

## **BadBoy 46**

### Chapter 46

#### **If you hurt her**

I was late for class but the moments with Ben were worth it. I step out of the school building as the last bell of the day rings, head bent over my phone. My annoyance fizzles out at Let's name on my screen. I want to be mad at him for taking this long to reply me but I want to hear from a male. He doesn't know Ben, so he might be more objective. I throw my bag on the backseat and slide up front to wait for Ben.

Let: Asking him out doesn't make you desperate.

Me: Maybe but I am not asking him out. My best friend says it's the man's job and I agree with her. I even asked him what we were and he didn't give me a definite answer. I don't want to push him away.

Let: Baby steps. Let him do it at his own pace. If he doesn't like you, he won't be kissing you that much. Boys don't kiss just any girl. I know I don't. Take this time to get to know him, kay? What if you find out he dips his fry in his latte before eating it? Then you are stuck with that kind of person as your boyfriend.

Laughter trickles out of my lips as I reread the last line of Let's text. I mentioned that I hated that once. It is almost as bad as dipping bread in your coffee. Only witches do that. Yuck. My insides tighten from laughing too hard and my hair falls over my face. Let might be right but I still want Ben to ask me out.

Me: Guess you are kind of right. How have you been?

Let: Good. Very good actually. I saw your letter. Sorry it took so long to get to it. I'll reply it soon.

His tone sounds promising, I am tempted to ask for more details. We haven't spoken in weeks and I miss my pen friend. Texting with two phones is hard. Sometimes, I forget to bring this old phone. This one is reserved for only Let. The other one has to be available always because Ben loves texting.

I sight Maria storming towards my car and shove the phone into my pocket. She knocks on my window, I roll it down and she eyes me warily, pursing her red lips as she takes in my appearance.

"Where's loverboy?"

She doesn't care about his location but I reply, "Inside. He will be out in a bit."

On cue, my eyes dart to the entrance. The cold air sends a chill through me, I open the door of the passenger side for her to get in so I can pull up the window. She flicks through radio channels to fill the silence. I don't wait for her to ask before I launch into a tale of everything. The night everything changed. Our fight at Asher's game after he saw me on Brian's lap. His reaction to knowing I made his birthday cake. She sighs a lot but never interrupts me at the mention of Brian, we both knew him.

I finish with a shaky smile, "You have to give him a chance to prove himself." That sigh again. It spurs my heart into overdrive, making me defensive. "He is not bad, I swear." She tilts her head to one side and her gaze sweeps over me. I don't like this. "Maria."

Maria stretches her hand to me. "Are you sure you are doing the right thing?" she asks. I don't know but I nod. I think I am. Ben showed remorse. "I don't trust that guy but I'll try to be nice." My heart finally slows its rhythm. I grin. "Be careful, okay?"

"I will," I say with a firm resolve.

Someone knocks on the window, I look up to blue eyes and a smile instantly takes over my lips. I hear her whisper, "Behave," but I don't want to. I have behaved for so long, I am allowed a break. I open the backseat for him to get in, he pokes his head between the two front seats and pecks me soundly on the cheek.

My fingers itch with the urge to slide my hands into his hair and kiss him properly but for Maria's sake, I behave.

"Hey, you," he says to me. His tone is less warm when he turns to Maria. "Hi."

"Hi yourself," she replies. We share a brief look and a warning flashes in my eyes. "Fine. Hi there." Her tone is monotonous like a robot in training. Maria shuts her eyes tight and says, "Okay. You know what? Let's cut this crap." I grimace. This was so not the plan.

Ben is not looking at me so I can't gauge his reaction. I cross my legs and face Maria, mouthing for her to calm down. She doesn't spare me a glance. When Ben turns to me, I force a smile to my lips.

Maria's voice drags his attention back to her. "I am only being nice to you because of Tessa but if you hurt her..." She leaves the statement hanging so it can sink in. "I'll hurt you times two hundred." Her brows knit together and I chuckle. "I swear it."

My hand crawls into Ben's hair, I tug on it lightly from the roots and he moans softly. "She will," I add.

The awkward tension between my two favourite people crumbles. Ben's eyes twinkle with mirth. "Ouu, I'm scared." Maria narrows her eyes, he lets out a laugh. "I won't hurt her." She snickers, I hide a smile at his effort to convince her. "Contrary to my past behaviour, I am a gentleman and I intend to prove it."

"We will see," I murmur.

"Gotta go, bitches," Maria says. Ben pecks me and Maria strangles the air. "Enough with the kissing."

She throws her arms around my neck in a brief hug and I thank her silently for being my best friend. Seconds later we are alone and Ben takes over the passenger seat. He opens his arms for a hug, I shake my head.

"But why?" he asks with a pout.

