanted to look through it right then. But she worried that whoever forgot it might want it back. So she kept it hidden in her bag.

The train approached her stop. It was downtown. Marnyke stood up and walked toward the doors. This was her favorite part of every school day. She loved walking home through downtown. She usually got there around 4:00, right when the suits started pouring out of their offices. True, the suits were all on their way home to some better

hood or suburb. But that didn't matter to Marnyke. What mattered was turning heads.

Maybe it was her hair, in its perfectly round and bouncy Afro. Maybe it was her mile-long legs. Whatever it was, men and women alike seemed to look at her a moment longer than they should. She just had that way about her. She loved the attention too. It was the best part of her day.

But, as always, the magic ended around Twenty-third Street. That's where downtown ended and midtown began. Midtown was the industrial area of the city. At this time of day, the shops, restaurants, and offices were still open. But not for long. Midtown became a ghost town after 7:00.

Midtown was full of huge high-rise complexes with inexpensive apartments. Marnyke lived in one of them.



Her building was nothing special. But it was a lot better than the dive Marnyke used to live in. That was when she lived with her mom before things got really out of control.

Marnyke lived with her older sister Akira now. The building was kind of old and a little smelly. But their actual apartment was nice. Akira worked hard and did the best she could with their space. When they moved in, she and Marnyke scrubbed the whole thing, top to bottom. It was clean and all theirs. It was the first place they had ever had, just the two of them.

Marnyke took the rickety elevator to their apartment on the twenty-first floor. She hoped Akira would be home, but didn't expect her to be. Akira worked at two restaurants downtown. She worked every night at one joint or the other. "The best money is at dinner," Akira

would say. “Dinner is more expensive, so the tips are better.”

Marnyke unlocked the door and turned on the lights. Of course, Akira was not there. Marnyke dropped her bag and jacket on the couch and glanced at the coffee table. A letter from the school was there, propped up against a candle.

Marnyke knew her sister had put it there. The letter was unopened, and it was from the guidance office. “That can’t be anything good,” she thought. She grabbed the letter, walked into her bedroom, and tossed it on her bed. Then she took off her dress and tossed it on the bed too. She walked to the bathroom and started the bathtub.

Don’t cost a thing to take a bath. That’s what her mom used to always say anyway. Her mom always took a bath before a big date. She had a lot of big dates, Marnyke supposed. To the best of