

Bullied By The Badboy By Maramartha Chapter 19

October 17

The air outside is a bit chilly. Of late, the weather has been deceptive. In the morning, I couldn't stand the heat, now it's freezing. On some days, the reverse is the case. My teeth chatter noiselessly, I lock my arms around myself and speed walk to my car. A figure with his head bowed catches my eyes, I stop, reminded of the evening with Asher. The evening that got me into the clinic. My stomach groans as if to remind me of the pain, I palm my lower belly and inhale. The figure pushes away from the motorbike to lace his sneakers, I smile when I realise it is indeed Asher. I don't make any attempts to call him, if the bike is there, then Ben must be lurking somewhere, ready to pounce on me again. Asher might be a cutie but I will pass today.

Asher notices me right as I resume walking to my car, he screams my name and I curse under my breath. I turn slowly to wave at him, my eyes darting to the front of the building. It opens and an unfamiliar face walks out, I relax slightly as Asher closes the gap between us. I will only spend a few minutes with him.

"Hey, Tessa," Asher says. His blue eyes are big, bright and innocent, nothing like Ben's and his hair sticks out in a gelled, spiky mess I ruffle. He scrunches his face and looks up to me, I muster a smile, eyes going to the door at intervals. Asher's fingertip brushes my cheek, I bite my lips. "Who did that to your face?"

Your brother. "Some guy," I say with a shrug.

His lips pucker, he shakes his head. "Not cool. I'll tell Benny so Benny can beat him up."

A laugh escapes me. He can't report him to Benny if Benny is the bully. "Where's Benny?"

Asher draws lazy circles on the floor with his foot. "Inside. He's talking to the principal." My lips twitch, I can only hope the purpose of the talk is to extend his detention period since he seemed to have missed today's. Asher's voice lowers like he wants to tell me a big secret. "He was early today. Very early."

"Nice." But it is more than nice. A strange but warm feeling settles in my chest, Ben might have gotten upset with me but he listened and Asher's big smile kind of makes up for the punch. I open the door to grab the chocolate cookies in the car compartment between the seats. "All yours, Champ," I say, tossing the pack which he catches mid-air. Asher giggles so much I start giggling. "Why are you laughing?"

"I don't know." He takes a small bite out of his cookies, I accept the piece he offers me and we munch silently. I should leave before Ben arrives but I find myself opening the passenger door for Asher to get in and make himself comfortable. "Only Benny calls me Champ. It sounds funny when you say it."

To that I simply murmur, "I won't say it again."

He shakes his head. "No. I like it. It's just funny." Finishing the first round of his cookies, he says, "Is this your school?" I nod, a smile playing on my lips. "Where were you that day? I wanted to introduce you to Benny." My mouth opens, I blink, trying to think up a quick lie but he cuts me off. "Do you know Benny? I call him Benny but his name is Ben. Benjamin Carter." His legs bounce in the air, he drums his fingers onto the dashboard. Without looking at me, he continues, "Carter is our last name. Do you know him?"

A lump lodges in my throat, I open my mouth and close it without getting a word out. His inquisitive eyes remain on my face, I manage a tight smile. Swiping my clammy hands on my jeans, my teeth sink into my lips and I try to calm myself. I left the clinic to avoid an awkward conversation but this seems worse. I'll pick talking to Maria and Daniel over answering Asher who's patiently waiting for my answer.

What was his question again? I clear my throat. "Um. I think I know Benny."

"Is he your friend?" His eyes widen with anticipation, his lips press into a close-lipped smile.

"Not really."

"Hmm." He looks away and my chest deflates with relief. Children ask too many questions. I think I take it back, I don't want a younger brother anymore if he is this inquisitive. "Will you still make the cake?"

My fingers become more interesting, I crack my knuckles and Asher clears his throat. His voice is too hopeful and I don't want to disappoint the poor kid. "How will you get it? And when's his birthday?"

"You can bring it to our house," he answers, "It's not so far from school." I shake my head, I don't know where they live and I don't intend to find out. Asher taps a finger to the corner of his mouth, his brows wrinkle and his features contort into what I now understand to be his thinking face. His head slowly turns to me, a sparkle creeps into his eyes. "What about his locker? Can you put it there? As a surprise?"

"No." The look of heartbreak on his face has me swallowing the rest of my words. His lips pucker into a sad smile, my heart shrinks when tears spring to his eyes. "I can try," I say. "I can put it in his locker."

