

BadBoy 23

Chapter 23

I don't like anyone

Maria is still not here. I send her another text, she replies with a red face emoji and a wink. I should have come with my car. My gaze drifts to the brown building in front of the parking lot. The library is behind it. I am tempted to return inside and retrieve the note but I am too scared of him finding me in there.

What if he's someone I hate? I have considered the possibility of it being someone I'm mean to but what if he's someone who has been mean to me? I go out of my way to keep to myself, for me to react, I must have been provoked. I rest my head on the hood of Maria's car and try not to think of him. He deserves a reply, it's the least I owe him after taking his letter.

A tug on my back has me raising my head, I look behind to see Maria grinning like she didn't keep me waiting. If she wasn't my best friend, I would have knocked some of her teeth out. She taps on her car fob, a beep follows and I unlock the passenger door.

"What took you so long?" I ask, sliding inside.

The October air is chilly, the clouds have been grey all day but no sign of rain. I fasten my seatbelt, turn on the heater. Maria doesn't get in immediately, I bury my face in my palms and sigh. Her head pokes inside her car, I make to talk but she presses a finger to her mouth and I roll my eyes. "Look outside."

"What am I looking at?" I ask, eyes scanning the almost empty lot. She took so long to come outside and now she's here, we can't even leave. Annoyed, I drum my fingers on the dashboard. "Can we get going?"

Kneeling on her seat, she grabs my face in her hands and tilts my head in the direction of the parking lot with a Benz. A man is leaning against the car with his head bent over his phone. He pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose, I purse my lips and she eases her grip on me. He looks familiar, way too familiar.

"Isn't that your dad?" she murmurs.

I peer at the figure from head to toe and tilt my head to the side. It does look like him. My phone rings, I pull it out and a smile forms on my lips. "Daddy," I scream into the receiver. His chuckles tickle my ear,

Maria mouths something about a daddy's girl to me and I stick out my tongue. Looking out the window, I see Daddy take off his glasses to dab at his eyes and my smile expands. "Daddy, where are you?"

"In front of your school, where are you?"

Without notice, I end the call. I get out of Maria's car, with a shit-eating grin. "Fuck you for keeping me waiting." She gasps, I blow her a kiss. "I'm kidding." If we had left, Daddy wouldn't have met me here but she's still a bitch for keeping me waiting for this long. I jam the door close. "Love you."

"Don't forget Nate's Halloween party," she screams at my figure but I continue racing to Daddy without a backward glance at her. She will survive. "Theresa Grace Mower, I know you heard me. Don't forget."

Halloween is in twenty days, I have never understood the fuss but this year, Nate's hosting it. Everyone has been talking about it. Apparently, he hosts the best parties. I haven't been to any of his parties so I can't confirm or deny it. But it's all I ever hear about in the toilet and drama club. Speaking of drama, I should tell Maria I am not interested. Only five people showed up for auditions. Five girls and they could care less about the scripts. I have a feeling the turnout would have been different if Olivia signed up.

Daddy looks up at the sound of my footsteps. He squints and I snicker when he puts on his glasses before spreading his arms for a hug. He is short-sighted, the man can't see beyond his fingers without the aid of his glasses. I rush into his arms, his hands descend on my back and he squeezes me tight. I haven't seen him in a week. It is either he's gone before I wake or he comes home when I have already left for school.

He pulls me back to stare at my face. I grin. "I've missed you," I say and hug him briefly.

"I've missed you too." He gives my back a last pat and opens the passenger door for me to get in. Maria honks and we both wave at her. "Is that Maria Vega?" I nod. "She doesn't come to the house anymore."

The car starts, he joins the other cars on the highway and we glide down the tarred roads in comfortable silence. "She is grounded," I reply. Besides, there is no way he will know if she comes to the house when he's barely around. I glance at his side profile. As expected, he has both hands on the steering. "What are you doing here?" I pout at my reflection in the side mirror, he sniggers. "I thought you were busy."

“Never too busy for my daughter,” he replies but his eyes remain on the road. I shake my head as a round of laughter bursts free. I can count the number of times he showed up for me on one hand. The money is always available but Daddy isn’t. “Do you still like Dan and Dan?” I squeeze my lips and nod.

