

Badboy 82

Chapter 82

They don't care

We stare at each other, my shoulders move carelessly in a shrug and Ben bridges the gap.

"Will you?" His voice is a whisper now and my heart is acting up. "It's a good choice."

"It is," I say for lack of better words. "Benny?"

He grabs my hand between his and places it on his chest. "I don't want you to leave me." My breath hitches when his eyes shimmer with tears and a tear rolls down his cheek. I have never seen him cry. My mouth opens and closes without a word, he takes it as his cue to say, "Please, stay here. Don't go away."

Maddie's words ring in my ears. I want him to be happy but I want to be happy too. I push his bag to the floor and straddle him. Ben looks up, tears coat his thick lashes and my heart beats harder than before.

"You know I love you?" My thumbs move across his cheeks, his lips turn into that cute frown and I kiss him. "I applied to NYU." Ben goes rigid under me but I don't release him. "I have always wanted NYU."

"Okay."

That's all. Nothing more. Nothing else. His hand hovers above my butt, then he gives it a firm squeeze. He pecks me and hugs me tight to himself as if afraid I will disappear. I want to say more to improve the mood but I don't want to make any false promises. I rest my head on his shoulder and Ben sighs again.

"What are your plans?" I ask with my eyes closed. His hand sneaks into my shirt to stroke my back. My teeth latch to a spot on his neck, I nibble on it and he moans his approval. "What will you be doing?"

"Fighting?" he says with a shrug. "I have never been to New York." His tone is lighter than it was before, he rubs on my lower lip with his thumb and some of my lipstick comes off. "I prefer the red colour," he murmurs while staring at the purple stain on his finger. I fake a grin. No more purple. "What's it like?"

I close my eyes and picture the city Hayden was born in. We lived there first but I barely remember any memories from that time. I plan to tour the school with Mum, it's her alma mater so she has lots of good things to say about the school and city. My eyelids flutter open and Ben is peering at me with sad eyes.

"Okay," I say. Ben snorts with laughter but I can tell he's slightly pleased by my lack of enthusiasm. "Will you fight the whole year?" His face takes on that serious look, he raises his hand and I link our fingers. "Say no."

He snickers. "I'm not sure. I have no plans beyond that."

By that, he means, he hasn't thought about college, right? Not that he doesn't have plans for us. I kiss the tip of his nose, he protests but I don't offer him a real kiss. He already got his eight kisses for today.

"Do you not like the idea of college?" If he's anything like Maria, college is a no. But he is not. Yet college is one of the topics we never discuss. Ben wants us to be together but there are no more talks about that or plans for it. "You are a good actor." I moan as his fingers slip into my shirt. "I think you should apply to SAS, it's a good option."

"I guess," he says. "I'll be close to Asher if I get the scholarship." I hiss when his finger brushes my boobs. I didn't wear a bra today. Ben smirks at my soft intake of breath. "Hey. Do you want to get out of here?"

His tone is suggestive, too seductive. Maybe that's why I shake my head. "No. Let's talk."

Disappointment spreads over his face. "What about?" Anything. Nothing. We haven't discussed us after high school. Do we end here? I will die of a broken heart. "Do you think we will no longer be close when you leave for New York?"

"I highly doubt that," I retort in a sharp voice. When his eyebrows raise, I say, "I don't think so."

We might not see as much but we will be close as long as both of us put in the effort. We both will.

He rests his head on my shoulders. "I don't think so too."

Eyes closed, I listen to the sound of his breathing. "Can I ask you something?"

A moment or two passes, he lifts his head from my shoulder. "Ask."

"You don't want to go to college because you can't access your funds right now or because you haven't given it much of a thought or you just hate the idea of colleges?" The former is most likely the case and it bothers me. Ben is still on his Mission to repay Josef. College will only make it worse. "Ben, please look at me." He doesn't. "Benny." He finally does. "I think New York will be good for you. For us."

"I don't want to talk about colleges now," he says with a note of finality that might have scared me if we were not dating. I fix him with a stern gaze that makes him squirm. "Can we forget it?" Not at all. If we keep pushing back tough discussions, we will never get a chance to hash them out. "I'm serious."

"So am I. I want to talk about it now." Our eyes clash, when he sees I am not giving up, he sighs. "Benny, you know Josef and your mum won't mind supporting you, right?" From our little time on Saturday, I know his stepfather cares. I don't know why Ben doesn't see it. Josef is wealthy enough to sponsor him, me and Asher through college without batting an eyelid. How can he throw his future away over a beef? A beef that makes sense only to him. His mother is doing fine with her new husband. "Why won't you even give them a chance? Please."

