

Runaway Girl

By Geni Printers

Chapter 1

"Hey, have you checked out that new girl yet?" I heard Tess exclaim with disgust to Cara. "No, but she looks kinda like that wierdo on Instagram that everyone follows. But I bet she's nice," Cara replied, obviously feeling sorry for me. "How could she be 'nice'?! She's weird. No friends, no piercings, brainy. A recipe for a nerd. Just leave her alone. It's better that way. LOOK!! She's got GLASSES!! And she's reading a BOOK!! OMG! She's approaching us!" Tessa exclaimed, listing reasons to dislike me. How could someone be so rude? And I did have friends. They shouldn't have cared that I had glasses! They probably read as well, so why pick on me? I wanted them to like me, even though they didn't.

"Erm... Hey! Can I erm..." I walked over to the girls. "Na-a-ah. We're cool. You're not. Simple!! Now shift it, loser girl," Tess interrupted me mid-sentence, automatically assuming what I was going to say. I wondered if I would ever make any friends... I thought about that concept for a while.

A group of book club nerds walked up to me. They asked if I would 'play' with them. "Oh, good Gracious me," I answered in a very posh voice. "I mean, sure thing! Finally I've found some friends!" We walked off, chatting about the latest Michael Morpurgo book.

Ding-a-ring-a-ding-dong!! The class bells. Great. "Megan, why are you dawdling? You're going to be sitting next to Cara and Tess for classes today. They'll help you around the school again." A big fat woman was standing in front of me. I knew her from somewhere. I just couldn't remember. It was Mrs Denis! The Head of Shaldon High, the biggest school in the state, was talking to me!!

"Why can't you just understand now? The pillow belongs to me," Justin exclaimed, annoyed with the persistent child."

"Great reading, Bryan. I like your facial expressions," I was in the library, and Bryan had just read us some of his book about *The Persistent Child*. Anyway, I was having a really fun time with the other book club nerds. Although Cara and Tessa had been being a bit nicer, and I thought they might be starting to like me. I kinda liked them; just a bit though. I thought about getting my ears pierced. I just wanted them to properly like me. Mum would never have approved.

Dad wasn't with us then, he lived with a supermodel/actress an hour away in Beverly Hills. I would ask him. He wouldn't care, and I could spend time with Sierra (his wife). It could have been for my weekend break! Wow I was excited.

"Megan! You're staying with Chris and Charlie this weekend, you know, your cousins? Better start packing, after all you're leaving tomorrow!" Mum shouted from the kitchen.

"Really? I mean I just got all excited about," I stopped for a breath and realised what I was saying. "About what, hun? Planning another one of your adventures, huh? Come down and tell mummy," Really? I'd have her know I was not three. What about the trip though? Perhaps I would let it slip until the weekend after. I didn't know, because the sooner I got my ears pierced, the sooner they'd like me. And I seriously wanted some cool friends. I hopped down the stairs to confront mum. I told her that I was getting excited about our annual camping trip, which was in five months. She believed me and let me go.

I was going to Dad's place that weekend, and mum seemed to be ok with that. Remember that heated conversation I had with her? That was a couple of weeks back by then. I stayed with my cousins the weekend before, and it was the worst. They shouted and screamed. They ran around the house hunting for snacks. They stayed up until 1am. What could've been worse? What, a psycho bear chasing you? Nah, anything was better than those two.

Chapter 2

The bus journey to dad's was one hour, but it dragged on for what seemed like forever. Every single emotion possible was in me. I listened to music, but that didn't help. The bus ground down to a halt. I looked out of the window to be surrounded by multi-storey mansions, Lamborghinis and princess pups. Diamonds sparkled heels clattered. It felt my life was worse than a flaming poodle's!

I walked up the street in tracksuit pants and a unicorn shirt that didn't even fit me. If I'd have worn my most expensive, posh dress I still would've been underdressed for that place. No.47 Shipwreck Avenue was certainly not a shipwreck; it was much more like a \$3.5 billion mansion.

