

BadBoy 42

Chapter 42

Gracie

Stupid me. Stupid tears. Stupid Asher. Stupid Ben. Stupid feelings. I pat my pockets for my keys, I need to leave this stupid place. My search comes up empty and my feet grind to a halt. Come on.

I march in the direction I came from, speedwalking to the small gate. The first place I check is the bleacher. Nothing. I pat my pockets again, refusing to believe I have lost my key. It was here with me.

How do I get home? It's getting late. My phone is in the car. I look up to the sky and groan. This is all Ben's fault. I start the sad journey to my car, head cast down, arms wrapped around myself. I don't know the first thing about picking locks. I don't even have a bobby pin. The early November chill air hits me, the tip of my nose reddens as I shuffle to my car. I bump into someone, almost falling down for the second time today and my head snaps up.

"Watch where you are going," I bark, ready to punch sense into the idiot standing in the middle of the parking lot like it belongs to his father. The person doesn't move, I stomp to his front, ready to launch into a speech when I see it's Ben. He is not moving. I tap him. "Ben." He doesn't look at me. "Benjamin."

"She's here."

Ben's eyes have a faraway look, I follow his gaze to the lot but I see nothing but a Toyota with tinted windows. His arms vibrate, I try to pry his fists open but he doesn't stop shaking. What's wrong?

"Who?" I whisper.

"Her."

Tears fill his eyes. His breathing becomes laboured but he doesn't look away from Her, whoever it is he's talking about. Fear claws my insides. I snap my fingers in his face, poke him on the side. Nothing happens.

This is not the Ben I know. I will gladly pick an asshole Ben over a scared Ben. The car is still there but it's not the only car in the lot. Tears leak to his cheek. My heart clenches and I do the most stupid thing. I kiss him.

His lips are as soft as I remember. He doesn't return the kiss. I bite his lips, willing him to snap out of his trance but he's unresponsive. As I am about to pull back, he pecks my lips and I grow shy knowing he's aware. A part of me expects him to shriek in horror knowing I kissed him but he does the unthinkable.

Ben cups the base of my neck and he kisses me back. Softly, gently at first as if he's seeking consent and I provide it with a moan. Tingles travel from my lips to my feet, I kiss him back with more urgency. He picks up the pace, kissing me like he needs me to survive and goosebumps erupt on my arms. My body melts into his, my fingers slide into his hair. I massage his scalp, loving the sound it elicits from him.

We break apart for air, his forehead touches mine and a smirk flits across his lips. Every single wrong he has done to me rushes back, I want to step back but the vulnerability in his eyes keep my feet glued to the floor. Where does this leave us now?

My lips part, he whispers, "Shhh. Don't ruin the moment."

I nod, I can't do otherwise. He laughs, I laugh, soon, we are both laughing like we inhaled laughing gas. He gives me his hand, I lace our fingers and we head to my car in silence. He stops beside the driver's side, I am about to let him know I lost my key when he produces it from his back pocket.

"You dropped this." I accept it without meeting his gaze. "I was coming to give it back."

"Thanks." He pries the key from my hand and opens the door, ushering me in. I am relieved and excited when he slides into the passenger seat. My hand closes around the wheel, I focus on the blue walls in front of us until I regain control of my breathing.

Ben is in my car.

"Who was that?" I whisper.

We sit in comfortable silence. I dart a gaze outside. The tinted car is gone. Whoever that was, she scared the shit out of him. And I don't like it. I don't like the sinking feeling that settles in my belly. Ben is never scared of anyone. I have watched him fight guys twice his size and he showed no fear.

"Theresa," he whispers. My head jerks to him thinking he's calling me. His hands are flat against his knees. "Her friends call her Tessa. I hate that name. I hate her." I am not sure he realises what he said. He clenches and unclenches his fist, staring at them for so long a chill creeps down my legs. I cough and he looks up. "Thanks for helping me."

"No biggie." I wipe my sweaty palms over my jeans. Are we going to talk about her? Our argument on the field? Why does he hate the name? Is that why he dislikes me? I share a name with someone he loathes. "Grace. My middle name is Grace. You can call me Grace if calling me Tessa makes you uncomfortable."

"Grace," he says like he's hearing the name for the first time. I like how uncertain my name sounds coming from him. It might take some getting used to. "Grace." I nod. "I like Grace, it's way better."

