

BadBoy 25

Chapter 25

Great job

I fiddle with my new bracelet, trace the tiny letter beads with my name on it while waiting for my turn. Miss Jota takes note as Whitney performs. Much to my annoyance, Whitney's red pointed heels connect hard to the wooden floor of the stage, producing ear-scratching sounds. I focus on Miss Jota's face, trying to tell if she's pleased with Whitney's performance but she gives nothing away. Whitney finishes with a mock bow, her friends clap and she climbs down the stage. Miss Jota picks a sheet from the table, squinting at the list.

"Theresa Mower?" I raise a hand. "Your turn." My heart thumps against my ribcage, I rumple the script and shuffle to the stage. Twice, I almost trip and the girls seated behind me giggle. I release my breath when I make it to the stage, turning to face the small crowd. "You are auditioning for the role of Juliet?"

"Yes," I answer with a nod, very much aware Whitney also auditioned for that role. I must get it.

Miss Jota reclines on her seat, arms folded on the table and I gulp. She motions for me to start but the words dry in my throat. With Whitney and her friends, she was slumped over her chair taking notes while they performed. I had hoped for the same. My eyes wander to the audience, the three girls gaze expectantly and the only boy present yawns. I close my eyes, take another long breath and open them.

The words on the script jump at me when I unfold the paper, my heart beats so loud in my ears I forget the lines I memorised. Miss Jota coughs twice from the table positioned a few feet away from the stage, I offer her a tight smile followed by an apology. I will be fine. I have done this before. I can do it again.

With that in mind, I read out the first line and my shaky voice echoes. "What are you doing here?" I say to the air, pushing fear into my voice to fit the scene where Juliet finds the stranger. "You shouldn't be here." I step back as required, ramble some more lines, gesticulating and moving round the stage. Soon, I forget where I am as I am drawn centuries back into the frame of a seventeen-year-old Juliet. "Romeo!"

A cheer erupts from the audience at the end of the last scene, tearing my eyes away from the script clenched in my hand. My head dips in a bow and I wipe my palm over my jeans. The adrenaline wears off, I hide my trembling hands behind me and take in the proud smile spread on Miss Jota's face. The corners of my mouth lifts. She stands to clap for me, causing me to grow conscious as I make way down.

The only boy present hasn't stopped clapping, I can't remember his name. The only people who aren't so impressed with my acting are Whitney and her friends. I walk past them and lower myself to my seat.

"Great job, Tessa." Miss Jota sits, that big smile playing on her lips. "Great job."

Murmurs break out from somewhere behind me, I roll my eyes without giving those three ugly witches the satisfaction of turning to confirm my suspicions. They must be talking about me. Last I checked, they didn't care to be here, they were more interested in the set. Set designs, boy talks, makeup and gossip.

The boy—Curt is his name, I remember now—saunters to the stage to audition, I tune out the girls and focus on his bulky frame. With that height, he can't pass for Romeo but none of us say a word as he gets into his role. Within minutes, the auditions end, chairs are pulled back and Miss Jota claps once so we can gather around her. She's all smiles as her eyes land on our faces and I find myself smiling back at her.

"You guys did great today," she says. Curt whistles, I grin and the three witches giggle. "I'm impressed."

Her smile vanishes as she arranges the pile of unused scripts on her table. A pang of guilt hits me. I feel bad for her. The time she took into rewriting the story shows but it's a big shame we don't have enough people to appreciate her efforts. If our numbers don't increase soon, we might have to cancel the play.

"We meet again tomorrow. Same time, same place." Our heads bob as we chorus a reply, she gives us a thumbs up. As we are about to file out, she stops us with the clearing of her throat. "Whitney." The rest of us pause to hear what she has to say but Whitney steps forward. "How's it going with the set designs? Have you informed your friends?" She spares all of us a glance, picks a script from the pile to wave it at us. "We need the numbers," she says in a pleading voice, "these scripts won't read or act themselves."

