

BadBoy 41

Chapter 41

Lover boy is watching

I am falling. My instincts kick in, I try to grab onto the wall but my hands slice through thin air. Closing my eyes, I wait for my body to hit the ground but nothing happens.

It's too calm. No, wait. I am moving. I peel one eye open.

The blue sky comes into view first, the roof is next, then a mop of brown hair with the owner squinting at me with worry etched on his face. I sit up slowly, hands stretched out to steady myself in case I fall again. I don't fall because I am on something firm. I look down, I'm seated. I'm seated on a guy's lap.

As if reading my thoughts, his hand snakes around my waist to keep me down. "What are you doing?" I whisper-yell but the sound is drowned by the stadium. They are cheering too loud. "Let... Let go of me."

"Relax, Tessa. It's me," the boy says. My brows furrow, he chuckles. "Brian. Brian McCartney."

I don't relax but I don't try to stand again. I give him a onceover, studying the freckles littered all over his nose. Only one person has this much freckle and I haven't seen him since they moved. I forget we are in the view of disapproving parents and whisper, "Brian?" I swipe a finger over his freckles. "McCartney."

Brian nods, I fling my arms around his neck, almost choking him in a hug. He was my first crush until his family moved, then I experienced my first heartbreak. I was smitten by him. His broad chest vibrates with laughter, I pull away to smile at him. He pinches my nose like he used to do and I feign annoyance.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, making myself comfortable. "It's been how many years now?"

He raises one hand. "Five?" I shake my head. "Seven?" It has been longer than that. His focus returns to the field, the countdown to the end of the match has started but I am no longer interested in the game. "Our junior team is playing," he explains, pointing to the opposition in yellow jersey. Asher's team is in blue. "I decided to tag along." I adjust my weight on his legs, his arm steadies me and he continues, "I was gonna come around to the house but I wasn't sure you still lived there. I have missed you guys."

“We still live there,” I tell him. “I missed you too.”

The final whistle blows, the crowd erupts in a thunderous cheer. People rush to the field to hug the players, I grin once I sight the scoreboard. Asher’s team won. I try to locate him in the joyous mess but it is impossible. I look to Brian, he’s smiling like his junior team didn’t just lose.

He has grown so much since the last I saw him. He is no longer the shy nerd with glasses I knew and he would fit here in Broadway Heights with the jocks.

“Why are you on this side?” I ask. First, he is not wearing his school’s jersey. Second, he is sitting with the enemy. I mimic a magical character from one of our childhood movies, waving my invisible wand in his face. “Tell me traitor, have you come to spy on us?” He snorts. “Speak now or I’ll have your tongue.”

“No, Milady,” he replies with a mock bow and we burst into laughter. “You still haven’t forgotten, huh?”

No way I can forget my first and only play with my crush. I note Brian’s lean muscles. His biceps flex when he brushes his hair away from his face and my pulse quickens. He used to like me back then. I wonder now if he might have turned out to be my first boyfriend if he had stayed.

The crowd begins to disperse, we are too comfortable in each other’s presence to leave. Asher’s coach pats some of the players, dishing out what I assume is praises because their faces light up. I need to say hi to Asher before he leaves. He is the reason I am here.

Maybe his brother too. Where is he?

On cue, my eyes roam the field for Ben and I suck in a sharp breath when they find him. He is by the side entrance with a frown so deep it’s almost a scowl. I raise my hand to wave at my favourite jerk but my arm refuses to move. He moves into the shadow but I can still feel his eyes on me.

Why is he glaring at me?

Brian arm settles on my shoulder. “Is that your boyfriend? He’s hot.”

Very. "No but I like him." Let's words float to my subconscious, I shrug Brian's hand off my shoulders and he ruffles my hair like I am still the little girl he left behind. Looking up to him with a pout, I mutter, "He doesn't like me back so don't even ask."

"Doesn't seem like that to me." I scrunch my face. Maria said the same but I don't believe them. He leans in, tugging my hair out of its bun so it frames my face to give us a bit of privacy. His lips inch close to mine, I swallow my breath. What is he doing? My hands press to his chest. "He likes you."

Yeah and pigs can fly.

"Do you want him to be your boyfriend?" I have never admitted it out loud to anyone and the words to reply Brian refuses to form. Our lips are too close. "Play along. Lover boy is watching." My body listens to Brian, I am deathly still as his hand slides to the back of my neck. Acting comes pretty easy to me, I gradually relax and fall into the role of lovers he is trying to portray. "He's fuming," he says. Somehow, I like the idea of making Ben angry and jealous. Take that, Benny boy. Next time, don't kiss that bitch. "You can look if you want."

I turn slowly. My breath ceases at the intensity of Ben's stare. He's no longer hiding behind the stairwell. It is obvious he is watching us and he doesn't care. I almost jump up but Brian's arm keeps me grounded. He shakes his head. Okay, I am not doing anything wrong. Ben is not my boyfriend.

"Make the boy come to you," he says. "If he can't man up and let you know he likes you, he has no right getting upset when you are with other guys." I nod slowly but every thing in me wants to run into Ben's arms and explain this whole thing to him. Brian pecks me, I turn the same shade as a tomato. "You gotta relax." His tone is deliberately light so I can laugh but I can't. It feels like I am cheating on Ben and we are not even dating. I snap my gaze from the spot Ben was standing. "Tessa, I have to go," he whispers into my hair. "My bus is leaving."

