

Bullied By The Badboy By Maramartha Chapter 15

Bucket list

The bucket list is a stupid list of things we want to do before finishing high school. I have something as silly as going on a date while she has something as big as sending her singing clip to America Got Talent. The bucket list says I have to try out for drama club this session, something I always put off because Olivia and her minions have been the reigning drama queens but that sneaky bestie of mine snuck it into the list. I get enough acting experience from being in the church's plays but to Maria, it doesn't count.

I slip into class, a greater part of the lecture is spent thinking up lies to escape this little problem Maria created for me. After the last class of the day, I find myself walking towards the drama room while hugging my textbook tight to my chest. A peek through the small rectangular glass on the door reveals an empty room, I frown at the words written boldly on the paper glued to the door. An announcement.

Practise starts at five. Auditions follow immediately. What am I auditioning for? Besides, no one will be here, the whole school should be getting ready to support the football team. The whole school but me.

Inside the room, there's a lady at the desk on the podium writing notes. She looks up when I saunter in like the timid girl I am. "Hey," she says, "are you here for practice?" I nod. "It has been postponed."

My hands become clammy, I wipe them on my trouser, too relieved at the latest update. Without another word, I leave the room, a light bounce in my step as I walk to my car. I am a bit wary at the emptiness of the park, my car sits alone with the sun pouring on the roof. My phone rings

in my bag, I pull it out to see the caller's identity and a scowl takes over my lips. I still owe her a serious beating.

"Tessa," Maria says once the phone is glued to my ear. I tsk, she's the reason I am still in school, I should have been home since. "I need your help." My hand freezes on the steering, my back goes stiff. "Sharon is still in school, Dad was supposed to pick her up after practise but he forgot and Mum's busy, I'm busy." I hear the band playing in the background, she sighs and I nod though she can't see me. "Can you help?"

Sharon is her youngest sister, the baby of the house and a sweetheart who sings as good as Maria. Singing runs in their blood, they have actual talents in their family. I fasten my seatbelt and nod again, there's nothing for me to do at home except binge-watch movies I have already seen a million times.

"Sure," I murmur, already driving out of the school gate. "I'm on my way."

After a torrent of gratitude, the call ends after a beep. Sharon's school comes into view, I park in the lot and grab my phone. I ring Maria to ask for her location, a groan leaving my lips when she doesn't pick. The sight of the locked doors has my hand going to scratch the back of my neck, I circle the tall building, turning knobs and knocking on iron doors. Her school looks nothing like ours except for a path that cuts into the field. I follow the trail, a big, proud smile on my lips at the lone figure sitting on the bleachers.

I jog to catch up with the person, drowning in disappointment when I reach the bleachers. The blanket draped around the big, black bag seems to wink at me, I say, "Fuck you too." Fuck whoever thought it okay to do

that to a bag. I kick the air and make my way down, my steps slow while I redial Maria.

A short text pops in from Maria, an apology, her mum managed to get someone to pick Sharon. I burst out laughing, snorting like an elegant pig. Great. I don't bother replying her, instead, I drive out of the lot, slowing down at the figure hunched on the curb by the entrance. I am reluctant to leave the comfort of my car. What if my eyes are deceiving me again and it is another bag shaped like a human?

The uncertainty fades when the figure raises its head, I am met with blue eyes the colour of the sky. He flashes me a smile that reveals perfect dentition, swatting his bangs that continuously fall into his eyes.

"Hey," I hear myself saying. He smiles harder, I return it. The time on the dashboard shows ten minutes past six. Elementary school closes earlier, the kid should be lounging at home. "When did you get here?"

"I was here when you drove in," he murmurs.

Oh. That means he has been here for hours. Does he know Sharon? Are they friends? We stare at each other while I contemplate my next decision, afraid to leave a kid alone. I get out of the car, a smile curving my lips when he balls his small hands into fists and shifts to the end of the curb to create a gap between us as I lower myself on the concrete surface. Little man is a fighter. Good thing I am on his side.

"Do you mind the company?" I ask. His eyes fleet to my car, a fancy black Rolls-Royce ghost that can fit a small family. He hides his fists between his legs. "I can go if you don't want me here." As someone who loves solitude, I understand if he wants to be left alone, at the same time, I don't feel good about leaving a kid all by himself. I look at the fast turning grey skies, I can't leave him here. "What say you, Mister..."

“Asher. My name is Asher.” His hands wrap around the straps of his backpack. “It’s okay, you can stay.”

