

BadBoy 36

Chapter 36

Eleven

Outside is less noisy, no one notices me on the gravel path. Maria's car is gone. My ride home is gone and I am not with my phone. Emotions clash inside me, tears fight to come out but I push them back.

I don't need to cry, I need to find a way to get home in one piece. With that in mind, I start walking.

The distance seems to increase the further I walk, my only company is the street lights lining the walkway. The itch worsens, I shiver and sniff as the cold air lashes at me.

This night was a mistake.

The powerful sound of an engine cuts through the air, a motorbike rolls to a stop beside me but I continue walking.

"Why you out here looking like a corpse?" Very funny. I force one foot in front of the other, urging my body to cooperate. I am alone on this street, anything can happen. My heart jumps to my throat as the rider continues at my pace. I refuse to look at him, my eyes focus on the pavement, on getting the itch under control. "Juliet, it's me. Are you okay?"

At the mention of that name, my head rounds to his face and my brain finally registers his voice. Ben. I almost cry in relief. I hate him but he's a welcome sight. "No," I say, shivering like a wet leaf. "I need new clothes." He stares at me like I grew another head. Tears fill my eyes. "I need help." I tug on my costume to reveal the welts on my skin. "Please."

The itch worsens, I slap the base of my neck to ease the throbbing and he frowns. "Climb on-board."

My brain shuts down, I stare at his bike and back at his face. "I have never been on a bike before."

"There's a first time for everything. Climb or you will freeze to death out here." Is that concern I hear in his voice? Mustering courage, I slide onto the bike, almost choking him with my arms around his waist.

He spares me a glance, I look away. "Easy, Juliet." His words elicit a small smile from me, I almost forget about this night. "I can't breathe."

I ease my grip without fully letting go. It's difficult to hold on while trying to avoid ruining his jacket with my smell. We arrive at a duplex in silence. There's no time for questions as Ben ushers me into the house. I jump into the shower, scrubbing my body until I am sore. When I'm done, I remain there with water dripping down my body and arms tight around myself.

I need a towel. I need new clothes.

On cue, a knock sounds and Ben's head pokes inside. "I am coming in. I got you something to wear."

Words stick in my throat, I simply nod. Steam from my bath heats the shower's glass, providing me with some decency but I am still shy and I refuse to look his way. His head is cast down as he drops a towel and some clothes on the toilet seat. As soon as the door clicks shut, I scramble to change.

A smile touches my lips at the scent that hits me. The sweatpants smell like him, even the shirt, I hum a familiar tune as I pull it over my head. Dumping my costume into the trash can, I tiptoe outside, leaving a trail of water in my wake.

The house is silent as I make my way through the darkness to the living room. A figure is slouched on the long couch in front of the TV showing the highlights of last week's game, I blink and he is gone.

What? Where is he? I stagger backwards, my pulse quickens as the TV goes off. Someone taps me, I jump and a scream tears through my lips.

"Gotcha," a voice says behind me. The lights come on, my anger ebbs at the sight of a grinning Asher by the switch. I straighten up as he starts towards me, trying to put my racing heart in control. "Did I scare you?" I shake my head. The little demon scared the shit out of me. "Liar. You screamed."

We both laugh as he leads me to the couch to sit and my eyes wander to the stairs that disappear into a curve, expecting Ben to appear any moment now and pull us apart. Asher mutes the TV and folds his hands under his jaw, eyes over me like a hawk.

“How are you now? Benny says you couldn’t come to my game because you were sick. Why were you sick? I missed you. Will you come to my next game? It’s next week.” Guilt washes over me, I nod and he flashes me a smile. Glancing at my outfit, he says, “Why are you wearing Benny’s clothes?”

Okay, time to leave. “Where’s Benny?”

“Inside?” We fall into a comfortable silence, I remain standing and out of place. My eyes roam their living room. It is smaller than ours. The only pictures on display are that of Ben, his brother and their awards. Nothing of his parents. No Mum, no Dad. “Tessa, are you leaving?” Asher pouts, I steel my heart, prepared to turn down any of his requests. “Don’t go yet.” Just like that, my resistance goes up in flames. I sit and he beams. “Benny liked his cake. He kept talking about it and he brought some home for me. I like your cake. You are a good chef.”

With Asher rambling, there’s no chance to reply but I manage to correct him. “Baker.”

His cute face scrunches, lines appear on his smooth forehead and my heart does a flip. I should ask Mum if she’s truly done with child bearing, I want a younger brother. I love my big brother. He tries his best to stay in touch with me but it feels like I’m an only child sometimes.

“Huh?” Asher asks. “What’s a baker?”

“Baker is what you call someone who makes cake. A person who bakes,” I explain. “A chef is someone who cooks.”

“Can you cook?” Not so much but I nod. With that intense look, I dare not disappoint. My reply pleases him, he pushes the throw pillow separating us so our knees touch. “Can I call you a baker chef?”

My chest vibrates with laughter, I tell him, “You can call me whatever you want, Champ.”

Someone—I believe it’s Ben clears his throat, I jump to my feet and Asher’s palm slips into mine. Ben’s eyes lower to our linked hands, I smile at the realisation he’s wearing the same grey sweatpants as me. Unlike me, he didn’t need to roll the waistband of his about a hundred times for it to fit his waist.