I noticed dad in the tiny window by the front door. He smiled, and beckoned me inside. As I got closer a lady opened the door, it must've been Sierra! I'd met her before, just a couple of times, and I could almost see how loving she was through her perfectly lipsticked lips. Her hair was beautiful, swept back into a glossy, light pink ponytail. Wow. "Hey Megan! My beautiful step-daughter has arrived at The Rocks!" The house was made of stone, hence the name. Sierra's voice flowed like freshly spun silk out of her mouth. Dad followed her out into the street, welcoming me into his home. As I walked through the grand, modern front door, I noticed the wall was covered in pictures of me, and another girl, who I suspiciously recognised...

Have you ever felt distracted by something weird that you really can't take your mind off? Well that happened to me. Those pictures on the wall; I knew who it was, but I just couldn't remember.

It was Tess. She's Sierra's daughter. My stepsister. Why did Dad not tell me in the first place, after all she *was* his daughter. Perhaps she was mean to me because she knew. But why did Dad pick Sierra? Probably because of the money, and looks of living in Beverly Hills. Anyway their house was super duper nice. 10 bedrooms, 4 floors, underground heated pool (with waterslide), plus they had 6 dogs and 9 cats. Suddenly, I then didn't want to live with mum, as much as I loved her.

Sierra led me down into the spa. There were ladies in posh uniform rushing round at the sight of her and me. One calmer lady strutted up to us with a beaming smile. "What could we get you two today? Oh, and hello, urm, Megan? That's the name, right?" "Yes, that's it. Can we have a mini massage? And a regular for me? Thanks dear, you are a true lifesaver," Sierra replied, obviously satisfied with the outcome of the ordering of our first spa. At the end of our treatments Sierra produced a pink diamanté bikini, for me. I liked it, even though I would've preferred it in blue or green, something less girly.

I should've seen what was to come. The pool! We went swimming, and Dad joined us. They had identical tattoos on their backs, of roses, so sickly sweet, they must have really liked each other. I guess they were married, and had had a baby: Tess.

"Call me Skye," Sierra made a statement over dinner. Dad was not surprised, but Tess and I definitely did not see it coming.

"Alright then, Skye, what time do I go back today?" I asked her, wondering what the plan was.

"You don't have to go, love, you know, you *can* stay with us and visit mum on the weekends," Dad butted in and answered the question for her.

"Ok, that could work, but what would mum think? Anyway, I was wondering, Dad, if I could get my ears pierced?" I was so happy that I got to ask him that. It was the only reason I went, wasn't it? Anyway, he agreed and Skye told me we could get them done downstairs.

Chapter 3

How could mankind have created such a wonderful being? I didn't know, but no one could *not* fall for Matthew Lewis. He got straight A's, he was so kind to me when I first went to Shaldon High. I thought about asking Tess for some advice. I wouldn't tell her who I was talking about, but maybe she could've given me some tips on how to be cooler, how to impress him.

My thoughts came to a grinding halt when I saw Tess talking with him. Talking *intensely*. Like *girlfriend / boyfriend* kind of intensity. That's what she meant when she said, "Leave love to others... Like me," She was 'with' Matty. And I was falling for my sister's boyfriend. Sometimes I felt like I really didn't belong in this world, like everything had been set up to annoy me, or embarrass me.

I forgot that it was prom soon. I was supposed to be finding a date, but I couldn't be bothered with the hassle. Like, what was the point? Couldn't you just find someone when you were there? There was no preparation with your 'date', so why find someone three weeks before? It made no sense, that was why I didn't ask anyone, but *maybe* someone might've asked me. .

All that backfired completely when the *nerd alert* arrived. I guess I was nerdy, but he was just on another level. He stuttered at first, hardly speaking English, but eventually found his feet. "Date? Prom? Dancing? Kissing? Spaghetti? Or pizza and coke?"

Awkward...

"Urm, excuse me a second," I jogged over to Tess. She had seen it all, heard it all, and wasn't impressed. She giggled.

"What situation have you got yourself into? Attracting the *nerd alert* again? Well, you must be very attractive to make the *him* to ask you out!! Punch him in the face, that's what I'd do. Move it along sweetie, Matty and I need some *alone* time," Tess trotted off, her face snuggled in to Matty's jumper, holding each other's hands.

Awkwardly, I waddled over to John, aka the *nerd alert*. "I'm, urm, sorry, well," Out of the corner of my eye I saw Tess sprinting up to me, looking a complete mess in heels running across the muddy field. "What do you want, Tess?"