We fall into a comfortable silence, I bring out a pack of home-made cookies from my bag and nibble on it slowly to avoid small talk. Asher’s eyes linger on the chocolate cookies, each time I look his way, he dodges my gaze. Covering the distance between us, I stretch the cookies to him with a small smile.

“Want some?” I ask.

His lips purse, he shakes his head. “Benny says not to collect stuff from strangers.”

Fair enough. I shove the cookies into my bag, I can’t eat with a hungry kid around me. Familiar patches peek out of his sleeves, I swallow the urge to comment on it. Crossing my legs, I ask, “Who’s Benny?”

“My big brother. I’m waiting for him.” I nod, anger for the so-called brother growing inside me. “It’s my super power,” he says when he notes my gaze on his arm. Rolling his sleeve to reveal more of the white patches, he flexes his fingers. If I had his confidence, I wouldn’t be stuck wearing only sweatshirts, T-shirts and other conservative outfits to protect my stomach from the public. He pulls down his sleeve.

“Cool,” I whisper.

Asher’s stomach growls, my insecurities take a backseat. I place the cookie in the small space between us and hide a smile when he picks it up. He takes the first bite and shows off his chocolate stained teeth.

“Don’t tell Benny.”

Making a criss-cross sign around my heart, I mutter, “I promise.” The silence stretches, I jog over to my car and return with a bottle of water I pass to him. It is fifteen minutes to seven and no sign of Benny. I send Mum a text to know what we will be having for dinner. It is the only way to know if she has arrived. Her work schedule is unpredictable and homemade dinner means she will be home tonight. My phone pings with a reply to order take out, I smile sadly. I’ll be home alone again. Yay. “Is Benny always late?”

“Sometimes,” he says with a shrug like he is used to it and a strong urge to chew Benny’s ears off with lectures about kids takes over me. I glance at Asher finishing the last batch of his cookies and slide the empty wrap into my pocket. “How’s my face?” Asher points to his chubby cheeks to ascertain there is no evidence of his snacking, I give him a thumbs up. We laugh. “What’s your name?” I tell him, his lips pucker into a cute frown. “Tessa, as in Theresa?” He swipes the bangs off his forehead, I nod, taking out an old clip from my hair to keep his stubborn curls off his face. “Thank you. Do you have a big brother?”

Loneliness crashes over me at his softly spoken question, I hug myself and my lips stretch into a smile. I miss Hayden. “Yes.” Asher notices the slight change in my mood, he pats my leg and I smile at him. If he is my younger brother, I will never leave him out this late. Benny deserves a beating. “He is in college.”

“Do you do stuff together when he’s around?”

“Yes, plenty of things.” I want to mention our fights and how he introduced me to Coach but I don’t want to spook the poor kid so I say, “We bake together.” His eyes widen, I nod. “I baked the cookies you ate.” A laugh escapes me at the pink staining his cheeks. “Where might Benny be? What about your parents?”

“Dad’s dead.” My chest tightens, we look up at the rumbling sky.

“Benny is never this late.” A yawn escapes him, I hook an arm around him when his eyes begin to droop. “I liked the cookies. Very tasty.”

His compliment warms me from inside out, I squeeze his arm. “I can make you another batch.”

Baking was a bonding activity with Hayden, I barely do it now because the kitchen feels empty without him there to complain about the amount of sugar I sprinkle all over my buns. Mum can cook up a delicious storm but she has no idea the first thing about baking. As for Dad, he’s the best at tasting.

Asher sits up, his eyes wide open with shock. “Really?” My head jerks vigorously in a nod, I am more than willing to please this kid. “I would love that.” Me too. “Can you make cake?” he asks after a minute of silence. “Benny’s birthday is next month, I don’t have enough money saved up to buy him a real cake.” My mouth opens to ask about his mother and to deliver a lecture on why Benny doesn’t deserve a cake or anything nice but his smile sucks the speech out of me. “I will pay in installments if that’s okay.”

“You don’t have to pay,” I murmur and give his shoulders another squeeze, “we are friends. Friends help each other. You just have to tell me what you want on the cake and it’s done.” His smile shows I said the right thing, he takes out his notepad to write down the details for the cake. “How old will Benny be?”

The sound of a revving motorbike cuts him off, we jump to our feet. Asher flings his notepad, rushing to hug the tall biker barely off the bike. My jaw hits the ground when the biker runs his fingers through his hair, I take a step out of sight. Benjamin is Benny.