

Badboy 77

Chapter 77

A month or two

Mum is calling again. I ignore her call and the new text that pops in and redial Ben's number for the umpteenth time. Only now, it doesn't go to voicemail, instead, it's switched off.

My heart is heavy as I pull out of his street. His bike is out front so I know he's at home. I was hoping we could talk. Are we breaking up?

If he's mad at me for this, he will hate me when he finds out I picked NYU and other schools outside San Francisco. In a few months, I will know my fate and I didn't tell him to avoid hurting his feelings.

But it doesn't matter now.

Tears trail down my cheeks as I resume the drive home. He's not a good boyfriend. A good boyfriend would have tried to hear me out. Does he think I want to move away? He just left me. He won't pick my calls. He won't even let me see him. It's unfair. I want to be with him too and he is acting like this.

The lights in our parlour are on. Mum is most likely making finishing touches to our things, she has been up and moving since morning. She doesn't want us to forget anything since we might never be back. It's a good day for her. Too bad I don't share in her excitement. I can't even be happy for my dad's promotion.

I knock on the door. No response. Another knock, then another, before Mum finally answers.

Mum opens the door with her phone glued to her ear, she pecks my cheek and walks away to continue her phone call. I am grateful for the call because it means I don't have to lie about the inexistent date. Tonight would have been great. We are one step closer to winning the prize money for the All-Rounder.

My room looks foreign without the sticky notes on the walls and the poster hanging on the door. Boxes are stacked in a corner, the cut-out pictures of me, Maria and Ben on the mirror are gone. I dive to the bed and sink my face into the pillow. There are a few more things I need to arrange but they can wait.

Footsteps near my door, Mum's muffled voice filters into my ear but I can't make out her words. What I do know is that she's not happy with the caller. Mum curses, something she never does, then knocks.

There are two options: pretend to be asleep or get this talk over with and move on with my miserable life. Ben seems to have moved on, I can do the same. At least, he will get to be with Olivia. She can have him. I roll to my back and pull the cover over my face. If she sees me, she will know I have been crying.

"Come in," I say to the door.

The bed sinks with her weight, she tugs on the cover until I release it and a thick lump collects in my throat. I breathe through my mouth before sitting up. If she notices my red eyes, she says nothing.

"Sweetheart," Mum says.

I try to smile but my lips are in a permanent scowl. Folding my legs, I hug a pillow. Mum inspects my face and sighs. I take the hand she stretches and give it a firm squeeze. I love her and I want her to be happy.

Pushing one leg to the bed so our knees are in contact, she asks, "How did he take it?"

Mum holds Ben on a pedestal, she doesn't think he is worth giving up my future but she respects and likes him. I want it to stay that way. I take minutes to gather my thoughts, it can't be so hard to lie.

"Bad." I inspect my nails to keep from crying, when I have a better grip on my tear ducts, I continue, "He hates me." The dam breaks loose, tears pour out of my eyes. I hiccup and wipe the snot running down my nose. "He won't pick my calls. I don't know what to do. I don't want to leave without making up."

Mum opens her arms and I throw myself at her, she rubs circles on my back while I bawl my eyes out like a kid. I don't want Olivia to have Ben. I want us to get married and have kids. I want to be with him.

"Sweetheart, I don't think Ben can ever hate you," Mum whispers into my hair. She doesn't understand because she was not there. His heart broke and he looked at me like I was the worst person on earth. I squeeze her as hard as I wished Ben did when I informed him about my travel. "That boy loves you."

I break away from her embrace but stay close to her. My vision is a bit blurry from the tears, I hug my knees and ask, "Are you sure?" She pats the top of my hair with a nod. "But he's not picking my calls."

She pushes my hair out of my forehead, her eyes hold mine in a silent plea for me to believe her. I do. "Because he's trying to process this, Tessa. Not because he hates you." I nod. "It will hurt him. He won't get to see you again, not as much as before." We can try video calls. "It's a huge change for two of you."

Peering at her through wet eyelashes, I ask, "Do you think he will come around before we leave?" I don't know what I'll do if he ignores me tomorrow. I also need to see Asher. Her lips pull into a thin line, the embers of hope blooming in my chest die a miserable death. There is no hope for us. "Benny hates me."

"I can talk to him if you like," Mum offers. I wrap an arm around her and place my head on her shoulder. "But that will be in the morning, what do you think? He just needs time to process what you told him."

Other teens might refuse their mothers help, not me. I sit up and wipe my clammy palms on my legs, she tucks my hair behind my ear and I feel half as hopeful as I did before. He will pick if she calls him.

"Don't shout at him, okay?"

She chuckles. "I won't. Ben is a good boy."

And a good boyfriend. It's also my fault, I should have told him earlier but it was so hard, especially with his fears. I didn't want him to think I was leaving him. But we can work things out, we will figure it out.

"Your dad likes him," Mum says with a laugh. "I like him too. He's good for you." And he makes my life colourful. I grin broadly. She bops my nose and her face turns serious. "I need to tell you something."

The switch in her voice causes my heart to quicken its pace, I shift to create some distance between us.

"It's about tomorrow," she adds. I nod for her to continue. Nothing can beat the feeling of knowing my boyfriend doesn't want to talk to me. "There have been a change of plans. Again." She takes my hands. "Sweetheart, I'm so sorry." I gulp. It can't be that bad. "Your dad and I have been trying to sort this out."

My voice shakes when I ask, "Sort what out?"

She sighs so heavily my nails dig into my palms. "The house in New York. It is not ready."

One. Two. I am still blank. If the house is not ready, we have nowhere to stay and if we have nowhere to stay, we cannot leave tomorrow. Laughter escapes me, I snort and retract my hands to cover my lips.

She scared me. This is not bad news, it's great news.

"Your dad has been staying at a hotel." I grimace. That's a lot of money, if we join him to do that, we will go broke. "The hospital is paying but we can't join him yet. We have to stay here for a month or two."

A frown appears on her lips and my eyes dry up at the implication of her words. I can get my boyfriend. I feign sadness as she continues, she clicks her tongue when she notes my excitement.

I need to tell Ben.

"So... We are not leaving?" I ask for the sake of clarity.

"Don't get me wrong," she says sternly. "We are still leaving." I am bubbling with too much joy to stay put so I drum my foot on the floor. Mum places a hand on my shoulder and my heart does a flip. I will be with Benny. "But not tomorrow. Our flights have already been cancelled, we will join your daddy later."

Relief floods me, trampling the sadness of not seeing Daddy for two months. I replay her words in slow motion. We will leave but not tomorrow. It's not the best news but it's good news. Ben might be mad at me but he will get to see me for another month or two. I will have to tell him about NYU in that period.

"We spoke to the principal of the new school and he's fine with it," Mum says. My teeth ground in mild frustration, the man should have refused. "You will have to resume after the mid-semester break." Her words nearly dampen my mood but I refuse to let it. I nod again. "Everything will be sorted out by then."

I hope not. But all I do is smile. She laughs. "Get some sleep, Tessa," she says as she slides off my bed. With the adrenaline coursing through my veins, sleep is impossible. "We will call Ben tomorrow, okay?"

Mum holds me for a moment and pecks my forehead. Seconds after, she releases me and a feeling of loss sweeps over me. Her hugs are warm and reassuring, I want another one. Mum stops at the door.

"Goodnight."

Hugging myself, I reply, "Goodnight, Mum."

As soon as the door closes, I whip out my phone to call Ben. Switched off. I let out my breath slowly. We will talk tomorrow and everything will be fine, we have two months together. We'll make the best of it.