

Badboy 85

Chapter 85

First valentine

Olivia's face is spotless. No black eyes. No split lips. I bring out a sandwich from my bag without breaking my gaze from her. Ben tries to follow my eyes and I quickly look away. She does her make up really well.

"Stop staring," Ben says. He takes one of the sandwiches. "You'll make her uncomfortable."

"She looks so different," I whisper. I dig into my sandwich after cutting off the crusts.

There's no trace of the girl from last night, her lips are okay. She can apply perfect makeup on a bruised face and I can't draw my brows without looking like a clown. It's unfair how God distributed talents.

"Gracie, stop staring."

It's hard not to. But I try. Ben goes on and on about the play while I give the occasional nods to show I am listening. He catches on pretty quick to my stunt and his infamous scowl appears on his lips. I shrug.

"If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?" he asks. "Somewhere you've never been."

"Outside US?" He nods. "Africa."

The hottest sound right now on TicToc is Shakira's song: Time for Africa. Some TicToc influencers started a trend with the song showcasing different African cultures, mostly their style of dressing. Maria showed them to me. As far as Shakira is involved, you can count on her to know about it.

I miss that silly girl. She is the only bright side to moving to New York without my boyfriend. We plan to meet up in New York at the end of AGT.

Ben frowns. "Africa is not a country, babe. It's a continent." Yes, Sir. "So where in Africa?"

“Ghana.”

My reply takes Ben by surprise. He clutches his chest and doubles over in laughter. I smack the back of his head. How dare him laugh at my answer? Ghana is lovely. I love their kente dresses and their dance.

Bristling with excitement, I jump to my feet to show Ben their local dance. Olivia’s gaze meets mine and the vibe dies. I lower myself to the bench, feeling out of place at her chilly glare. I don’t expect her to be nice to me but I don’t expect hostility either.

“Why Ghana?”

My brain chooses that moment to bail on me, everything I know about Ghana leaves my memory.

“Because they have really nice dresses,” I say. Nice and colourful dresses. Most African countries have that. Ben’s face is one of pure mischief, he’s holding back his laugh. I poke his forehead with my finger and add this line to tease him. “In Ghana, a woman is not legally required to take her husband’s name.”

It catches his interest like I knew it would. We haven’t mentioned marriage again but it’s not a topic we shy away from. His hand drops to my knee. I flash him my cutest smile but he doesn’t fall for it.

“So if we were to get married in Ghana...” he starts in a sweet, smooth voice. “You wouldn’t take my last name?”

Ghana isn’t the only country. It’s not a legal requirement in some western countries. I know this because I spend homework time researching unusual facts instead of doing actual study on my class assignments.

Theresa Grace Carter honestly sounds good. But Ben doesn’t need to hear it. His ego is big enough for two people. “Na.” My tone is way too flat. “I’ll keep my last name. You should consider taking mine.”

“Benjamin Mower. BM.” Eyes closed, he purses his lips like he’s a chef tasting a meal. “It doesn’t sound so bad, babe.” His eyes flutter open, he folds his empty paper bag into a triangle. “Yeah, I think I like it. I don’t think I mind taking on your last name.”

The bell rings. We groan simultaneously. No seeing each other until the end of today. Ben helps me with my backpack, and we file out of the cafeteria with the other students. We are halfway across my class when Olivia stops us in the hallway. I'm not sure what I expect but I don't expect her to totally ignore me.

She pulls Ben away without taking any form of excuse from me and my 'loving' boyfriend throws me a contrite look as he follows suit. I watch the back of her head bob as she whispers something into his ear.

Fuck both of them. But I stay put with my hands gripping the straps of my backpack. On cue, they turn to me in unison smiling. I will never know what Ben told her but she smiles at me and waves like a broken doll. As soon as I reciprocate the gesture, mostly for Ben's sake, she rolls her eyes and walks away.

Ben swaggers towards me with a smug grin. His arm dangles from my shoulder as we continue to my class. "See, I told you she's not so bad." And I've told him she's a good actress. What the fuck was the meaning of that? I sigh. "Anyways, she just wanted to say she was feeling much better. And thank you."

If she was so grateful, she would have come to thank me herself. I drove the car, not Ben. I flip my messy hair over one shoulder, determined not to let her attitude and my boyfriend's obliviousness get to me.