"Don't muck around, just say no to him, swivel, walk away, and then your job is done. That's life advice. Never, *ever* apologise if you don't mean it," She was essentially telling me to be a bully, and be mean to an innocent student. I decided to put him in his place. "Nope, no and no again," I felt bad. Sulkily, he walked off, somewhere I did not want to say. Tess. He went to Tess.

She came home that night in a grump. The biggest grump I think I've ever seen anyone have. As she arrived, she kicked off her heels and ran to the back door. Sprinting to the hammock she screamed, crying, shouting words I couldn't understand. Well all I could understand was rather simply, "Why? Why why why why why on God's Earth?" Stupidly, I decided to ask her what's up. The only answer I got was rather unpleasant. She told me to leave her alone and never speak to her again. Was that really necessary? But I left, because that's what she said.

Dear Diary,

I have a feeling I am becoming too soft with Tess. After all she is only just a bit older than me, and she is my stepsister, so I think I need to fix up my game.

Things to do:

- 1) Stand up for myself*
- 2) Not let her control my actions*
- 3) Not let her control my words*
- 4) Make sure she doesn't act differently at home and school*
- 5) Be stronger and more confident*
- 6) Not act babishly in front of her*

So hopefully if I do the things in the list she might start to like me. A bit. Maybe.

She had me wrapped around her little finger at home, just so she could make fun of me at school, well at least that's what I had worked out. All of the changing of moods, different attitudes towards me depending on where we were, it was all so she could make me feel smaller, less important. My philosophy teacher once told me, that no one is bigger than others, wether you are the prime minister, or a beggar, just scraping up the money to get by. She obviously wasn't taught that, I thought.

Then I got told something very important.

Chapter 4

Last term I got told something that I didn't understand at first. It had changed my perspective on Tess. One day I got pulled from school early, and Tess was with me. So was Skye and dad. He told me that we were just going on a little trip, somewhere for Tess. Well, it turned out we were headed for the hospital. I wasn't allowed into the consultant's office with the others. They took a while, but when they came out Tess was carrying a bag of prescribed tablets. I just about made out from dad's expression that they were serious.

Later that day I decided to ask Tess what all of that was about. And it turned out she had a mental disability. I couldn't understand *why* she told me, because after all, if that was happening to me, I wouldn't want to tell anyone. Not even my stepsister. After that dad had kind of worked out that Tess had told me, so he decided to tell me a bit more.

"Yes, so Tess is suffering from a mental health issue called Borderline Personality Disorder. Her emotions change very quickly, and she doesn't like new things. That's probably why she hasn't taken to you all that quickly. I'm sure she'll get over it, like when we got Missy, the cat, she wouldn't talk to us, or go near the cat at all. So don't panic, you'll be fine," I had always loved how dad was so supportive.

So I guess it all made sense then, she had liked her school friends because she knew them well, and she didn't like me, because I was new to her. That made me feel so much better about myself.

There was a knock at the door.

"What do you want now, Stephanie? I'm over you, I thought you knew that. We're divorced," Dad answers the door. MUM.

"I'm coming to say goodbye, that's all. I'm going to Sydney in the morning, and I probably won't ever see you again, which I guess is a good thing," Obviously it wasn't. That meant I would never see my mum again! I couldn't think of anything more horrible. As I was running down the stairs something I couldn't believe happened. They kissed. Dad picked mum up, and they kissed for *ages*, totally grossing me out. Luckily, Skye was at work, but just as dad put her down, she walked in. "I can explain," Mum launched into telling Skye about how she fell over in the backyard, and couldn't walk on her ankle. "We are just going to Emergency, and should be back in a couple of hours,"

"Leave my house now, you filthy woman! How dare you! And love, why would you do that with such a.. Well... You know what I mean? Oh..." Skye then noticed I had been there, seen it all.

"What is your problem with my mum? Just let her be! Ok, she might have upset you, but really, that is just, wrong! Why? Just... Oh forget it," I snapped back at my stepmum. She had made me annoyed, so I couldn't do anything but stomp to my room. Right at that moment, I realised something I should've realised a while ago. *Megan Shannon Royal*, I spoke to myself. *You don't belong here. You are putting yourself through so much more than any regular fifteen year old should be going through.* That was when I decided. I knew that the twenty four hours ahead of me were going to be a challenge, but I sat up, and began planning. Planning my escape.

