

Badboy 81

Chapter 81

SAS

Maria is an idiot. She won't stop teasing me. I bite a piece of my cake and a tiny smile forms on my lips as my phone lights up with a new text. Ben nudges me with his foot, I look up from my phone and my cheeks redden at the memory from Saturday. It's all I think about these days and Maria's jokes are not helping.

"What's up?" He props his hand on the table. I shrug. How do I tell him my best friend is asking naughty questions about him? She wants to know how far we went and if we intend to do the deed next time.

I don't have answers for her or myself.

"The ceiling," I say with a smile and throw an arm around his neck. He sniggers. "Just happy to be here."

Ben grunts. He watches me finish my snack while the rest of the cafeteria minds their business. We are sitting away from his friends today. I don't mind but Olivia is there. We don't talk but I still don't like her.

"Have you decided on a college?" Ben asks. His question is so random, so out of the blues it renders me speechless. I stare at him like a deer caught in headlights. He frowns. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Um... I have." His hip bumps mine and I offer him a jittery smile. The next thing is to mention the name of the school and have the conversation once and for all but I am too scared to mention it. "Have you?"

"Nope." A yawn escapes him, he covers his mouth. "I think I will stay back for one year."

If he's staying back, then I might not see him for a year. The thought hits me harder than I expect, my fingers sink into my knee until my heart stops pounding. We will figure something out. I clear my throat.

"Why?" Ben shrugs. "Benny, why?"

“I’m not ready for college,” he says. Oh. My heart drops. This is not good. I am not exactly ready but this is one step towards the future—our future. “Ready to go?” Ben asks when I finish up my meal. I toss the can and nod. He offers me his hand to help me to my feet. We start for our next class. “What school?”

The bell saves me from answering. Ben’s hand clamps down on my wrist to stop me from rushing into the class like the other students running past us. He squints. I think he knows I don’t want to tell him.

“Benny. I’ll be late.”

Ben drags me under the stairwell, he pins me between him and the wall. “Gracie, just tell me the name of the school?” I open my mouth and close it. His hand runs through his hair in frustration. “Please, babe.”

“I... I haven’t made up my mind.”

He straightens up. His hand covers his mouth and his eyes narrow. “You’re lying.”

“Yes. I am,” I confess. “Can I tell you after school?” Ben stops pacing. I hug my backpack and continue, “I don’t think you will like my answer, Benny, and I don’t want to go to class knowing I ruined your mood.”

Without a word, Ben kisses me. Hard and urgent and feverishly. I only respond when he grunts into my lips and my hands weave into his hair. His mouth is everywhere. On my nose, my jaw, my neck, then back on my lips again. His unspoken words are poured into the kiss. He doesn’t want me to pick a far school.

“Gracie,” he says. Our foreheads touch, his blue eyes bore into mine and I look down to our entwined hands. “Alright. After school, yeah?” I nod because we both need that reassurance. “We have drama practice so you can tell me after.” He pulls my lip between his and laughs. “I am scared.”

Me too. “Don’t be.” I push him gently and step away from him. “We have to go or we will be late.”

Ben takes my hand like the dutiful boyfriend he is and walks me to the front of my class. I don't get a kiss on my lips but my forehead. I wave at his retreating figure until he turns the corner to his class and my shoulders sag. My school choice will break his heart again. We might not even be together by March.

The class goes by fast. I don't pay attention. When the bell for the last class rings, I am the last one to step outside. I stop at the foot of the stairs. A few more steps and I'll be in front of the audition hall. I turn away and take the long route to buy some time. My phone vibrates with Ben's text but I ignore it.

Unfortunately, I reach the hall faster than I planned to. I peek in through the glass. Ben is there. He's not alone. Noah and some other students that were here with us last year are present. My boyfriend frowns at his phone. I smile. He is always handsome. I push the door open, his head raises and his frown fades.