That comfortable silence descends on us again. I should start the car, ask him to leave or check on his brother. My job here is done but I don't want to ruin the moment. His thumb brushes my cheek, my tongue wets my lips and Ben repeats the action with his forefinger, keeping his eyes trained on me.

"I'm sorry I made you cry." I offer him a tight smile. It doesn't matter how many times he apologises, it won't change what happened between us. He doesn't like me and I can't bring myself to be mad at him. I'll rather be hurt than be with someone who's forced to pretend they care about me. I gulp when he unbuckles my seatbelt. "I'm not ashamed of you."

"Don't." He retracts his hand, a pathetic sigh leaves me. I miss his touch. This proximity is messing with me. I close my eyes to garner courage to speak out. If he continues staring, I will never get this off my chest. My hands shake so I hide them between my legs. "Don't lie to me. Don't act like you care. You don't. You don't have to explain yourself, I get it."

Instead of looking at him to gauge his reaction, I gawk at the wall. I am doing this for myself.

“You don’t get it. Please look at me.” My eyes clench tighter, he sighs. “Olivia was in the hallway, she was watching us. I didn’t want to give her another reason to bully you. You said it yourself on Halloween night. She told you to stay away from me. Grace, I’m not ashamed of you, I was trying to protect you.”

Protect me from what he started? My head rounds to him, he grimaces. I exhale. “You can’t protect me if you are part of the problem. If you had not punched me in the hallway, none of that shit would have happened.” My hand shoots up, I raise two fingers. “You punched me. Not once but twice and now you talk about protecting me? Get over yourself. If you want to protect me, tell her to stop being a bitch.”

Still fuming, I roll down the window to let out the bad air. I don’t try to hide my irritation and my foot drums into the floor. I might like him but I am not stupid. Ben opens the door and puts one leg out.

He doesn’t leave. “I didn’t see your bike.”

“It’s at the mechanic.”

I insert the key in the ignition. “Where’s Asher?”

“Went with the bus, he’s sleeping over at Samuel’s.”

A moment of uncertainty passes between us. I might regret this but I still say, “I’ll give you a ride.”

“You don’t have to.” I spare him an angry glance. He frowns. “Gracie,” he calls out. My heart flutters, I forget every reason to be mad at him. “I am sorry.” He jams the door close and hoists me on his laps. His big hand cups my face, I lean into him and sigh softly. “You were not fair to me that night.”

The only night we talked was Halloween night and I was more than fair. I kissed him. We talked, we were cool. Wait, he’s not talking about that. He’s talking about our match. “It’s a game. I had to win.”

“Yeah,” he says but I can sense he’s holding back. I palm his face, loving the way his stubble tickles my skin. He is usually clean shaven but I like this look. Ben pouts, I peck his lips. I want to know what makes him tick, what makes him laugh. Why he does the things he does. “We should get going.” His hand slips around my waist, I raise my brows. He smiles. I love and hate his smile. “Thank you for the cake.”

I freeze. "You knew?" If he knew, why did he kiss her?

He shakes his head and I nod. "Found out yesterday. I overheard you and Asher talking but I never got a chance to ask him." He drags a hand through his hair, a rare smile touches his lips. I squirm on his lap. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"You kissed her and you looked happy to see it was her. Didn't want to ruin the moment."

His eyes find mine, he hooks a finger under my jaw. "You were jealous." I nod. "Is that why you cried? You snapped in Calculus class." I hate his brain, why does he have to remember? I nod again. "Sorry."

"Don't be."

He frowns. "I should be. I'm sorry I made you cry. I'm sorry I punched you."

Oh, Ben. He sounds so sincere and remorseful. But it doesn't matter. This won't work. I take a deep breath. My hands drop to the space between us.

Finally working up the courage, I mutter, "Look, we can't keep doing this. I like you and you don't like me back, it's fine." No, it's not. Fine lines appear on his forehead, I think back to our last encounter in school and the rest of the words rush back to me.

"I can just drop you off and we will pretend today never happened. You don't have to talk to me in school and I won't even get mad. We're not friends so that's okay." I know I am rambling but I can't stop. I don't even have the confidence to look him in the eyes as I say this. I am talking to the car roof. "People like you and people like me can never be friends, it's expected and I don't expect it to..."

I don't finish my statement. Ben kisses the rest of the words out of me. I groan against his lips. Why does he have to be such an awesome kisser? He breaks the kiss before I have time to process it.

Smiling, he says, "I like you too, Gracie."