“Bye dad, bye Skye,” Setting off to school that day seemed harder than ever. In my over-stuffed school bag I had a loaf of bread, a bottle of water, a jumper, my book, and a photograph of me, mum, and dad. One family. I didn't quite understand how I had brought myself to do this, but whatever it was, it had driven me to face my biggest fear. Being alone. Alone in the world, no support, no one to guide me. Alone.

Chapter 5

I was hungry. So hungry. I had eaten all of my bread and had just a little water left. Never had I imagined how hard it would be to survive with almost nothing. I had brought my passport. The night before I went, I had been on the Internet and booked a flight to Mongolia. I stole Skye's credit card and sat up all night on my laptop. I probably paid about six times, because the wi-fi wasn't strong, and kept chucking me out, but I didn't care, because I didn't care about Skye, or her money.

After two days, I was ready to jump on the plane, and fly to, well, I wasn't so sure. Mum had once told me that Mongolia wasn't westernised, which is why I chose to go there. And really, the last thing I wanted was more people.

When I arrived, I was greeted by some natives with way too much body paint on. They wore feathers in their hair and did a weird welcome dance when they saw me, because I was the only one on the plane. When I stepped out onto the hard, dusty soil, I fully understood what I was. A runaway girl.

The helicopter was hovering above me. At first I just ignored it, assuming it was just passing by. But oh no, I was wrong. I heard voices, voices, American voices, voices I knew. Dad. He had found me. No, no, no, no. I went to escape. Not to be found ever again. I hoped to die in the wilderness, die without without company, die of starvation. It had been weeks, months maybe, I had gone without food or water. I was becoming weaker by the day, hungrier by the day, happier by the day. I was happy. Happy to not be surrounded by unfamiliarities. People I didn't like, didn't want, didn't need. I was happy.

A harness and rope was being lowered down. I stepped back into my cave, further and further, until I hit the back wall. "Come on out, it's just me, the pilot and some medics. Are you alright? Are you hurt? I'll just send someone down to help you with the harness. Don't be scared! You can come home now," Of course I didn't want to go home. Ever ever ever, but dad insisted. I thought if I ran, they would be able to follow me. So I stayed in my cave, waiting to be taken, to be grabbed, yanked, forced, away. I had grown to love Mongolia. The local tribes sometime stopped by for company, and that was fun, they sang me songs, although I couldn't understand the words. Told stories, even though I didn't get the punchline. Every now and again an elderly lady called Bolormaa would come. She made made me clothes from goats skin, although it was hardly cold there. But nobody, nobody understood what I craved the most. Something to eat. Not a big thing, but food. Food I needed for comfort, but most of all to survive. I had drifted far from the real world then, I had fallen asleep. Something was tugging at my waist and it woke me up. I was clipped into an uncomfortable position, floating in midair. If I hadn't have lost control and fallen asleep, I could've run away, and I wouldn't be going home.

Thermometers were stuck in my mouth, I had people testing my blood pressure, looking into my eyes and ears. But none of that could distract me from my one thought. *Try harder. Jump out of the helicopter if you have to. Leave. Get away.* At that moment I saw Bolormaa down below. She was shouting my name in desperation. I was all she had had. She burst into tears, fell on her knees, still calling for me. I felt so bad. I shouted back at her. We were both

sobbing hysterically. Dad asked what was wrong but I ignored him. "Take me back! I won't let her suffer! Please, dad. I love her. We are practically family. Imagine being taken from all you had. The only thing in the world you loved. Imagine. Now take me! Take me back! I'm not going to America. I hate it there. Don't do this to me. Please,"

It was somehow different to how I remembered it. I knew it so well, yet I couldn't recognise it. My home, although, not my home. I belonged back in Mongolia, with Bolormaa, and the tribes. I had to think about something different, otherwise I would burst into tears again, and that would just be embarrassing.

Dad drove me straight to the police station, and I met mum there. It was tipping it down with rain, and we got soaked in dad's convertible. The button that pulled the roof up had stopped working, and Skye had the other car, so we were stuffed.

Rain or not, I was tired. All I wanted to do was flop into my bed, and drift off into a deep, deep sleep. I never wanted to wake up again...