He helps me to my feet, we walk hand in hand to Ben's line of sight. I die a little on the inside when he places a kiss on my forehead and draws me in for a long hug. He's good at this shit.

"Make him come to you, okay?" he murmurs, keeping his lips close to my ear like he is whispering sweet nothings. "He likes you or he wouldn't be that bothered. Trust me on this. I'm a guy, I know when a guy likes a girl." That line sounds too familiar but I manage to smile. Brian straightens up, pushing his phone into my hand so I can input my digits. I return his phone, he bops my nose one last time and winks. Is Ben still watching? I am a horrible person. "Take care and you better let me know when you two start dating."

Brian leaves before I can reply, I am still smiling as I start towards Asher and his silently fuming brother. The school bus is a few metres from them, someone shouts Asher's names and he gives him a thumbs up. My smile falters when I am a few metres from them. I direct my gaze to Asher.

"Tessa," Asher cries out, tackling me in a hug that almost causes both of us to fall. He beams. "You came."

"I told you I would, Champ. Great game," I say and we fist bump.

His arms are still locked around my waist when he turns to his brother. "Benny, I want to see Samuel. Can I go?" Ben shrugs. Asher takes that as a sign of approval and dash to the bus slowing filling up with boys his age. He stops at the entrance and waves.

An awkward silence falls on us, I push one leg forward, waiting and hoping he will start a conversation. A soccer ball comes flying at a boy heading to Asher's bus, luckily missing his face by some inches. His friend claps his back and they laugh.

"That would have hurt," Ben says.

His fingers slide into his pocket, he twists so he is facing the yellow bus and I am facing him.

"I know right? I have been hit by balls before and it hurt." A bemused look takes over his face, I pinch myself. "Um, I meant soccer balls not balls." An eyebrow shoots up. He smirks. Oh, God, I'm making this worse. "You know what I mean."

He grins in amusement, the only good thing about this moment. "I don't. Enlighten me."

My cheeks are tomato red now, I push my fingers into my back pockets and bounce on my toes. "Forget I said anything. Thanks." Ben crosses his arm on his chest. "Stop looking at me like that."

Ben looks away briefly. A few seconds pass and he swivels to face me. He cocks his head. "Who was that guy?"

I hide a smile. "What guy?"

"The one you were seated on his lap," he spits out. My face crunches in confusion, he rolls his eyes and I mentally swoon. So cute. If I get a teddy, I'll name it Benny. "That jerk you wouldn't stop touching."

Someone's jealous and I like it. I school my face into an innocent mask, batting my lashes. "Brian is not a jerk." Ben's frown deepens. "He's actually a gentleman. I fell but he caught me." I grin. "He saved me."

"Yeah, saved you from yourself."

His jaw clenches, I shrug. He hasn't defined what we are, he can't be mad at me. If Brian is right, then he doesn't have to hide the fact he likes me. I like him too. I think he does too or he wouldn't care.

The awkwardness returns, my body sways lightly. The school bus is not in sight. "Are you leaving?"

"Yeah. There's nothing left for me here." The subtle jab is directed at me. I don't miss the flash of hurt that crosses his face but I don't say anything to that. Maybe Brian is right, I have to make him work for me. He hasn't even called me by my name yet. "Asher won the game, we have to go celebrate."

Liar. Asher is with Samuel. They left together in the school bus. I spread my arms, then hug myself. The weather is cool. A great topic for conversation.

"I could join you guys." I need a padlock for my mouth. What happened to making him work for me?

Ben eyes me from top to bottom, I look away when his gaze returns to my face. "You are not invited."

What? Breathe, Tessa. Breathe. It's not working.

I watch him take his first step away from me. My shoulders vibrate with anger, I glare at the most foolish and the rudest boy I have ever met.

“Is this it?” I scream at his back. He stops walking. “You kiss me once, then act like I am some piece of trash you can’t wait to get rid of. Really?” Ben slowly spins to face me and my heart breaks. “No, wait. That’s not even it. You kissed me twice where no one can see us because you are ashamed of me.”

“Juliet...”

Taking a tentative steps towards me, he holds his hands up but I am raging too hard to care. He does this every time. I have feelings too and they are hurt.

“We are not friends, remember?” I yell at the idiot. “And Juliet is not my fucking name, you moron.”

Ben flinches but doesn’t try to come closer. I am grateful for the distance because I can’t think so well around him. I make a sweeping motion across the empty field. As usual, he is only talking freely to me because we are in an unfamiliar environment. No one from school can see us here. No one knows him here. The realisation sends a new wave of anger growing inside me, I level him with a deathly glare.

I am done.

“You are blowing this out of proportion.”

Am I? He’s annoying and his smug face isn’t helping. There are so many things I want to say and my head threatens to explode from keeping it all in. He takes another step forward and I snap.

“You know what? Fuck you.” My finger stabs the air and a shiver rolls through me. “God forbid anyone sees the great Benjamin talking to someone like me. I get it. I really do.” He tries to speak but I cut him off. “I am not your type and I was stupid to think for one moment that our kisses meant anything to you.” My words catch in my throat, I take a deep breath, barely seeing him through the stupid tears that decide now is a great time to make an appearance. “I am leaving.” Spotting Asher from my side view, I start walking backwards. Why is he even here? This mess is his fault. “Make sure you tell your brother how much of an asshole you are.”