When I near his seat, he pouts. "You're late." I mumble an apology and he pats his legs for me to sit. I shake my head. "But I missed you." My gaze darts to the door. He has to understand my fears. "She is not here yet." But she will be soon and I don't want to be caught on his lap. He sighs in resignation. "You're so stubborn."

I lower myself to the seat beside him and pinch his cheeks. "But you love me like that."

His lips pucker. "Yep. I love my Gracie."

Someone clears their throat. Miss Jota. She stares at me for a second and climbs the stage. Everyone's heads turn to her. This is our first meeting this semester and we haven't gotten the date of the play yet.

"Welcome back." A small cheer breaks out from the boys at the back. Miss Jota smiles. I missed her and all the stage moments with Ben. "How was the break?" She points to one student—a male who rambles on about his rad holiday. Good for him. When he's done, she nods. "Anyway, we are back to business."

"Yes, ma'am," the boys chorus.

I roll my eyes and Ben chuckles. He might have joined them if I wasn't here. His hand moves behind my seat, a soft moan escapes me when his fingers slide into my waistband. He avoids my gaze when I throw him a warning look but his hand slides deeper to cup my butt. I press my legs together and he snickers.

Maybe I should have worn tighter pants. He pulls out his hand before I say another word, my frown falls when I feel a pair of eyes on me. Miss Jota. Her hands are folded on her belly like a disgruntled mother.

“Yes, Tessa?” Me? What did I do? I clear my throat. Ben’s hand has disappeared from my body. “Yes, you. What do you think?” I don’t know what to think; I was not listening. “Ben.” We both stiffen. She points at the last seat on our row. “Go sit there.” I tuck my hands between my legs. “Now, where was I?”

Ben grudgingly obeys. He dumps his bag on the floor with a loud thud that causes the students behind us to laugh. I send him a contrite look once Miss Jota starts talking. The play will hold on Valentine’s week to suit the theme of love. We must give our best performances because most parents will be present.

She goes on and on about the love play, which is an irony since Ben and I die at the end. I raise my hand.

“Yes, Tessa?”

“But the play is a tragedy. They both die.” Someone chuckles, maybe Ben. “What’s lovely about it?”

Miss Jota shrugs. “Nothing. But life itself is a tragedy.”

Ben snickers. I narrow my eyes and he throws his hands up in surrender.

“Any other questions?” Her eyes roam over everyone in the room, we shake our heads. “In that case...” She is about to walk off the stage when she pauses and facepalms. “I almost forgot.” From her pocket, she pulls out a crumpled flier. The prints are hard to read from here. “Has anyone here heard of SAS?”

The silence lingers for a minute or two and no one answers. Miss Jota returns to the centre of the stage once more. “Tessa, have a look at it and pass it to everyone.” I do as I am told, a bit surprised at the flier. It’s a new college in our town. Not so new since they are clocking five years in March. “SAS is an art school.”

San Francisco Art School.

An insane thought pops into my mind when I spot the location of the college and I nearly throw the flier at Ben. He stares at me worriedly until I smile. The school is a forty minutes drive from here. If I was a student there, I would see Ben at least every weekend or maybe more if we are both willing to make the sacrifice. I push the thought out before it takes form. It's New York for me. New York or nowhere else.

"All forms of art," Miss Jota continues. "Each year, SAS offers scholarships to six students and this year is no different." I nod. Not because I am interested but because everyone else is nodding. Even Ben looks interested as he turns over the flier. "Their new dean will be here to watch the play. You cannot disappoint."

The atmosphere changes, we nod and our spines become stiffer. "Applications are open until the end of next month and I am willing to put in a recommendation for any of you." Our heads bob in unison, the flier gets back to me and I keep it. "You can go home and think about it. Practise will resume tomorrow."

Her eyes stay on me the longest like she's expecting me to seize this opportunity. I look to my feet when I feel a familiar gaze on me. Benny. Miss Jota excuses herself and everyone starts filing out of the hall. For some reasons, I can't move, neither can Ben. Moments later, it's just two of us.

"Will you apply?" he asks.