



Juicy Central

Mapnyke

Sassy, bold, flirtatious, lonely

Keepin' Her Man

Shay Jackson

[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



Juicy Central

Kiki
Level-headed, trustworthy, sporty, shy

Bein' Good

Jada Jones

[chapter]

1

Kiki sat in Mr. Crandall's office. "Miss Shemeka Butler. Will you please look up and pay attention? I'm attempting to educate you."

Kiki sighed and moved her braids out of her face. Mr. Crandall was the worst. He was always telling students what to do.

"It's Kiki, Mr. Crandall," she whispered. Not like Mr. Crandall was listening. Not a lot of people did when Kiki talked.

"Miss Butler, do you know why you're here?"

"Cause you got nothing better to do?" she muttered.

Kiki covered her mouth. Did she just say that? It sounded like something her twin sister, Sherise, would say! Sherise was always talking back to teachers. Kiki was the good student. The quiet one. Usually, anyway.

Mr. Crandall's blue eyes glared at her over his glasses. "No, Miss Butler. You're a very intelligent girl. You should be able to understand I'm trying to help you."

Kiki frowned. That's exactly what he said when he forced her to join an after-school club. It was lucky that she really liked yearbook club.

"You need to attend class, Miss Butler. It is no excuse that you are doing well. Truancy is not tolerated at this school."

Kiki exclaimed, "I only missed a few days, Mr. Crandall! I was sick. I've already made up the homework."

Mr. Crandall rolled his eyes. Kiki could practically see his hair getting whiter.

Kiki couldn't believe it. Even when she told the truth Mr. Crandall didn't believe her. He never believed any of the kids.

"Then can you explain to me why you let Jackson Beauford copy your work again? Last time you got a warning. I told you if you were caught a second time there would be consequences."

Kiki sighed. It wasn't her fault Jackson sat behind her in study hall. Jackson was nice to her. He noticed her. Sort of.

There was only one other guy who'd ever smiled at Kiki like that, and she'd only seen him a couple of times on the basketball court.

It wasn't like she had a lot of options. Was it the worst thing in the world that Jackson looked over her shoulder sometimes?

"This just isn't the behavior I'm used to from a girl like you, Miss Butler. Until two months ago you were an exemplary

student. Then you let that boy copy your homework. Now you're skipping class. What's next?"

Kiki looked at her shoes. What was she supposed to say? That she got so sad sometimes she felt sick? That she really wanted a boyfriend, but didn't know how to get guys to like her?

"Letting boys copy your school work only leads to trouble, Miss Butler. You will not make friends that way. You may think he's cute now, but he'll leave you in the dirt once he gets what he wants."

Kiki couldn't believe it. Yeah, she thought Jackson was cute. Yeah, she wanted him to ask her out, but it wasn't like Kiki really wanted Jackson. She just wanted a guy to pay attention to her. Like every guy in the room paid attention to her sister whenever she showed up. Mr. Crandall had no clue what he was talking about.

“Miss Butler. You seem to be having problems because you don’t fit in. Look at your sister. She may not have the best academic record, but she is quite popular. She acts like a young lady should.”

Kiki’s mouth dropped open. Mr. Crandall was telling her to be more like her sister? Her sister, who didn’t like school and rarely studied? Her sister who was in here once a week?

“You might have more friends if you didn’t dress like a gangbanger and shoot baskets by yourself so often.”

Kiki looked down at her loose shirt and low-riding shorts. So what if she didn’t dress in pink like Sherise? So what if she would rather shoot hoops than discuss makeup and hairstyles? She didn’t make friends as easily as Sherise did, especially boyfriends.

“Your behavior in here is only the first example. A young lady like your sister

would have behaved more appropriately. Try acting more like her, Miss Butler. Then you might have more friends and a real boyfriend. Not one you bribe.”

Kiki felt she might cry. What if Mr. Crandall was right? Would Kiki really be more popular if she was more like her sister? Did she really bribe people to be her friends?

“Furthermore ...” Mr. Crandall kept talking.

Kiki stopped listening. Mr. Crandall didn’t know anything about her before. He didn’t know anything now. Besides, Sherise always came back crying from her talks with Mr. Crandall. He was always trying to make people change.

“... And I think you just need more structure. I’m going to assign you to tutor one of your science classmates.” Mr. Crandall looked through the papers on his desk.

“That’s so unfair! I already have enough homework, Mr. Crandall,” Kiki told him.

“Well obviously you have time to contemplate skipping school. So you’ll have enough time to tutor someone else. Be quiet now. I have to find that student I was looking for.”

Kiki fumed. Tutoring? On top of yearbook club? And all because she was sick! Mr. Crandall definitely had it out for her.

Kiki knew it was because Mr. Crandall and the science teacher, Mr. Colbe, were friends. Mr. Colbe was an awful teacher. Kids goofed off in his class. Kiki was the only one who was passing. Mr. Crandall was just protecting him.

“Ah ha! Here it is. Tia Ramirez. She’s new. Mexican or something. Do you know her?”

Kiki knew Tia. Tia was in yearbook club because she wanted to be. She was

also always nice to Kiki. Kiki didn't want to tutor anybody, though. How was she going to keep being the best student if she had to help someone else?

Kiki looked at the clock. Yearbook club started five minutes ago! She didn't want to be too late. It was the only hour of the day she could stand. Ms. Okoro, yearbook club adviser, said she had a special announcement. Mr. Crandall probably didn't even care that Kiki was late. He just kept talking and talking.

Kiki began tapping her toes. Then her fingers. Finally she just jumped into his speech.

"Mr. Crandall, I was supposed to be at YC ten minutes ago. Can I go?"

"YC? What's that? I don't keep up on all your slang terms."

"YC? Mr. Crandall, it's yearbook club. You assigned it to me, remember?" Mr. Crandall was so clueless.

“What? Well, I suppose you can go,” Mr. Crandall said. Kiki grabbed her bag.

“Remember, you have to meet with Tia at least twice a week. I don’t want to see you back here.”

“Bye, Mr. Crandall,” she said, walking out the door. She was glad to finally be out of there!

“Oh, and Kiki?” Mr. Crandall had stuck his head in the hallway. “Don’t forget to act more like a girl. You might just get what you want.”

Kiki blushed. She was so embarrassed. She jogged away, pretending she hadn’t heard him. She hoped nobody else had seen or heard him.

She got to the YC room. She sighed with relief. It didn’t look like they’d started yet. Everybody was still sitting around talking.

Of course most of the group was hanging around Sherise. Sherise was