

## Bullied By The Badboy By Maramartha Chapter 8

He knows

By Monday morning, I am still trending. It turns out a video of me getting dunked with iced coke by the Queen B herself is far more interesting than a video of Ben pecking Olivia in the middle of the cafeteria. Either way, the entire school is having a laugh at my expense and my fame doesn't seem to be expiring soon. I don't need the spotlight, they should be going crazy over Maria's voice in the background of the original video. She sounded like an angel but no, those teenage devils will rather come for innocent me.

"Sweetheart, you are going to be late," Mum calls from somewhere downstairs.

"I'm almost done," I reply. I hear shuffling and her footsteps fade.

Another ping comes from my phone, I ball my free hand into a fist, glare at my reflection in the mirror before taking a look at the sender. This time, it is Daniel, he wants to know if I am okay. Okay? I scoff. If they are taking turns sending me messages, then they must be super worried by my silence over the texts in our group chat. I haven't had time to reply because every time I pick up the goddamn phone to do that, a message pops up from our class group chat and guess what it is? Another stupid meme.

Setting my mascara down, I smack my lips to highlight the red lipstick. How can I be okay with a sticker of my head attached to a coke bottle or the caricature pictures that have come out of the cursed video?

I am not okay but I will live. High school is fun.

Bullying in BH is normal, it goes round and it will surely reach the turn of whoever uploaded that video. The tone of the new message alerts me it's Maria, she must be outside. I am not driving today, possibly tomorrow and for the rest of this week. I apply an extra layer of foundation to cover the fading bruises, concealer comes next and I darken my brows to hide the cuts on them. When I am done, there's no indication I was a walking bruise a few minutes ago and I give myself a thumbs up for a job well done.

Maria honks again like a mad woman, scratching my ears with the irritating sound. My head pokes out of the window, I scream for her to shut the fuck up and she honks once. Adjusting the sleeves of my sweatshirt, I tug them over my knuckles to hide the bruises. The next thing I check is my necklace, it is intact. One last glance at the mirror, I shake my hair out of the messy bun and it cascades down my chest. I am dressed the same way, a top paired with skinny jeans but I dare say I look pretty today.

On my way outside, I grab an apple from the fruit bowl on the dining table and skip out, barely giving Mum a chance to gush over my makeup. She must be so proud. It's rare to see me in makeup, I got my flawless skin from her so all I have always needed is lip gloss and I am good to go. Except today.

I slide into Maria's car and close the door gently. With her eyes closed, head bobbing to the pop music coming from her radio, my best friend doesn't notice me. I count to five before raining on her parade.

"Hey," she screams when I reduce the volume. Her head jerks to me, her eyes shoot lasers at me but I don't care. We need to get to school or we will be late. I hate tardiness. "Why did you stop the music?"

Throwing one hand out the window, I hit the car while she shrieks like a banshee. “Just drive.”

“Who shoved a stick far up your ass?” she asks but reverses out of the driveway and we are soon on our way to school. The song resumes playing but at a low volume, she hits the horn when we are at a stoplight like she’s obsessed with it. The driver in front flips us the bird and she yells, “Fuck you too.”

I shake my head, I am supposed to be the one with a stick up my ass. The light turns green, Maria speeds off, I fasten my seatbelt and try to poke the roof, forgetting it’s a convertible. She belts out the lyrics of Love yourself, I chuckle. She reminds me of Sofia Vargera sometimes. Her attitude, her accent and damn, she’s dramatic too. When I can’t take her singing anymore, I shut the music. Some of us love silence.

“Why are you such a killjoy?”

“Why are you such a happy person?” I retort.

She flips her hair with one hand, effortlessly spinning the wheel with the other as we glide into the school compound. Goosebumps race down my arms as I glance at the enormous building with the name of my school in blue and gold letters. I don’t like this place and I am certain I won’t like it more today.

“Daniel is coming today,” Maria whispers.

Then it clicks. I understand why her gown is tighter, makeup more intense. I observe her as she fixes her eye makeup in the rearview mirror, my gaze falls on her chest and I giggle, she is showing cleavage too. She pushes her boobs up, I snicker. Daniel better read the signs, our best friend can’t continue like this.

“You can always tell him you like him,” I offer.

“No.” We open our doors simultaneously without getting out. “That’s the guy’s job.” My lips pull into a tight line and I nod, I will save that line for a future argument. She retrieves her bag from the backseat, I wait patiently as she makes final touches to her face. One foot is out of the car when she says, “Are you wearing makeup?” I purse my lips, looking everywhere but at her. “You are wearing makeup. Tessa is putting on makeup.” Her voice goes an octave higher, I plug my fingers into my ears and slam the door.

Without waiting for her, I jog towards the entrance. She bridges the gap in no time, undeterred by her pointed heels. Her arm sneaks around my wrist, dragging me to a stop. “Tessa, what’s the occasion?”

“None.” She throws me a cautious look but doesn’t say a word as we climb the stairs. Her heels make squeaky sounds, I push the door open, using my body to support it and she steps in. “Is he here yet?”

She peeks at her phone and pouts. “No.” Daniel might not show up and that won’t be a surprise but I don’t want to ruin her Monday morning. She must have heard my thoughts because she says, “He had better not change his mind.” Sweeping a hand over her outfit, she scowls. “This dress can’t go to waste.”

We continue down to our lockers, it feels like the first day of resumption all over again. Talk about *déjà vu*, I don’t like this. I scan the hallway, some students are at their lockers but no one is openly staring at us—me. Okay. I don’t know what I expected but things are way too calm, I expected the giggles at least. We arrive at our locker, Maria is saying something about her video, the one I managed to take after Olivia baptised me with the coke. I tune her out and bring out all the books needed for the next four periods.

The banging of the locker two rows away from mine has my head raising and the owner casts me a shy glance I pretend not to notice. I have Spanish for the first period, Maria has Greek. A normal person would jump at the idea of learning her native language with her best friend but not Maria. Do people still speak Greek? Mousey girl with her wide rimmed glasses glances warily at something behind her, then at me. I straighten up, holding my textbooks to my chest. She does the same thing twice, her gaze darts between me and the object of interest behind her. What the fuck? I roll my eyes, finally giving in to my curiosity.

I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have spun so fast. Blinking to clear the dizziness, I don't see Ben until he is right at my front. The playful Ben I shared a class with is gone, replaced by the version I met in the ring. I take one step back, he matches it with one of his and my back connects with my locker. He pins me with an arresting gaze, his hot breath fans my face and I stare wide-eyed at him like a deer caught in headlight.

What the hell is he doing? His eyes lower to my chest, I follow his gaze to my necklace poking out of my sweatshirt. Our gazes lock, a knowing glint enters his eyes and I shake my head. It can't be. He knows.

Ben knows I was at the ring Saturday night.