

"[*The First Principle*] challenged me to stand up for what I believe in, no matter the risk."

—*Abi, 15*

"*The First Principle* is fantastic. . . . Keeps you wanting more. . . . A great read."

—*Joanna, 16*

"Loved reading it and hope there will be a sequel."

—*Leah, 17*

"Amazing! . . . I love how Vivica is well known and has to make decisions that may affect more than just her own life."

—*Lexi, 18*

"It was hard to put down. . . . The future that Marissa Shrock writes about could very well happen."

—*Monica, 14*

"Raises good questions about government control and personal freedom. . . . I would recommend this book to my older friends."

—*Rebekah, 13*

"I absolutely loved *The First Principle*, a dystopian story with a Christian twist. . . . Tear-jerking, heart-racing, and beautifully written."

—*Tessa, 16*

*The First
Principle*
A NOVEL

MARISSA SHROCK

 Kregel
Publications

The First Principle: A Novel

© 2015 by Marissa Shrock

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc.,
2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

Published in association with the literary agency of Credo
Communications, LLC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, [www
.Credocommunications.net](http://www.Credocommunications.net).

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or
otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except
for brief quotations in reviews.

The persons and events portrayed in this work are the creations
of the author, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is
purely coincidental.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4357-2

Printed in the United States of America

15 16 17 18 19 / 5 4 3 2 1

To Mom and Dad
Thank you for always believing in me

CHAPTER 1

The biggest rebellions begin with the smallest steps, and I took my first small step one December morning during study hall. The quiet drumming of fingers on desktops filled the room as my classmates used keyboards projected from their government-issued multiphone devices to work. I tried to concentrate on writing an essay for my literature class, but the blinding glare reflecting from the sun on the snow outside made it difficult for me to see my screen. I didn't mind. The glare gave me the perfect excuse to let my thoughts wander to Ben Lagarde. Three weeks ago he'd broken up with me, and while I'm not the type to fall in love, I really cared for Ben until he ended our relationship.

In the seat in front of me, Meredith Alderton sat with her chin in her hand, curly brown hair shrouding her shoulders. She was the girl Ben had been hanging around lately. The fact that I'd even noticed meant I needed to find another guy and move on.

A message bubble appeared on my screen.

Viv? U ok? Not much typing up there.

It was from my best friend, Tindra St. John, who sat three seats behind me. She was using the school's rogue messaging system that I'd created during the summer after hacking into my high school's network. The messaging system my friends and I used broke through the school's server blocks and hid inside the network. It allowed us to communicate with each other using our multiphone devices, also known as MDs or docs. The message system was only a fraction of the enhancements I'd made. The one that provided the most possibilities was my access to the grade books. Already a straight-A student, I didn't need my grades altered. However, Tindra did, and we'd made a deal. I changed her algebra grade from a D to a B-, and she quietly promoted my new job to the other kids. I made some extra cash, and my mother had no idea I was breaking the law.

Yeah. I'm fine. Just thinking about Ben.

Tindra's response made me smile.

Don't waste your time. You're too good for him.

The classroom door opened, and twenty-five heads turned. One of the school's government-appointed security guards, Officer Jim, held the door open for a woman wearing a military uniform. Her black hair was cropped close, and her pretty features were marred by the hard expression that settled in her eyes and around her mouth.

Mr. Wilson stood and removed his reading glasses. "May I help you?"

"I'm Officer Martina Ward from Population Management." Her raspy voice was deep. "I'm looking for Meredith Alderton."

Everyone turned to look at Meredith who shrank in her seat. Mr. Wilson pointed to her.

"Stand up," Officer Ward said, and Meredith obeyed. "Come with me."

Meredith gripped the back of her chair. "Why?"

Officer Ward raised her eyebrows. "We'll discuss that later. Come with me."

"No!" Meredith sat down at her desk so hard it banged into mine.

I turned to glance at Tindra whose brown eyes were wide.

Officer Ward crossed the room in three strides, grabbed Meredith's arm, and yanked her out of the seat. "I'm a government employee. You're required to speak with me."

Meredith jerked her arm away. "I'm not going anywhere with you until you tell me why."

