

## Bullied By The Badboy By Maramartha Chapter 14

For life

“You should have called me,” Maria says for the fifth or one hundredth time. I don’t know but I stopped counting the second time she said it. She rubs her hands together, angry eyes boring into my forehead.

“What would you have done?” I ask.

Whenever Olivia is involved, I try to handle it on my own to avoid her interfering. She is my best friend, she has my back but I want her to remain on the cheerleading team. I drag my sleeve over my knuckles, shivering a little in response to the gust of cold air that sweeps in. Most of the chairs are still wet from yesterday’s rain but the air is cool, cooler than it will be in the cafeteria. I am never going in there again.

“I don’t know.” She shrugs, her top rides up to reveal her pierced belly button. “Next time, call me.”

She dumps her bag on the bleachers, I grab the sandwich she stretches to me and cross my legs under me. I take a bite and close my eyes as my teeth sink into the cheese, savouring the delicious mix of all the simple ingredients. Only Maria’s mum can make a sandwich taste so good. She pokes me with her index finger, I relocate to another seat, keeping a safe distance between us as I munch hungrily on my lunch like a starved animal. Taking a swig from the carton of juice she sets on the space between us, I release an undignified belch when I am done eating. Her nose scrunches in disgust, she shakes her head.

Impatience rolls off her in waves as I take my sweet time to clean the mess I made. My eyes zoom in on the field, I imagine the jocks throwing the ball and making a dash for the goal post. Ben was good at this, the

top goal scorer for a long time. Images from that time replay in my head like a series on fast forward, I picture Ben in his number 17 jersey, running with the ball. How he dived, launching the ball in the air to give us the qualifying goal for the state championship and the field erupted in deafening cheer. I was among those hollering. It was our last shot at getting into the tournament. Does he miss it? I know I would.

I will miss fighting for Coach. Is that why he picked underground fighting? For the adrenaline rush?

“Are you cheering today?” Her date is tonight, same with today’s game. It tends to run late. If our school wins, the guys will find a pub to celebrate or throw a party at the house of one of the super rich jocks. She nods, I tense at her strained smile. The distance between us disappears, I dump my empty sandwich wrap in the brown paper bag, noticing her untouched lunch for the first time. “What about your date?”

Her chest deflates, her fingers run through her thick mass of curls hanging over one shoulder in a slow motion that irritates me. I snatch her hand to place it on my legs. “He cancelled.” Her voice cracks on the last word, she retracts her hand to put her hair in a messy bun but I know she’s stalling. “Buuut, I get to cheer fine boys at the game,” she murmurs and I cringe at the fake cheeriness that laces her words.

We sit in silence for another terse moment, my gaze travels the length of the field. By night, the place will be filled to the brim, the lights glued to the poles situated at each corner of the field will be shining bright enough to blind anyone who is dumb enough to stare into them. A glance in the direction of the cafeteria causes dread to race down my spine, I rub my cheek with a soft sigh. It dawns on me now, the reason she was willing to eat out here. Daniel is at the cafeteria. We are both avoiding our demons.

Leaning forward so my elbows are propped on the bench, I make funny faces until Maria giggles. The lines on her forehead even out, she mimics my position with a small smile that finds its way to my lips.

“We don’t need boys when we have each other,” I whisper. Her head jerks in agreement, her eyes light up. “Who needs Daniel when Zic Effon is hotter,” I add, fanning myself with one hand like the thought of him drives me crazy with need. He’s a cool actor, nothing special but she adores him. “Hot and single.”

Maria takes the bait, her cheeks flush as she bends to retrieve her phone and I hide the smile trying to make an appearance. “Did you see the last video he posted on the gram?” No. I have only ten followers and two of them are from her personal and singing account. Social media is not so much of my business. She stares into space and sighs dreamily while palming her face like a hopeless Disney princess forgotten by her prince charming. “He’s so hot it should be a sin.” On a scale of one to ten, I will rate him a seven. If he does away with the fake tan and British accent, I might make it a nine. “I can’t wait to be legal.”

I double over with laughter, she bares her teeth. “Then what? You have never even kissed a guy before.”

“Shut up, Killjoy.” She unlocks her phone, her finger alternating between both of us. “We,” she says with emphasis on the word, “have not kissed a boy.” I fail to reply with a better comeback, she nods.

To be honest, I believe she will get her first kiss before me. It might have happened today if Daniel wasn’t an ass, I need to talk to him. I can’t think of anyone who would want to date me so I most likely will never get a kiss. Maybe acting school will be different, I might be lucky to get a kiss during filming.

Maria's squeal jolts me out of my reverie, I plug my fingers into my ears. She can be too loud sometimes. She jumps, I eye her warily while considering my next move. To smack her into silence or wait for her excitement to wane. She makes the decision for me. Grabbing me by the hand, she squeezes the life out of me and I am surprised I don't pass out before she lets go. She pushes me back to the bench and starts off in fluent Spanish. I know a few things from language class but I do not understand a word she says.

Her hands lower to her exposed knees when she's done talking, she frowns. "Why are you not happy for me?" she asks in a thick voice that reveals her Spanish roots. I yelp when she smacks me on the back of my head. Shit, that hurt like hell. "Bad Tessa. Bad friend. Why aren't you happy for your best friend?"

I rotate my shoulders carelessly. "Cos I didn't understand one word you said. Care to repeat that?" She scowls, her grip tightens on her phone. I grin sheepishly and pinch her rosy cheeks. "In English, please."

Taking a deep breath, she says, "Okay, horrible friend." She keeps mute. I sigh, she drops her phone on my lap and I shriek when I see the numbers below the video. Curving my hands around my mouth, I let out another scream as she performs a graceful double flip. Maria takes a bow and waves at our invisible audience. "Thank you, thank you all. This wouldn't have been possible without my best friend here."

My face heats up from her praise, my eyes flit to the video I captured. The video from that night at the pub. My heart swells with pride as I replay it with a grin. It is short, lasting only two minutes but Maria makes the most of it. I shake my head, our eyes meet and my cheeks hurt so much from smiling at her.

One hundred thousand views. One thousand more subscribers and many comments begging for more with suggestions on her next video. She squeals again and hugs me, I wrap my free hand around her neck.

This might not be much of a big deal to another YuuTuber but this is a huge win for her. Before now, her highest view was ten thousand, the comments never reached one hundred. We get up simultaneously, I return her phone, chest heaving with pride. I am glad to be the one who captured her most defining moment, this could be her big break. Her arm hangs lazily on my shoulder as we start for the school building, my heart fills with so much joy that the thought of running into Ben and Olivia doesn't faze me.

"Has your mum seen it?" Her smile dims, I tickle her and she brightens a bit. "Well?"

"Yes." We stop at my locker briefly for me to pick my backpack, she sighs. "She was very happy." I nod, waiting for the bad news to follow. Her mum is not one to mess with and the comments under the video asking to confirm the name of the pub will put her in trouble if they haven't already. "I am grounded for life." I cackle like an old witch, it earns me a few looks from the passing students. "But it was worth it."

"Yeah?"

She nods. A smile replaces her sombre expression. "Oh, I almost forgot." We don't stop walking but our steps slow as we near her class. "You have drama practise after school. Good luck with our bucket list."

"What?" I whisper as if it will rewind the last few minutes. My coward best friend slides into her class, she sends me a wink through the tiny opening before the door closes and I flip her the middle finger.