

BadBoy 38

Chapter 38

Mother Theresa

Mum must be waiting for me but that knowledge doesn't stop me from shutting the front door quietly. The living room lights are off, the stairs are illuminated by the ceiling lights on my bedroom floor. Alert, I tiptoe to the stairs. If I can get into my room, then I'm safe from her questions tonight. That woman doesn't quit and if I prove too stubborn, she will recruit Dad's help. As a team, they are harder to resist.

"Where do you think you are going?"

My boots drop, I scream until the familiar voice settles over me. Laughter echoes behind me, I let out my breath. Shit. The light comes on, I frown at my mum doubled over in laughter beside the switch. It feels like déjà vu but this time, there's no Asher.

Mum strolls towards me to wrap me in a hug and my anger disappears as fast as it came. "You should have seen your face," she says. I huff and she responds with a bigger smile. "How was the party? You are early." She ushers me to the couch, tossing the throw pillows to create space for me. I offer her a tight smile she ignores. "Maria didn't bring you home? Why not?" Pressing a hand over my mouth to stifle my giggles, I shrug again. I know my mother like the back of my hand, she is trying to ease me into the main questions. "Theresa."

Her fingers poke my sides, the giggles I was holding in breaks out. I wheeze with laughter, struggling to catch my breath. I am ticklish. "Okay. Okay, Mum. I will talk." She stops but her hands are poised for a repeat should I go against my words. A poke on my side earns her a frown, the events of the evening crash down on me and I sigh. "We fought."

Surprise washes over her, her arm wraps around my shoulders. I inch closer to her. "What happened?" My eyes lower to my hands tangled in Ben's sweatpants or should I call it mine? I fight back a smile and roll my tingling lip between my teeth. "Why are you dressed in this? What happened to your costume? Where's Maria?" Her voice is an octave higher, she nudges me but I refuse to look up. I wipe the invisible dust on my knee. "Theresa Grace, start talking or I will call Maria's mother."

My mouth snaps open. I tell her everything.

From the video to the fish water to the kiss, everything I would have told my best friend. The living room falls quiet once I am done, I imagine the wheels in her head spinning. I tug on the sweatshirt, counting the seconds until she blows up in anger. She's too quiet. Mum is never quiet for this long. She hates silence and I hate her silence.

"I'll speak to Mrs Beckham tomorrow." In high school, pranks and bullies are normal. Most people never get their parents or teachers involved, I wouldn't have but I am tired of having to endure it so I nod and she squeezes me in a hug. "You should give Maria space. She has every right to be angry."

Maybe she does but it's not my fault and she shouldn't have left me. If she didn't leave, the kiss would never have happened. Argh. It's so confusing. I want to be mad at her but I am also thankful she left me behind. Ben fucking kissed me.

"I know you were trying to help but she expected you to be her friend first before you were Daniel's," Mum says when I remain quiet. She pushes one leg over the sofa and my chest sags with her words. I nod. "Your loyalty lies with her first, not Daniel."

Maria is the one who stands up to anyone who so much as glares at me. She is the one who always has my back, not Daniel. Guilt chews my insides, I curl my legs under me and Mum rubs circles on my back.

"I can't believe it." My head jerks up, Mum flashes me a toothy grin. "Tessa, you kissed a boy." That's my mum, it took her so long to mention it. I bat my lashes and she shakes her head with a half-smile.

"My baby is growing so fast. Partying. Kissing. Soon you will be getting married." Hold that thought. Wait, I like it. I like the idea of getting married to Ben. Will our kids have his blue eyes or my dull brown ones? They better take after him in terms of beauty, brains and confidence. "Do you like him?" Her voice lowers like we are best friends planning evil, it makes me giggle. Words are not enough to describe how much I like Ben so I simply nod. "Next time, invite... What's his name again?"

My cheeks are burning up, I cup my face and create some distance between us. "Benjamin. Ben."

"Next time, invite Ben for dinner so your dad and I can thank him for helping our daughter." Yeah, right. That's code for: so we can grill him to decide if he's good enough for our baby. "You should invite him for Thanksgiving." No, thanks. My back presses against the couch, there's no place left for me to go. I

fake a smile. “How was the kiss? Nice? Okay? I like it so much we should do it again?” The lines on my palms become attractive, my head dips to avoid her gaze. “Was there too much tongue?”