Officer Jim stepped in and put a grandfatherly arm around Meredith's shoulder. "Now, Meredith, it's okay. We need you to step out in the hall and speak with Officer Ward." His tone was friendly but firm.

"Then just tell her what she wants to know," I said to Officer Ward. Everyone turned to face me. Meredith shot me a grateful look.

Officer Ward glared at me. "Mind your own business."

I stood. "No. I won't." I caught Tindra's eye. She made a slight hand motion signaling me to sit. "She has the right to know what's going on."

Officer Ward moved closer. "What's your name?"

"Vivica Wilkins."

“The daughter of our governor. I thought you looked familiar.” Officer Ward turned to Mr. Wilson. “Is she always this mouthy?” She didn’t wait for an answer. “We’ll let them have their way. Miss Alderton, it has come to my attention that you are pregnant. As I’m sure you’re aware, the Posterity Protection and Self-Determination Act requires that you report to a Population Management Clinic for a termination since you’re underage.”

“I know what the law says.” Meredith raised her chin. “But I’m not pregnant. Don’t you have my vaccine record and my test results from last month?”

“Funny you should bring that up”—Officer Ward tilted her head—“since someone tampered with your results.”

“I don’t know anything about that.” Meredith stared the woman down, but her voice trembled.

“I think you do. We recently obtained security camera footage from Officer Jim and discovered you sneaking into the school office after hours.” Officer Ward paused and surveyed all of us with a sneer. “Can you believe she was idiotic enough to believe we wouldn’t notice?”

Officer Ward’s mockery turned my stomach.

“Miss Alderton, you will come with me and comply with the law.”

Meredith flinched as if the officer’s words caused her physical pain. “You’re not going to kill my baby!” She bolted for the open door and darted into the hall. Before either Mr. Wilson or Officer Jim could take off after her, Officer Ward seized her gun from its holster and fired. Meredith’s hand flew to her arm, and she moved a few steps before she seemed to hit an invisible wall and collapsed next to the lockers.

A few students screamed and chairs scraped against tile while I ran to the door with several classmates.

“Sit down!” Officer Ward yelled. “It was a tranquilizer gun.” We shrank against the wall. Officer Ward looked at Mr. Wilson. “Keep them in here.” She pointed at Officer Jim. “Lock down the school. Now.”

I couldn’t take my eyes off the crumpled heap in the hallway. She was more than a little nutso if she thought she could break the law and get away with it. It’s not like you could hide a pregnancy. Why hadn’t I

ignored the impulse to stand up for her? Why had Ben befriended her? And then the obvious occurred to me—he was probably the cause of her situation.



I pushed steamed broccoli and carrots around my lunch tray. I'd only managed to swallow one bite of over-baked chicken before my stomach rebelled. I took a sip of vitamin-infused almond milk and wished I could have a brownie, but government regulations rationed sugar and fat for everyone and banned school cafeterias from providing any good stuff.

"You have to eat," Tindra said. "You'll feel better." She'd polished off her entire meal, and her eyes flicked toward my tray. Food always made Tindra feel better, and she was lucky it didn't show on her petite figure. Even though I was tall and slender, I couldn't get away with her eating habits.

"Help yourself." I pushed my tray toward Tindra and moved hers closer to me. The last thing I needed was the cafeteria monitor reporting my lack of consumption. "I can't get Meredith out of my mind." That was half true. I couldn't get Ben *with* Meredith out of my mind. Had he been seeing her while he was with me?

"I can't believe you stood up for her like that." She attacked the broccoli.

"That woman from Pop Management was a bully. But what was up with Meredith sneaking into the office? How dumb was that?"

"I know."

"I can't believe her vaccine didn't work." Every year the government gave each underage girl a vaccine to prevent pregnancy and STDs. We learned in health class that the shots were healthier and more effective than the hormone-based pills women had used years ago, when pregnancy control was optional.

"So what if it didn't?" Tindra asked. "Why didn't she go terminate? Doesn't she want to have a life? A kid would totally ruin everything."

I plucked a strawberry from my original tray and nibbled it. "I don't

know.” Maybe she just wanted to defy the government. Underground rebel activity had been a problem in our country for years. It was the reason the government monitored everyone and everything. I’d heard of pregnant girls going into hiding with rebel help, but I’d never known one personally. I’d more or less figured that part was urban legend. “You think she’s a rebel?”