Dan and Dan is an old cafe owned by a father and son duo with the same name. We used to spend our Sundays there. Me and him alone, talking about everything and nothing until he got really busy. It feels surreal to be in a car with him, to talk like we are back to those days and I have to keep stealing glances at him to be sure he is real. Daddy is a busy man, so busy his wife and kids don’t get to see him often.

“Did Mummy put you up to this?” I stretch my hand outside, the breeze caresses my fingers and I giggle.

“Put your hand back inside,” Daddy says in a strict voice. I roll my eyes but indulge him and he rolls up all the windows, shutting off the natural air. “To your question, yes and no.” His reply doesn’t come as a surprise to me, Mummy must have been scared by my breakdown. “I have always wanted to come see you but I couldn’t get the day off until today.” He gives my hand a squeeze, we don’t discuss any further until he pulls up in front of the familiar building of Dan and Dan. I am about to hop out of the car when he says, “Work has been really hectic, Tessa. I am sorry I am not available as much as you would like.”

I nod because it’s what I am kind of expected to do. I am expected to understand that his work keeps him away from us. I don’t like it but it is what it is. I link our fingers and he smiles. “It’s alright, I get it.”

We find our way to a booth at the far end of the cafe, none of us bother with the menu on the table because we know it offhand. The small screen television at the centre of the cafe plays without audio. I shift closer to Daddy. It has been too long since we spent time together and it feels awkward.

“How was school?”

I think back to the letter, the harshness of Let’s tone. “Fine. Nothing eventful happened.” He frowns, I shrug. At times, I think his doctor’s instincts notify him when I lie. “What about you, how was work?”

“It was okay. Same old, same old. Consultations, patients who need help. Nothing eventful happened.”

He rubs the back of his hand against his eyes. I note the eye bags, the dark circles and wrinkles that have multiplied on his forehead. Maybe I am being too hard on him. He’s alive. He’s here. He’s trying his best.

“You are doing a great job, Daddy,” I tell him. He throws an arm around my shoulders, I pick up the menu and skim through lines of familiar food items typed in black ink. “I’m glad you came today.”

“Me too. I’m happy to be here.”

A brunette waitress sashays to us with a pink apron tied around her waist and her notepad peeking from one of the pockets. She asks for our order, Daddy lists off my favourite item on the menu, “Burger. Fries. Big coke.” The girl nods, he makes his own order and she leaves. He turns to me. “Did I get it right?”

“Yeah... Random question.” He nods for me to continue. “If you find a letter in one of your patient’s bag, will you take it?” His brows scrunch, I quickly add, “You were not spying, you just saw the letter by chance and you were afraid some other doctors would find it. Would you take the letter?”

He nods slowly as if he’s still contemplating the answer. “I guess I will, to protect the patient’s privacy.”

“Will you read it?” He shakes his head, my insides burn with guilt. “Not even out of curiosity?”

“No. The point of taking it is to protect his privacy, reading it is the opposite of that.”

“Um... Okay.” That’s not what happened in my case. Curiosity got the best of me but I didn’t do it to hurt his feelings. “It makes sense.” He eyes me like he knows this is more than a random question but the waitress shows up at the right time, effectively cutting off this conversation. “Look, our food is here.”

I dig into the fries first, dipping a potato into the ketchup before pushing it between my burger. Daddy’s face wrinkles with disgust but he doesn’t say a word. He’s the one missing out on this deliciousness.

“How will you know if you like someone?” I ask after the third bite of my burger-fries.

“You will just know,” he murmurs when his pancake drenched in syrup is almost gone. “Do you like someone?” I choke on my burger. My eyes tear up and he pats my back. Passing my drink to me, he waits for me to take a sip. “Is this about a boy?” I pale. “Do you like someone from school?” he adds.

Ben's face flashes in my mind, I shake my head. Something must be wrong with me if I'm crushing on the guy who punched me twice. "No." His lips curve in a teasing smile, I cough. "I don't like anyone."