I start the car and drive out of the deserted lot. Since his bike is still at the mechanic, I am his ride home.

"We should go out," I say once we are at a traffic light. Ben turns off the radio when he doesn't find a channel to his liking, I push one hand out of the car and bring it back in when I remember Daddy. He will have a fit if he sees me. "What do you think?"

"Out like where?"

"A date."

The light turns green and I zoom off in silence. He doesn't say anything so I connect my phone to the car's speakers. Maria's voice filters into the air, I try not to steal glances at the handsome boy beside me.

Should I have held back?

I count backwards but miss a few numbers so I sing along to Maria songs. Electricity zaps through me as his fingertips brush my arm, I tighten my arms around the wheel. I don't think I'll ever get used to his touch.

"Your friend sings good," he mutters.

"Yes," I answer, desperate to jump on any conversation to diffuse the awkward silence. Maria is a great singer, she already knows that. She has the voice of an angel and the mouth of a sailor. But I like it. Her snarky mouth never fails to come to my defence. "She hopes to sing at America Got Talent and win."

We take the turn into the street leading to his. The streetlight reflects on the hood of the car parked in front of his house, I slow down a few metres behind the Volvo. "Big dreams. She will be popular before you know it." I reduce the volume. "Singing at big events and all that." I hum in reply. "Can you sing?"

"Not to save my life," I answer with a laugh.

Unbuckling my seatbelt to position myself at an angle that allows me full view of his face, I fold my legs under me. He pokes the car seat, then smiles.

"That makes two of us. I can't sing." The door to his neighbour's house bursts open, a child runs out and his parents dash out behind him. "That's Mikael." Ben's eyes linger on the boy who has his head cast down as his parents lips move rapidly. They must be scolding him. "He's always trying to run away from home." He redirects his attention to me, I finger comb my hair to appear busy. "Have you ever tried to run away from home?"

Did the thought ever cross my mind? No. As busy as they are, I love my parents and brother and I can't imagine a life without them. "Nope." He lifts a bushy brow. "I'm the poster child for good behaviour."

A guarded look shadows his face. "I tried to run away once," he whispers. I lean forward and take his hands to offer silent comfort. He smiles at me with a lost look that shows he's in his head, not with me. "Came back the same day." He laughs but his laugh is so sad and empty and my heart bleeds for him. There is more to his story. "Couldn't do it."

"Why not?"

His gaze meets mine. "Asher. Couldn't leave him." He smiles and the sadness is replaced with a hint of mischief. "What's the most juvenile thing you've done?" I start shaking my head but he stops me. He tugs my hand onto his lap and grins. "Come on, babe. Don't tell me you are perfect. One bad thing that can get you in trouble. It could be anything."

"Fighting," I reply. If Mummy finds out, she will have a heart attack then call Daddy right after. Later on, they will find a reason to blame themselves or beg me to know where they went wrong. Good thing they won't find out. I am quitting after the All-Rounder. "Does that count?" Ben's disappointment is obvious. I try to make up for my lack of bad behaviour by saying, "It's illegal fighting. So it counts."

"Yeah," he says with a shrug. But his tone has lost some of its excitement. "We need to start practicing," he says. "The first round is in January."

And we are in November. We will make great partners in the ring but the thought doesn't excite me as much. I open my palms, he traces the lines and a shiver shoots up my spine. "We need to."

We fall into comfortable silence. Ben pulls his lower lip between his teeth and leans back so his head is resting on the seat. His eyes clamp shut. He looks more at home in this car than me, the actual owner.

His eyelids flutter open. "Can you dance?"

"Not really," I reply, "I don't have any talents." Ben stares at me like he's about to dispute my statement but in the end, he says nothing and we engage in another staring bout. So crazy how speechless one becomes in the presence of their crush. I wipe my clammy palms on my legs. "Can you? Can you dance?"

He nods. "Yep. Very much."

Ben stares at his door and back at me. I don't want him to go. I guess he feels the same way, that's why we are going back and forth with this question and answer. Warm breath fans my cheeks, Ben grins and my breath hitches in my throat. I cup his face, feeling the softness of his skin and his smile falls.

His nose brushes mine. We are breathing the same air and the proximity muddles my brain. "Where's Asher?"

I feel the subtle shift in the air before he pulls back and grabs his backpack. "With my mum."

"Your mum?" He nods. I observe him but his face gives nothing. This is an opening to know more about him and his family so I take it. "You never talk about her." He shrugs. His nonchalance stings a bit. But I don't let it bother me. "Where's she?"

My question seems to turn him off, he props his backpack on his legs. "Out with Asher. I gotta go."

He places a kiss on my cheek before I query him. If he's home alone, why is he in such a rush to leave? He stops at the entrance of his house to wave at me, then I realise he never replied my question about a date.