
[CHAPTER]

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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."