I am not only begging him to forgive Josef but to consider our future. We can continue in New York.

"Gracie," he warns.

But I am too far gone to care. Ben doesn't dare to dream because he has forced himself into a box of his own creation. He won't accept my help. He won't accept Josef's help. He won't accept his mum's help. It is like pouring water into a basket.

"There's so much you are missing out on by clinging to the past." Ben scoffs. I struck a nerve but he needs to hear it. "You are not letting yourself live, Benny. I love you and I want you to do all the little things teens do without worrying so much. Josef doesn't need you to pay him back a cent." He growls but I am not backing down. "They care about you. They love you like I do. Benny, please."

"They don't care," he whispers.

Ben's voice breaks on the last word, his head dips and he hides his face in his palms. I stare at the back of his head. He doesn't sound convinced of his words. And I know it is a lie he has told himself so much and for so long he believes it. Josef and Maddie are in love. He might lie to himself about a lot of things but not that.

His eyes close and tears leak down to his cheeks. I wipe them and place a kiss on his forehead the same way he does to comfort me. Maybe I am doing this wrong but I don't know what or how to deal with it when I don't know what the real problem is. He can't go about his life paying Josef for every little thing.

"We can go to NYU, Benny. I think you will like it there. We don't have to end in Broadway Heights." His eyes twitch in anger and frustration. I cup his face, my voice lowers to a whisper. "Applications run till the end of this month. We can be together."

His mask of indifference crashes. "Or you can apply to SAS and we can be together. Think about Asher, Gracie. Think about me too. We don't need to move cities to be together, babe." His eyes burn bright, my hands clench at my sides and I try to force my breathing under control. I think of him all the fucking time. "We get to see Asher every weekend."

"I love Asher but I want to do more with my life than coming back here to see him every weekend."

Ben smiles. A cold smile that doesn't reach his eyes. It's a little late to take back my words so I mentally ready myself for his comeback. He is fighting so much for a boy that will gladly move into Josef's house given the chance. It's not a bad thing but it's an indication that this Josef hate starts and ends with him. He is the only one hating on Josef. I don't want to be on his team in this case.

"So he's not important?" he finally says.

The coldness in his voice leaves me expecting him to shove me off his lap. I smoothen the invisible lines on my shirt. I don't want us to fight over this.

"I never said that," I murmur. "I love Asher."

Ben grunts. The lines on his forehead deepen and my hands itch so much to smoothen them.

"I think you should leave."

My jaw slacks. "I should leave?" He nods. "I am on school property, you can't ask me to leave." He lifts a brow and gives me a onceover. My chin juts in the air and I make myself even more comfortable on his legs, he's not getting rid of me. "I'm not going anywhere until we are done talking about this."

A long pause ensues before his arms wrap around me again. I almost smile at him.

"SAS is a good school, Gracie," he mutters. His voice is soft and convincing. "Babe. They have potential."

"I don't want SAS," I say through gritted teeth.

"I don't want NYU," he replies with as much annoyance laced in his voice. I don't like him again.

My fist meets his shoulder. "You don't even know NYU." NYU is almost as exciting as the city. New York is most people's favourite city, crawling with the good, bad and ugly. People mind their business. No one cares what you do as long as you don't get in their way. It's a great place to start a new life. We can be young, wild and free there. "Think about me too. Let's apply together," I say while poking his chest hard enough to leave a dent. "I want NYU."

"Then go to NYU."

A thick silence falls over us. Seconds after, his words are still ringing in my head. I forget every other thing and hop off his lap to sit on the chair closest to him. My hands tremble a bit and I hide my face in them. Today was going so well.

I pick my bag and attempt to leave but Ben hasn't moved an inch. I take the first step in the direction of the door and stop. If he doesn't come after me, I don't know if I will be able to handle it. Slowly, I spin to face him. He is staring at me, gaze so tender and sad it makes my heart hurt. He stands and I gulp hard. His stare is so intense, so sad, so heartbreaking.

Ben stops in front of me but does nothing. I roll my lip between my teeth and tilt my head towards him.

"I'm sorry." I don't know which part of our conversation made him upset. He hugs me and my arms hook around his waist. "Don't be mad at me, babe." It must have been the mention of Josef. "I was only trying to help but I guess I did it wrong."

"I'm sorry too. Don't be mad at me."

Even if I tried, I could never be mad at him.

Ben releases me with a small smile and takes my hand. We walk into the parking lot holding hands. I am his ride home today. The lot is empty except for my car. Once we are inside the car, he pulls me to his lap.

"If NYU is what you want, you should go for it," he says in a whisper. "I'll always support you."

"Thank you."