Whitney's hand shoots up. "My friends will be here tomorrow." She throws me a pointed look, I wink and she rolls her eyes. I sigh as she pulls out her phone to show Miss Jota what I assume will be set designs, they converse in hush tones for a moment. In a loud voice, Whitney says, "What do you guys think of this?"

We cross over to them, she hands her phone to us so we can take a look and pass it round. A picture of a stage done with cardboards and colourful cut-outs fill her screen, I purse my lips, unwilling to admit the

design looks good. She did her homework right. Miss Jota crosses her arms over her flat chest, foot tapping into the floor in impatience as we take our time to analyse the designs. Our eyes meet and she smiles softly at me. My chest swells with pride and I look away. I think I might be her favourite student.

“I like the design,” I say as Whitney grabs her phone from Curt. “It suits the play.” The others murmur their agreement, Miss Jota dismisses us for the final time and we exit the hall in pairs. Curt sticks to my side because we are easily the perfect misfit. We are quiet as we jog down the hallway and burst out the backdoor. A gust of wind lashes at us, I shiver and skip down the stairs. “You did a great job back there.”

“Not as great as you did,” he replies, mimicking my character. I laugh, he flashes me a grin. His hands slide into the pockets of his grey shorts. “I don’t think I’ll get the role. I should have auditioned for someone else,” he says with a forced indifference but I keep mute. He might be right but we don’t have the numbers or the options to pick who we want. “But you, Tessa, you killed it. Damn. You did a great job, Juliet.”

A strangled sound escapes my throat, he looks at me and chuckles, I am not used to praises from others. “Thank you.” Kicking pebbles out of my way as we continue down to the parking lot, I stop by my car, expecting him to walk past me to one of the cars but he stops and I am prompted to ask, “Need a ride?”

“If you don’t mind,” he replies. My lips twitch, I am reminded of the person I gave a lift last time. I had to convince him even though it was obvious he needed my help. My heart flutters at the thought of the blue-eyed jerk, Curt snaps a finger in front of my face and I offer him a sheepish grin. He’s far different from Ben. Short, cute and chubby. And why am I thinking of that ass again? Gosh. “Back to earth, Tessa.”

Fiddling with the car fob, I hit the red button and a beep follows. Curt winks at me, I stifle the urge to roll my eyes as he moves to the passenger side. Instead of joining him, I remain standing by the driver’s side without opening the door. Granted, a lot of guys don’t talk to me because I spend most of my time in Maria’s shadow but I have a type and it’s not Curt. My inner voice teases me at the mention of a type, I ignore her but she mocks me with the name I refuse to mention. I join Curt in the car to see he has already raided my cookie stash.

The fuck?

“This tastes so good,” he says, revealing teeth stained with chocolate chips. I grimace and he digs into another cookie, munching loudly. He didn’t even ask for my permission. “Did you make this yourself?”

I start the car without replying the chubby fuck. What if the cookies are poisoned? The sound of a bike cuts through the still air and I slow down as Ben's bike comes out from the other side of the parking lot. Ben notices my car and pushes his visor up. Our gazes lock and a thrill runs down my spine. I wave at him, happier than I should have been to see him. He scoffs, looking beyond me to see the person in the car.

His eyes return to mine, I lower my hand hanging in the air and tighten it around the steering wheel. The engine of his motorbike punctuates the silence, he drives past my car without a word or glance at me. I slide down the car seat, releasing my breath. I don't know why I thought we were cool. I don't know why I thought the ride I gave him made us partially friends. His reaction stung, he could have at least honked.

A song blasts through the radio, I yelp and Curt laughs, reminding me of his unwanted presence. "That was hella awkward, Tessa. But that guy is too arrogant," he says. I ignore him and hit the brakes. I shouldn't have offered him a ride, he has no manners. Still simmering, we exit the school gate with the sound from the radio filling the silence.