

BadBoy 44

Chapter 44

I'm his Gracie

I can't stop thinking of Olivia.

Chill air blows in through the opened window, I wrap an arm around myself as Abigail darts a murderous glance at me for the umpteenth time. If she's so mad Ben chose to be with me, why can't she take it up with him? Same with Olivia. If she wants me to stay away from Ben so badly, why can't she tell him that?

What happened to girl power? Why must we girls hate each other?

"Then X gives you five." Mr Sam's voice jolts me out of my reverie.

He scribbles on the board, rambles some more about X. I don't think anyone is paying attention since he has repeated the same thing twice. A paper plane hits my temple, I narrow my eyes at the sender and Ben winks. My cheeks turn a shade darker. How did I land him? Ben motions for me to pick the plane at my feet. I delay for a nanosecond to get a reaction from him. He clasps his hands and juts his lower lip.

A smile springs to my lips at the content of his note. I waggle my finger at him. He is too sweet. So unreal.

The note says: Are you okay? You look lost.

I push the doubts creeping up on me. People change. They deserve a second chance but what made Ben change his mind about me? We didn't start talking until this semester and it never ended well. Was it the cake? He was pretty excited about it. Taking out my pencil to put down a reply to him, I giggle when he makes kissy faces to me, slapping one hand over my mouth to avoid attention on us. I really like him.

"Yup. I'm okay," I write. I don't want to worry him on the first day of our relationship. He winks again, his hair falls over his eyes and he flicks it off. I like this look but he needs a haircut. "The class is boring."

I pass the note to him like a normal person but Ben being Ben does the opposite when he sends his reply. I flip him the bird, he joins his hands together and places them on one side of his chest to form the shape of love. My heart skips. Is he in love with me?

Love. It is too strong a word and we have never used it. Love takes time to form, right? He can't love me. I don't think too much about it. Well, I try not to but my lips stretch into a small smile. Love.

Ben: Yes. So boring. I wish we could get out of here. I want to kiss you again and again.

Giggles sputter out of my lips, abruptly dying when I lift my head to Mr Sam glaring at me. His hand shoots out for the note, Ben grimaces and subtly shakes his head. I will die if Mr Sam collects it.

"Theresa Mower, the note or you can forget Calculus for the rest of this semester." Sweat breaks out on my forehead and my palms become more clammy. Some heads turn to us. Mr Sam stretches his hand to me like I owe him money. "You are wasting precious time. We don't have all day."

Squeezing my eyes shut, I drop the note on his palm. He stalks back to the front. Ben gives me two thumbs down and my heart rolls to my belly. Is he going to break up with me after this? He cannot.

What am I saying? We are not even a couple. Wait, we are. He called me his babe. I'm his Gracie.

The class falls quiet as Mr Sam scans the rows of students for another scapegoat. There's only a little gap between me and Ben but it seems to grow wider when he refuses to look at me. I fold my sweaty hands on my legs as Mr Sam's finger moves left and right until it settles on Abigail. The creases on his trouser are sharp enough to cut wood, he smoothens it and nods twice. He invites Abigail forward and my breath halts in my throat as she sashays out.

He hands the note to her. "Read it to the class."

My cheeks pink. I hide my face in my palms when she starts reading. A lump forms in my throat each time she stresses on a syllable. She didn't have to mention the word, kiss twice. Ben's aloof attitude only increases my worries, I lower my gaze to my sneakers. The delight in her voice is clear, the witch is so excited to embarrass me.

An awkward silence punctured by muffled giggles fills the air after she's done. My cheeks are a darker shade of red. My eyes locate the formula calendar hanging on the wall. I chew on my lips.

"Who wrote this?" Mr Sam asks.

The class erupts in laughter, some steal glances at me and I slip down my chair. I have never been in detention. Never been suspended. But I know one of that will happen if I say something so I seal my lips.

"I did." I cast Ben a wary look. He can't take the blame alone. I am also to blame so why am I mute? "It's rehearsal for drama club. I am Romeo and Gracie is Juliet," he explains. My eyes widen, I shake my head furiously. He's the only one allowed to call me Gracie, the class doesn't have to know. "I mean, Mower. Miss Mower is Juliet."

Damn. Theresa or Tessa must have hurt him so bad for him to hate the name this much.

"Drama club?" Mr Sam reiterates and Ben nods. The tips of Mr Sam's ears darken with rage. I make to talk but he continues, "You are rehearsing for drama club in Calculus class?" At that, Ben has nothing to say and I feel like an asshole for peeking behind my fingers. No one speaks. Mr Sam stops between a row of chairs. "Principal's office. Now."