“Duh. Why else would she skip termination?”

“Then why wasn’t she in hiding?”

“Do I look like a rebel expert? Maybe she was afraid to run away and leave her family.” Tindra shrugged and flipped her shiny black hair over her shoulder. “All I know is that if I ever get pregnant, I’m terminating. No worries here.”

“Yeah, I hear you.”



When I arrived at my URNA history class, everyone was unusually silent. I took a seat in the third row and propped my doc on the table. The bell dinged four times, and Mrs. O’Keefe rose from her chair, although the screen above her desk that normally held our notes remained blank.

Mrs. O’Keefe tucked a red curl behind her ear and cleared her throat. “I know you’ve all heard what happened today during fourth hour.” She paused and looked at us. I nodded and noticed several other heads bobbing. “I need to read the following message from the principal before we begin.” She tapped her doc. “Today during fourth hour, a young lady was placed into a juvenile detention center for attempting to change the results of a government-issued pregnancy test in an attempt to avoid the required termination. Though pregnancy is rare due to the success rate of our vaccination program, we would like to remind you that the Posterity Protection and Self-Determination Act was implemented for the common good of our country. We hope that such an incident will not be repeated, as it reflects badly on our school and community.” Mrs. O’Keefe looked up, her expression grim. “Now, moving on—”

“That’s bull.” Darius Delano crossed his arms. D² was a new student this year, and he always had an opinion.

Mrs. O’Keefe held up her hand. “I know some of you found this incident disturbing, but I’ve been told that we are not to discuss this issue any further.”

“What gives the government the right to tell her she can’t have a baby?” D² asked.

“We simply can’t discuss this.”

D² scowled, and I think he swore under his breath, but I wasn’t sure. Mrs. O’Keefe must not have been sure either because she hesitated before she focused her attention on opening the class notes.

“Why can’t we?” This time I knew the voice without looking. It was Ben, his tone gentle and disarming.

“Principal Daniels asked that we not.” Mrs. O’Keefe’s tone was firm, but her thin hands fluttered around her doc. “Besides, it’s clear that the student’s actions were illegal.”

“Can we at least discuss the law and if we even need it anymore? We don’t have to talk about Meredith,” D² said.

Several people agreed.

“Fine. Darius, since you feel so strongly about the matter, go ahead.”

D² sauntered to the front of the class, and Mrs. O’Keefe moved to the side and supported herself with one hand gripping the edge of her desk.

“So, the best teacher ever”—he grinned at Mrs. O’Keefe—“taught us the Posterity Protection and Self-Determination Act, a.k.a. *term law*—’cause of the part that says underage girls and people with too many kids have gotta terminate pregnancies—was put into place back in the day. Our government was trying to get the country rolling after the Great Collapse and the Second Civil War. Too many people were poor and starving, so they had to control population growth.” D² shifted back and forth. “The economy is better now. We have food. Why should the government care if some teenage girl has a kid? Or if adults want a big family?”

Claire, who sat in the front row, waved her hand. “You’re kidding, right? Do you know how many people *still* live in poverty?”

Pop Management regulations ensure we have enough resources to go around. And what about the environmental impact of overpopulation? Besides, you aren't being honest. Adults can have more than two kids if they pay."

D² crossed his arms again. "It shouldn't be the government's job to provide for everyone, and no woman should have to pay a huge fine or terminate."

"If she can't afford the fine, then she can't support another child," Claire said.

"People like Meredith fight the law because they think the required termination part is wrong," Ben said. "It's not about resources. Or the economy. They don't want to slaughter kids."

I spun and shot Ben a look. *Slaughter?* What was he thinking? Using words like that could cause the government to investigate you for hate speech or anti-government activity.

D² pointed to Ben. "That's right."

"So, Darius, are you announcing that you're a rebel?" Claire asked.

He scowled. "I'm expressing my opinion. That doesn't mean I'm a rebel."

"Right." Claire rolled her eyes.

Mrs. O'Keefe stood. "Darius, do you have anything else to add?"

"No." He stomped back to his seat.

"Anyone else?"

The room stilled. Even if someone had a thought, Claire's accusation against D² was enough to silence the entire class.