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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