The class is eerily quiet after Ben leaves. I can hear their unspoken words, the hate directed at me. Guilt weighs heavy on my chest, I shrivel when Mr Sam turns to me. He says nothing but his disappointment is palpable. For the rest of the class, I behave. Even when he starts droning about the same things, I listen.

When the bell rings, I wait for everyone to leave. I am halfway across the class when Mr Sam calls me.

"Theresa." I stop. He drops the notes he's arranging on the desk. "Be careful." Surprise must have been evident on my face, he adds, "Don't get carried away by..." He points to the door. "By him."

Him is Ben. "I won't."

For the rest of my classes, I am distracted. Once the bell for lunch rings, I bolt out of the class.

Maria is by the door waiting for me. A frown forms on her lips, I try to play things off by placing an arm on her shoulder but she shrugs it off. She flips her hair over one shoulder as we brush past students.

“Spill.”

I look around. The hallway is bustling with girls and boys rushing to the cafeteria. “Not here.”

Maria drags me to the door of the janitor’s closet. She shoves me into the small space that can barely contain both of us. The place is pitch black, I can’t see past my fingers. I can’t even see her.

A foul smell infiltrates my nostrils and I am forced to plug my nose. “Maria, not here.”

“Agreed.”

We stumble out and take a gulp of clean air. Her hand clamps down on my wrist like I will escape. “I don’t understand why the kiss is not on BG,” she says. “It should be the highlight of the day.”

It would have if Olivia doesn’t control what is posted on the site. Anonymous my foot. We all know it’s her or at least we pretend not to know. It doesn’t bother me. I have Ben and she doesn’t.

The cafeteria quietens once we step in. It might be my imagination but they all stop what they are doing to check me out. My palms moisten. Someone claps and everyone snaps out of their trance. I throw a look over my shoulder to see Olivia. No surprises. She hates when the attention is on someone else. Where’s my Ben?

Speaking of Ben, he struts into the cafeteria like the handsome jerk he is. My cheeks colour, Maria sighs again. “Snap out of it, Theresa Grace Mower. What was that you said about not having a crush on him?”

“Maybe I lied.” We join the slowly moving line to get our meal. With the tray pressed to my chest, I say, “It was only a teeny weeny bit of crush that blossomed.”

“Into what?” She wrinkles her face like she’s disgusted at the thought of us together. “Since when?”

I shrug. Ben and I are different, I know that already but she's not being supportive. "Since I don't know."

We grab our meals and find a seat farthest from Olivia. The long bench by the window overlooking the field. Ben has not noticed me and I don't know how to feel. Is he even looking for me? I take a bite of my chicken and swallow tight when I sight him at Olivia's table. My chest constricts. I grab the can of soda and I don't stop drinking until it's empty.

I release a belch that has Maria frowning at me. But I don't care. He is at Olivia's table, not ours. Why?

"We kissed after the party," I say, eyes on the back of Ben's head. Why isn't he looking for me? Maria's jaw drops. She doesn't say anything and I fear a fly will enter her mouth. "I was stranded and he picked me."

Remorse flits across her face, I offer her a small smile. It is a good and bad thing she left me. Maria stabs her fries, I pick at my shredded chicken. I was so hungry but not anymore.

"Soo, are you two together now?"

"He called me his Gracie."

"I noticed," she cuts in.

"And he called me his babe," I finish.

Setting her cutlery on the table, Maria crosses her arms under her boobs. "That doesn't make you his girlfriend."

It does, doesn't it? She picks a fry from her plate. My eyes wander to Olivia's table again. "Tessa, if you two are not dating, then what are you doing?" I open my mouth to answer and close it wordlessly. "Ben punched you twice. How can you forget that?"

Doubts begin to creep in again. I grip the edge of my table. "He apologised," I breathe out. This Ben is not the same person who punched me. He won't repeat that. I feel it in my guts. "He is really sorry."

"He didn't ask you out, Tessa." Why won't she stop talking? I don't need her to dissect our relationship. "Why do you keep kissing him? Look at them, does it look like he cares?" I guess him sitting at Olivia's table instead of mine sends the wrong message but we can't make a decision based on that. "Do you want to get hurt?"

"No." Tears prick my eyes, I look away from the picture perfect couple at the other end. Maria offers me a smile. "I guess I thought he really liked me."

"If he does, he's not doing a good job of showing it."