

Badboy 75

Chapter 75

He's gone

We win the first round.

The screams from the crowd almost destroy my eardrums as they cheer us on. My heart pounds against my rib cage, Coach waves his hands in front of my face and I slowly snap out of my trance.

Sweat stings my eyes, my chest rises and falls in tempo with my breathing. I accept the towel Coach offers me to wipe my face as best as I can under the mask. Ben flashes me a grin. We both fought but he doesn't look half as disoriented as I do. Not fair. He gives my shoulder a firm squeeze when the referee returns to the middle of the ring.

"If you win this round, then it's over," Coach screams over the noise. "Can you do that?"

I drag in a shaky breath. Everything fades to the background, it's only Coach and Ben that matters. I nod. If we win this round, we will qualify for the next match. If we don't, I can't say for sure that my body can last another fight with the twins. I peer at them from my lashes, one of them has a cut under his eye.

They catch me staring and I look away. A lady in black bikini appears in the ring, she holds a board with the number, two, written on it above her head. A burst of energy explodes inside me, my knuckles jam my palm. I jump to my feet, bouncing to keep the current flowing through me. We will win this round.

Ben and I stand side by side as per Coach's instructions. We don't fully stand on our feet, our bodies are at alert and we bounce on our toes. Using one hand to protect our sides, we get into position as the referee pushes the whistle into his lips. The hall falls silent, we jerk into action once the whistle goes off.

They attack first and we dodge them smoothly. My heart pounds in my ears. I block, attack, guard, defend, combining everything to keep them at bay. My legs and arms move in quick succession, inflicting as much damage as I can. Ben closes in on the taller twin, he fakes an attack and I swoop in for a knockout kick to our opponent's head. The crowd boos as he collapses to the ground. Simultaneously, we turn to face the only man standing in the ring.

One down, one more to go.

Without his partner, his moves are uncoordinated and we quickly figure him out. It takes only a few minutes for Ben to get him down. My heart slows its rhythm as the referee squats in front of him and begins to count. The crowd counts along with him, their excitement so thick as they scream in unison.

Ten.

Nine.

Eight.

Blood rushes to my ears, my eyes dart to the timer. If he stays down, we will win. Coach's eyes meet mine briefly, he wipes his forehead with the towel hanging around his shoulders then resumes pacing.

Four.

Three.

Two.

The twin's eyelids flutter, the crowd goes quiet and a thunderous cheer erupts when the countdown ends.

Shit. I scream and Ben plugs his fingers into his ears. I am beside myself with joy as I leap on him.

We won. We did it.

Adrenaline pumps through my veins, I almost kiss Ben until I realise how awkward it would look to see two sweaty male fighters making out in the ring. Ben slips his hand in mine and my grin doesn't falter.

A bell rings to officially signify the end of the match. One minute we are alone on the stage, the next, Coach is inside the ring with us, arms wrapped around our shoulders. The referee motions for us to walk to the centre of the ring. Ben stands on his left, I stand on the right. He takes our hands and raises them.

The winner of tonight's match is us.

Another round of screaming from the crowd begins. The commentators are speaking rapidly but I don't give a shit about their analysis. I am too stoked to listen to their professional ramble. Coach guides us to the changing room, once the door closes, Ben wrenches the mask from my face and captures my lips.

"We did it, babe," he whispers against my lips.

My eyes shimmer with tears. "Yes."

Tears shine in Ben's eyes but they don't fall, my shoulders vibrate and a sob escapes my throat. What was supposed to be a cry of joy turns into full blown tears. I break down in his arms. The tears don't stop pouring. I cry harder as he rubs my back and mutters sweet nothings into my ear. It's not what he thinks.

I have to tell him now. I couldn't do it all week with the practise and anticipation of today. Ben holds me until my tears subside. Coach comes over to give us a speech about good work and team effort. He ends his speech with a pat on our backs and exits the door. I forgot what he says the moment he leaves. His speech won't matter if I am not here next month for the next fight. We are leaving tomorrow morning.

"Babe, you're scaring me."

I throw my arms around his neck and hold him tight. "I'm just so happy. We won, Benny."

Ben nods against my hold. Seconds later, he untangles himself from me and we walk to the long couch opposite the dressing table. In silence, he helps me out of my bandage and I do the same for him.

