

Badboy 70

Chapter 70

Always and forever

Ben hits the radio and Nikki Minaj's Chun-Li remix fills the silence. He moves his upper body to the left, then right. I honk twice, push two fingers into my mouth and whistle. He was right, he's a good dancer and he's killing it. His shoulders jerk in rhythm to the beat, he claps and resumes the body movement.

"You are a horrible dancer," I murmur. He grins, clearly seeing through my lie.

My hands wrap around the steering as I guide the car to a new lane. The ice-cream van comes into view, my car slows down metres from it. Much to Ben's annoyance, I shut off the radio and the music from the ice-cream truck filters into the car. He scowls and I bat my lashes at him like the cutie he says I am.

Ben's elbow juts outside the car, he twists his body so he has full view of me. "Is this it?"

He sounds... Disappointed? I mean, I would be too. This is nothing compared to our first date. No. I'm doing it again. I'm overthinking it. Benny doesn't care where we go as long as we spend time together.

"Yep," I say, popping the p. "Ice-cream date."

So many emotions cross his face, I stop trying to decode them and unfasten my seatbelt. Ben gets out of the car before me to open my door, a blush springs to my cheeks and his mocking laughter earns him a glare. Ben takes his seat on the hood of the car. I stretch out my arms and the chill air caresses my face.

"Babe." His hands lock around my waist, he nuzzles my neck and I shiver as his teeth sink gently into my skin. Emboldened by his public display of affection, I thread my hands into his hair. "Gracie. My Gracie."

"My Benny." He laughs against my neck and the throaty sound washes over me like ice water. I shudder and my arms lock around him. A car honks, causing me to jump and my eyes narrow at the model of the car. It is the same as Daddy's. He will ground me if he finds out I was here during school hours. "Time's up."

“No,” he says. I pry his hands from my waist and his whines increase. Another person joins the queue in front of the white truck. There’s a name on the top that’s not readable from where I am but the glow on the kid’s face as he takes a swipe of his ice-cream melts my heart. It’s so worth it. “Babe. A little more.”

Wary and reluctant, I step away from his addictive hug. “Nope.” The sooner we get our ice-cream and return to school, the better for us. I’ll feel safer there. This rebellious student lifestyle isn’t for me. “You get a kiss if you comply.” And he does. “Good boy.” I press a chaste kiss to his lips and say, “Love you.”

“Love you too but that was not a real kiss.”

“Maybe.” I don’t wait for his response, I start for the truck.

There’s a smaller queue in front of the ice-cream truck, Ben groans at the idea of waiting in line but I drag him to stand behind the brown-skinned kid in yellow bandana. We stare at each other for a few seconds, he waves at us and we wave back. Ben makes a funny face and a battle of funny faces begins.

My lips purse as my eyes roam the pictures of different flavours glued to the body of the truck. We came here once. Hayden and I. I promised myself I would come back to taste all the flavours because I can.

The attendant smiles, his head pokes out from the window of the truck. “You can pick the coffee...” My face contorts. Most times, I don’t like coffee. “The Oreo flavour will even it out.” He points to another picture of a lemon green ice-cream. “Or, you can go with this, the mint flavour. It never disappoints.”

I cast Ben a desperate glance and he shrugs. I nod at the attendant. “Okay. Mint it is.”

“What about you?” he directs to Ben.

Ben scratches the back of his neck. A pink hue stains his cheeks. “My girlfriend will pick for me.”

My cheeks turn a darker shade of red than his. I bite my lips and whisper, “Coffee and Oreos flavour.”

The attendant laughs. Ben laughs. I laugh.

Minutes later, we are on our way back to my car with our ice-creams slowly melting in their cones. I lick mine and smile. Ben is still frowning because I paid. But it is my treat. We slip into the backseat and sit on opposite ends. Our backs rest against the doors, lips widen in a grin. My heart is peaceful as we lick our ice-cream in silence. Today is one of my favourite moments.

A couple stops in front of the ice-cream truck with their kids. A boy and a girl. From their stance and the rapid movements of their lips, I assume the parents are arguing or about to. But it doesn't faze their kids.

"They were always fighting," Ben says.

I bite off a part of my cone and look away from the bickering couple. "Who?"

He flicks his tongue over his ice-cream, I do the same to mine. "My parents." My face pulls into a mask. "They weren't good at communicating. They fought too much. I don't want us to be like them."

My heart flutters. "We won't."

The couple leaves the truck. Ben rewards me with a smile. "Dad used to say he wished he walked out of the arguments instead of exchanging words with her because it only made it worse." His fingertips brush mine and a strong current zips through me. "That's why I went to cool off so I wouldn't make it worse."