The happy child is back in a minute, he grins from ear to ear and my lips pull into a line. “His birthday is on October 17. Benny has never gotten a surprise before, I want this to be his first.” My heart melts at his thoughtfulness, I hug myself and nod. I can get it into his locker, if I can’t, Maria will. She’s friends with some cheerleaders, they should be able to smuggle a cake inside. “He will know it’s me when he sees the name.” I pinch his chubby cheeks, he pinches my unhurt side and we snicker. “Thank you, Tessa.”

When the car is quiet again, I turn on the radio and ask, “When is your birthday?”

“January 5.”

The front door slams close, we jump and our eyes snap in the direction of the school building. Maria storms out with Daniel on her heels, his lips moving as fast as her feet. I grimace. Their talk didn’t end well. I check my phone for any new messages and sure enough, I have a few from her promising me death by the most painful means for betraying her best friend. I chuckle, Asher raises his brows.

“What is it?” He says nothing, I roll my eyes. Asher flicks through the radio channels until he settles on a song I have never heard. I frown, a cautious eye still on the front door. “I was born in April. April 11.”

“Mummy too. April 5.”

His smile fades, he hides his hands inside his shirt. Sadness rolls off him. “Where’s Mummy?”

A faraway look blankets his face, he shrugs and looks out the window. I observe him. Ben is tall, when standing, Asher reaches up to his stomach. His gloves keep his superpowers out of sight, I raise my shirt to peek at mine, the white patches in an irregular shape that have taken over my

stomach. I am not sure I will ever call mine a superpower, to me, it's a blemish, something to hide. A knock on my window drags me out of my thoughts, my brain freezes at the angry eyes glaring back at me. Ben knocks again, I gulp.

"Benny," Asher calls out to him, he stretches his hands and pouts. I would have laughed but Ben's angry eyes grow angrier, his brows pull together to the point of forming a unibrow and I hastily fasten my seatbelt. I don't like how he looks at me like I am the most horrible person on earth. I am only having a conversation with his brother hours after he warned me to stay away. Great going. "You took so long."

I don't miss the dark promise in his eyes as he moves around to Asher's side, I tap on the lock and the door easily opens. "Sorry, Champ." He crouches so he's eye level with Asher. "I had to sort some things out." I avert my gaze when he throws a sinister look my way like the thing had to do with me. "Ready?"

"Yeah," Asher drawls out without leaving the car. I focus on my thighs, noticing the small space between my legs. I have a thigh gap. Maybe I can join the latest TicToc trend. A voice at the back of my mind mocks me, I know I will never join any trend but it's nice to distract myself with such thoughts. The pair of eyes boring into mine finally gets me to raise my head, I look up to see the brothers staring at me.

Asher smiles, I make sure to keep my eyes trained on him alone but my gaze wanders to Ben's face and his frown deepens to a scowl. Why does he loathe me this much? I should be the one hating on him.

"You remember Tessa from that day?" Asher nudges Ben in his side, Ben grumbles a reply. "She's in your school too." No shit, Captain Obvious. Asher hops out of the car, dragging Ben to my side like he weighs nothing. He unlocks my door, I fist my hands in my shirt. "Tessa, meet my brother, Benny." He squints at his big brother, tugging on his

hand which he shoves into his pocket. “Benny, meet my new friend, Tessa.” I wave at Ben with a forced smile, he ignores my greeting. I retract my arm, he doesn’t have to be so snobbish, I don’t want to talk to him either. “Benny doesn’t like people calling him Benny.”

I suppress a laugh at his frown and my head jerks in a nod. The attention is taken off me as Asher turns to his brother, he motions for Ben to squat and when he does, I am blessed with an up-close view of his blue eyes. His face softens at the words whispered in his ear, he smirks when he catches me ogling him.

Arrogant asshole. I know he is arrogant, rude and snobbish so why am I still looking? I want to stop but I can’t. They say the eyes are the gateway to the soul and Ben’s eyes are so beautifully blue, I want to keep staring at them to uncover those layers he puts up. To know if he is really a jerk or it’s a facade.

Okay, where did that come from? I don’t like Ben at all. I am still repeating that mantra to myself when Asher taps me. “I told Benny about your face. Next time, he will beat the person up.” His mouth opens wide to release a yawn, he throws his arms around my neck and pulls me into a hug. “Bye, Tessa.”

I will bet my life that Ben is watching our exchange with a scowl but I don’t look to confirm it. Instead, I squeeze my eyes shut and return his brother’s hug. He breaks away to smile at me. “Bye, Champ.”