Water coats Ben's forehead, rolling down his temples. I steal another peek at him. Did my smell affect him so bad he had to take a shower? My breath catches in my throat when he lifts the hem of his tank top to wipe his face, I release Asher's hand to fan myself because the place becomes too hot.

Who turned up the heat?

That V line. Does he sleep in the gym? I also workout but I only have a flat tummy. I swoon at the sight of his sexy body, wetting my lips at his abs. He has eight fucking packs, I thought the normal number was six. How did I not notice all of this during our fight? Right, I was busy trying not to get beaten to a pulp.

"Pick it up," Ben whispers.

Stylishly wiping the drool at the corner of my lips, I blink, forcing myself out of my silly thoughts. The dude helped me out, the least I can do is thank him instead of ogling him shamelessly like I have never seen a hot boy before. Have I? Ben has to be the hottest guy I know.

My eyes flit to his face, he lifts a brow. "What?"

"Your jaw. It dropped when you were staring." My mouth snaps shut and my cheeks turn red. The idiot snickers. "Liked what you saw, Juliet?"

"Nope. Nothing to see there," I reply with an apathy that makes me proud, a bit sad he covered his abs. It must feel good to lie on that broad chest, kiss those pink lips and be cuddled by those strong arms.

What will it take to have that? Okay, stop it. The reason I am here in the first place is because of him. Somehow, everything always leads back to him.

Ben belongs to Olivia.

"Thank you for helping me," I whisper. My hand blindly reaches for Asher's, I don't like the way his brother is gawking at me. I don't see Asher and it takes another second for me to realise we are alone. The fact sends my heart slowing, I bite my lower lip and his eyes narrow. "Um, I have to get home."

He jumps over the couch to stand beside me, I become a million times aware of his presence. When his fingers brush my arm, I stop breathing. My knees turn to jelly when he takes my hand, by some divine miracle, I don't fall flat on my face.

Ben raises my hands to his lips, his breath kisses my knuckles. "Your hands are shaking, you okay?"

How can I be okay when he's touching me? Ben darts to a remote, the air-con goes off and I am forced out of my daze. Who turned on the air-con in this freezing weather? He tugs me towards the foot of the stairs and yells, "Champ, we are leaving." Asher screams back at us to wait but Ben refuses. Urging me to the front door, he whisper-yells, "Go, go, go. Fast, Juliet. I don't want him out of bed."

The urgency in his voice pushes my feet forward, we dash out at the approaching footsteps. I am laughing hysterically when Ben locks the door behind us only for Asher to start pounding on it.

He groans, I resist the urge to ruffle his hair and comfort him. "Go to bed, Champ," he says to the door.

Another knock. "No." Knock. "I want to see Tessa." Knock. "Tessa, tell Benny you want to see me."

Ben covers my mouth and whispers, "Champ, she's not here."

My eyes widen and he shrugs. Ben, the liar. Asher eventually leaves and we saunter to his bike without a word. I notice our hands are still connected. Ben does too and he releases me. An awkward silence settles over us but I miss his warm hands.

"It's past his bedtime, that's why I didn't want him to come with us." He looks everywhere but at me.

I don't know what to say so I nod. "Your mum, where is she?"

"Out." Ben moves to the curb supporting his bike, I follow behind him because I am not ready to leave. Running his fingers over his sweatpants, he says, "You went to Nate's party?" I nod. "What happened?"

"Your girlfriend. She doesn't want me around you."

A moment passes, I wait for that mocking laughter but he doesn't laugh. A strange emotion fills his eyes, he says, "She's not my girlfriend." I roll my eyes, Ben's face grows serious. "Olivia is not my girlfriend."

"Hmm." I tuck my hands between my legs, offering him a tight smile. I don't believe him but I don't want to argue or ruin this evening. "You two broke up?" He shrugs, I kick him and he responds with a laugh. If she came to the party with Noah, maybe he's telling the truth. But having a boyfriend has never stopped Olivia from flirting with other guys. I sneak a glance at Ben. "Maybe because you are a terrible kisser?"

"Am I?"

The playful note in his voice encourages me to add, "I wouldn't know, I'm not the one you kiss—"

He cuts me off with his lips. My mind blanks, then my thoughts rush back with a violent intensity.

Ben is kissing me.

What do I do?

Do I use my tongue? What about my hands? How should I act? Think. Ben nibbles on my lip when I remain unresponsive, a low growl escapes him and I melt against his chest. My eyes close, I follow his lead, kissing him back clumsily, sucking on his lip to the best of my ability. He pulls away too fast and my heart clenches. We miss him and his lips.

"So?" he says, eyes gleaming with mirth. I cough. I must look a mess, just one kiss and I am speechless. Ben appears okay, why wouldn't he? He kisses girls like Olivia regularly. I put some distance between us, he pouts and covers it. He traces my lips with his thumb, sparks dance beneath his finger and my heart pounds in my ears. Olivia will kill me but I want us to kiss again. "How did I do?" Confused, I gulp. My mind is still muddled by the kiss. He is so close. "You said I might be a terrible kisser, so, how did I do? On a scale of one to ten, rate our kiss."

Our kiss. I must have fallen in love with his choice of words because I lean over and kiss him again. A brief kiss that happens before both of us can process it. My eyes lock on his blue orbs. "Eleven," I reply.