"Where are we going to celebrate?" he asks.

The clock says I have thirty minutes until my curfew. Mum thinks we are on a date. Our last date before I have to leave so she extended my curfew by an hour. My mind fills with the best way to break the news.

“Come on, babe.” Ben shrugs out of his shirt. “You have been distracted all week. We won.” His lips spread in that proud smile. “You can relax now.” I can’t, not until I tell him and we discuss how to handle a long distance relationship. I don’t want to lose him. His thumb brushes my cheek. “Gracie. What is it?”

“Sorry.” I peck him and rush to the door of the connecting bathroom. “I have to change,” I tell him from the door. His lips pull into a disapproving pout. I bite my lips. “We will pick a location when I get back.”

With a scowl, he waves me off. I clean up and change into my initial outfit. The combat boots on my feet match my long-sleeved shirt. There’s no trace of the fighter who walked into that stage minutes ago.

I sashay to the room. Ben is already dressed. Water drips from his scalp to his forehead and his hair is slightly damp. I assume he used one of the bathrooms outside. He sits on the edge of the dressing table and stretches his arms to me. I cross over and stand between his legs. His smile is so big it brings a tiny one to my lips.

I’ll miss him.

His hand slides to the back of my neck, before he has a chance to kiss me, I blurt out, “I have to tell you something.” He stiffens. His arm falls to his side. He nods. I gulp. “You have to promise not to get mad.”

Ben’s brows furrow as his gaze rakes my face. My poor heart beats so hard I expect it to jump out of my chest. To my surprise, he holds my hands and presses a kiss to my knuckles and my insides turn to a puddle. He cannot be mad at me. We can work it out. We will figure out a way. People do it all the time.

“Is it something bad?” I grimace. On another day, this would have been great news. “Something you did?”

I lick my lips and shake my head. “Not me. My mum.”

He smiles. “I won’t get mad.”

Guilt clogs my throat as I squeeze his hands and I almost feel bad for my next words.

“Say promise, then I’ll tell you.”

Ben laughs. It’s a beautiful sound I’ll miss.

“I promise, babe,” he says with a pout. The pressure in my chest stops me from talking. His hands move below my armpit, I squeeze my arms together and he sticks out his tongue at me. I sigh. “Now tell me Gracie before I tickle it out of you.” I nod again and he smoothens my hair. “I won’t get mad. Tell me.”

To be on the safe side, I kiss him. If he gets mad, I will remember our last kiss. “Daddy got a promotion.” Pride flashes across his face, when he sees I am not as excited as he is, he straightens up. “To New York.”

Ben drops my hands. “What does that mean?”

A tear rolls down my cheek. I exhale. “It means we have to move with him.”

“Oh.” His hands sink into his hair, he stares at his feet, then his gaze returns to my face. “When?”

This is the hardest part. A lump forms in my throat, I wrap my arms around myself. He will hate me. I can feel it. My eyes shut so I don’t have to see his face when I do it, then I force the words out of my lips.

“Tomorrow,” I whisper.

Seconds blend into minutes. I can hear a pin drop in the silence that settles over us. I peel one eye open, then the other. Ben is gawking at me. His face pinches into a painful expression and my heart clenches.

“Tomorrow?” he says. I nod and more tears spill out of my eyes. “And you’re just telling me?”

My heart breaks all over again for both of us. "I wanted to tell you. I didn't know how." I try to touch him but he keeps his arm out of reach. Fear seizes me. "Benny. I don't want to go but I don't have a choice."

"Doesn't matter."

Ben draws my stiff frame into a hug and presses a kiss to my forehead. My heart skips a painful beat. I don't want to believe this is goodbye. It cannot be the end of us. He steps back before I return the hug.

With his thumb, he wipes the tears on my cheeks. "Have a safe trip, Gracie. Take care of you."

He starts walking backwards. When he reaches the door, his hand wraps around the handle and I shake my head to clear the haze. He hesitates. I don't know what I expect but it's not for him to open the door.

"Benny," I call out to him. "Please. You promised."

The door shuts quietly behind him, I stare at the door for so long until tears blur my vision.

He's gone.

Benny left me.