* * *

I wake up earlier today. It's valentine's day so I am making cookies in the shape of hearts. I finish one batch and place it in a box with a cute wrapper around it. My lips spread in a smile as I attach a love note written in my most beautiful handwriting.

The note is so silly, so stupid I can picture Ben laughing his ass off while trying to decode the chemistry hint in them. I hum a familiar tone as I slide another batch of cookies into the oven. This one is for Mum. I know she won't admit it but she misses Daddy a lot. Their midnight calls have become more frequent.

When the cookies are ready, I arrange it on the counter so it's the first thing Mum sees once she walks in. The short note I attach is not as silly as Ben's. Something about loving and thanking her for being her.

I am pumping with excitement as I rush up the stairs to prepare for school. I send Ben a quick text to let him know I won't be picking him up today and he replies with a sad face. It's our first valentine together. I can't believe we have lasted this long. In about two weeks, our relationship will be three months old.

A song plays while I get ready. I apply an extra layer of red lipstick on my lips and even do the winged eyeliner. Instead of curling my hair, I leave it flowing down my shoulders and grab the keychain—his gift.

The next few minutes pass in a blur, same as the ride to school. I skip to Ben's locker to put his gifts but my steps falter when I near it. Cut-out hearts, customised balloons, among other things are glued to the door of his locker. Someone brushes past me and stops by his locker to tape a valentine card to it. Wow.

I didn't even get him a card. But we don't do cards, we do notes. The hand holding his gift drops, I am about to leave when a hand lands on my shoulder. I look up to Ben glaring at his locker with a hint of amusement. Does he like what he sees? There are so many cards and gift packs at the foot of his locker.

"Did you do that?" I shake my head but Ben is already walking forward. He pries one card off the locker. "Hmm." His brows wiggle, he starts reading, "I think about the people that are dear and the delights they bring when they are near. You bring me delight." He glares at me, then back at the card. There's no name on it. "What the fuck, Gracie?"

"That's not me," I shriek.

The poem is too serious. Too unlike us. Who sends poems when they can piece together a puzzle that will make him shit himself from laughing too hard and trying to decode it. Not me. Ben pinches my nose.

"It better not be," he says with a laugh.

There is a proud smile on my face when he pops the balloons and gently kicks the gift bags to the next locker. Maybe I am being a jealous girlfriend but I don't want other girls gifting my boyfriend anything.

I hold up his package above my head and he raises a brow in enquiry. "This is me."

Ben relieves me of it. Without peeking inside, he retrieves a small box from his pocket. My heart pounds hard when he opens the box and pulls out a bracelet with charms. I flick a finger over one of the charms. Some of the charms are recognisable but others aren't. I recognise the house. The hair clip and... a cake?

"Is this a cake?" I touch the cake charm to confirm and he nods. "Why cake?"

A pink hue stains his cheeks. Benny is shy. I should take a picture. "Because you made me a cake on my birthday, remember?" I can never forget. "Then this," he says as his fingers brush the house. "Our first kiss was in front of my house." My smile grows and he lifts the hair clip. "This was my first gift to you."

"I love it," I say. His smile is as big as mine, maybe bigger. I swat his hand away from his forehead. "I love you."

Ben helps me put the bracelet on my wrist. "Now, you can carry all our memories wherever you go."

Without a word, I throw my arms around him and murmur into his chest, "You're the best."

"You too, Gracie. Love you." I take one step back when he opens his locker. There are more cards inside. "How did these get in here?" he says to himself as he sweeps them into his hand. I follow behind him to the trashcan at the end of the hallway where he tosses the cards. At my expression, he says, "What?"

My mouth snaps shut. He just threw all the cards without care for the people who wrote them. I take a cautious glance behind me and the girls watching us look away. They shuffle in different directions as if they weren't watching. I will be hurt too but I will never pull a stunt like this if my crush has a girlfriend.

"You're throwing them away?" I ask as if the evidence staring right at me isn't enough. "All of them?"

"Yeah. I only want the one from my Gracie." I giggle again like a little girl. Ben knows the right things to say. Offering me his hand, he nudges me towards my class. "What did you get me?" I shrug. "Gracie."

"There's only one way to find out."