A smile curves my lips, my heart feels so full I can only grin. He is always thinking about me. He loves me. I paint the tip of his nose with my ice-cream. "You did good," I state. "You are a good boyfriend, Benny."

His eyes light up. I think I said the right thing. "Thank you. I want to be a better partner than my dad."

"Partner?" I tease.

The word makes our relationship sound bigger than what it is.

“Yeah. A better partner to you.” Tears sting my eyes. Ben licks his ice-cream and smiles, unaware what his words do to me. He doesn’t need to do more. He is already a perfect boyfriend. “A better husband.”

“Benny.” My heart races so fast I fear it will shoot out of my chest. “Are you saying we will get married?”

“Of course.” His chest puffs with pride and my heart starts a funny dance. “When we are older. We will get married, have kids and we will tell them how we met.” The confidence in his voice warmly surprises me. I love him all over again. “I will tell them you asked me out and cried like a little girl when I said no.”

The perfect comeback eludes me so I stick to grinning sheepishly. He wants us to get married. He wants to be a better partner. Take that, Hayden. Silence falls on us. A peaceful silence that’s broken by him.

“Can I ask you something?” Ben says. He is chewing his cone. Bits and pieces stick to a corner of his lips and his tongue swipes over them. I chew on my cone and give him a thumbs up. “Why do you hate Liv?”

The hand holding the ice-cream to my mouth drops. “Really? You want to discuss her on our date?”

Ben takes my ice-cream and finishes it off. I want to be annoyed but I can’t because he already ruined the taste for me. I bring my knees to my chest and my jaw connects with my knees. Ben shifts forward.

He touches my cheeks and I swat his hands. He pouts. Today was going so great. When I don’t burst out laughing, he says, “All the times we fought was because of her.” No shit, Sherlock. And if he was smart, he would dump her for my sake. “I know you would have reacted differently if it was someone else.”

Maybe. But she gets to me all the goddamn time. A mention of her name is enough to rile me up.

“What is it about her that makes you so angry? Why do you hate her? Why does she hate you?” His eyes soften. “Maybe I can help. I don’t want our fights to revolve around the same person. I don’t even want us to fight.” Me too. I can’t handle our fights. He draws my legs to his laps, taps my knees. “Talk to me.”

His eyes hold mine in a trance. I take a deep breath. “I don’t think I hate her.” Ben cocks his head. “She just makes it hard to like her.” I sigh again. “And she’s pretty. And everyone likes her. And she gets all the boys. All the attention without even trying.” His frown deepens into a scowl. “You even kissed her.”

“And I regret it,” he says. His hands stop working on my feet, I whine and he continues massaging them. “You are pretty too, yunno?” Yeah, right. He is only saying it to make me feel better. “Gracie, you are.”

He nods at the rearview mirror, his hands palm my face so I am looking at my reflection. My messy hair and red lips. “Look in the mirror, see for yourself. You are pretty and smart and you bought me ice-cream.” I snicker. “No one dislikes you. It’s just hard to talk to the girl who stays away from everyone.”

“That way I won’t get hurt,” I explain. Olivia was my friend and it didn’t end well. He pulls me to his laps and strokes a side of my face. I draw strength from his touch to express my fears. “Sometimes, I feel like you will leave me for her. That you will wake up one day and realise it’s not me you love.” My chest tightens as I let out these words. He is uncovering a new layer of me and I don’t know how to feel about it. I look up to Ben. He’s frowning. “I know you love me. I love you too but I still have those thoughts.”

Fears are stupid. You know it’s not true but you can’t help thinking it until you believe it.

His arms wrap around me, he rocks both of us. “I think you’re insecure. We all are.” As if that’s a word in his dictionary. “When Mum remarried, I saw the dynamic of our family change. It scared me. Still does.”

His jaw ticks, I tap a finger to his chin until he relaxes. “So I told myself to avoid relationships. That way, I don’t have to worry about being someone’s second choice.” My heart sinks. His hold on me tightens. I sit up on his lap and cup his face. “Then you came. You annoyed me and you loved me,” he says with a smile.

He annoyed me too. Too much. But he loves me too so it makes up for all those days.

“That’s why you receive those random texts from me asking if you still love me.” It dawns on me now, it makes so much sense and my head jerks in a nod. We both have our fears. “Sometimes, I’m scared you will leave me but I try not to think about it.” I’ll have to learn that. “If I focus so much on my fears, it will ruin the good moments. It will ruin us.” Our foreheads meet. “So, relax. I love you. Always and forever.”

His hand curves to form half of a heart, my hand joins to make it a complete heart.

“Always and forever,” I add.