“Mum!”

She is too blunt. There wasn't too much of anything, the kiss was perfect. Mum laughs. After a series of uncomfortable questions with my cheeks turning tomato red, she allows me to leave for my room and I make sure to lock the door behind me.

Locating my phone in the dark room, I hide under the cover and bring out my phone to text Maria. Light from the phone brightens my face, I read the words I sent her over and over again, waiting for her reply.

Me: I'm sorry bestie. I LOVE YOU.

Maria doesn't reply. I sit up, lie back down, pace my room. Nothing. We have had our differences but it has never been about a guy. I am seated in front of the vanity, finger combing my hair when she replies.

BFF: Luv u 2.

Are we cool now? She didn't use emojis, she loves emojis, she always uses them. I stare at myself in the mirror. My fingers trail the collar of the sweatshirt and my mind is assaulted by the memory of our kiss.

On cue, my thumb lowers to my lips, caressing it the way Ben did. My cheeks flush, I push my hair away from my face. What are we now? Did it mean anything to him? Does he like me? Today is the nicest he has ever been to me. What if it was payback for helping him that day? That boy has an odd way of thinking.

Maybe he did it to make me think about him so I can consider his proposal to be his partner. It is working. I want every excuse to spend another moment with him. Bringing out a pen and paper, I start writing. Let hasn't replied but I need to talk to someone my age. Someone who's not angry with me.

Me: Hey, stranger. You didn't reply my last letter, are you okay? How's AJ? How are you? I would have waited for your reply but I am too excited to tell you what happened today. I went to the party, it didn't

end well but I got something that made up for it. Guess what that is? Don't bother, I can't wait another two weeks or months for your reply. *Inserts eye roll* I hope you are fine tho, this silence is unlike you.

Drum roll please I got my first kiss. I might look like I'm okay but I'm screaming. I got my first kiss. Do you know what that means? It was like the movies. Sparks. Electricity. You name it. I want to kiss him again. Everyday. That being said, I miss you and our letters. Don't ignore me again, please reply this one.

Another yawn escapes me, I crawl into bed, falling asleep with a smile on my lips. The next day, I am all smiles and giggles while preparing for school. I take two extra apples from the fruit basket, allow Mum to smother me with kisses as she teases me about Ben's shirt. I am not letting go of it. It's mine now.

The ride to school is a happy blur, I slip the letter to Let inside the novel and jog back to my locker. On seeing Maria at her locker, my excitement wanes and my steps falter. I cover the distance between us, ribs digging into the metal bar as I watch her bring out her books. I should say something, I want to but I don't know what to say. This is unlike us. She spares me a glance and walks away without a word.

I hug myself to chase the loneliness, other students dash to their classes but I remain there. A hoot grabs my attention, my cheeks pink once I spot Ben at the end of the hallway.

Holy cow.

He is wearing the same outfit as me. His blue jean is ripped at the knees, mine isn't but our sneakers and sweatshirts match.

Is this a sign? When I meet my soulmate, I would know, right? What if Ben is mine and this is the sign?

My feet push me in his direction, I don't know what I'll say but I'm happy to see him. A girl approaches him before me, she flips her red hair and I gag in my mouth. Abigail. I stand by the side, drawing lines on the floor with my foot while she blabbers about something Ben doesn't care to know. His gaze flickers to my face, my brain decides to embarrass me by flooding my mind with images of our kiss. I smile at him, expecting his arrogant smirk in return but he looks away.

Weird.

The bell will ring soon, I should leave but the part of me that glimpsed his carefree side convinces me to wait. He might be in a bad mood. His smile is tight, he nods to something she says and his chest visibly sags when Abigail goes. I occupy her position, standing in front of him with my fingers in the tiny pockets of my jeans. His smile softens.

“Hey,” I say with a smile, standing on my toes so I can reach his height. “How are you?”

Ben opens his sexy mouth but says nothing. His eyes roam my body, I instinctively take a step back at the disgust fuelling his gaze. I don't get it. He smiled, then the switch flipped. What did I do? Did I smile too much? I wrap my arms around my belly, wishing I changed out of his sweatshirt. Now I seem desperate.

“Don't get it twisted, Mother Theresa. We are not friends. You don't get to ask me how I am.”