

Badboy 88

Chapter 88

A long story

I pull the phone away from my ear but Maria keeps screaming like a banshee. The video of me hitting Olivia is all over BG and it is the highlight of her day. Maria says something I don't hear and I grunt in reply. She's excited but I am not. Not when Ben is upset. I think I fucked up this time. Big time.

Maybe I am being paranoid but I don't think we will get better even after Ben cools off. I don't want to think it's over for us but it feels like it is. He picked her over me. To show his support, I guess. I swipe the back of my hand against my eyes. My eyes sting too much. I want to curl in bed and cry like a baby.

I end the call after a few more moments of false enthusiasm to Maria's constant teasing. I can't tell her about Olivia because Ben already feels like shit talking to me about it. I massage my temple to try and stop the growing headache. I feel like shit.

His words play over and over again in my head until they are the only things I know. It's a little too much for only one person to handle. Her parents divorce. Her mother's boyfriend harassing her.

Knowing these things about her doesn't make me feel as bad as I do when I remember the hurt in Ben's eyes. He was heavily disappointed in me. Then, he talked about feeling so alone and empty in a crowd. I thought I was good for him. If he feels that way even now, what kind of girlfriend does that make me?

My red-rimmed eyes lift to the mirror. Mum isn't home. There's no way of hiding in my room for two weeks without her knowledge. I got off easy because it was my first misdemeanour. I'm a perfect student.

Taking tired steps to the bathroom, I soak in the bathtub for longer than necessary. I must have fallen asleep because I wake up to the sound of knocks from behind the bathroom door. A yawn escapes me.

Mum's voice comes out small and muffled. "Tessa, are you in there?"

"Yes, Mum." Wrapping a towel around my chest, I skip to the door and open it. "I'm here."

She takes a step back to allow me entry inside my room. Her rigidity throws me off balance.

Something is wrong.

Mum doesn't kiss my cheeks or hug me or ask about my day. Instead, she goes to sit on my bed and smoothens the same surface too many times to count. My hands are shaky as I pull a pair of shorts over my knees. She doesn't know about Broadway Gossip. Or does she?

She pats a spot on the bed for me to sit and I tighten my arms around her waist before she has a chance to speak. My head rests in the crook of her neck. I don't want her to be disappointed in me too. She's the only one I have now. Maria and Daddy are far away.

"I did something bad today." My eyes close. I don't want to see her face when she hears how much of a tyrant I am. "I've been suspended." Mum freezes, her hand moving on my arm stops. "For two weeks."

Mum's sigh is so heavy it carries around my room. Yeah, she is super disappointed in me.

"I just got off the phone with Mrs Beckham." That witch. If she paid close attention to her daughter, she might not have turned out this way. Olivia hurts people because she's hurt. I am not excusing her or her behaviour but it kind of makes sense. It follows the same pattern with Noah. The pieces fit in now. The reason Noah is friends with Olivia is because they have experienced the same thing. Does Noah know about it? "Olivia needed seven stitches."

"Oh, my God," I gasp.

It didn't look so bad. There was blood. Lots of it but I figured it must have been an exaggerated cut.

"Yes, her mum is pissed. Your dad took care of the bills. They will not be pressing charges." She holds my hands. I prepare for the verbal lashing. "Did this happen because of Ben?" I don't know. It all links back to him. If I am not with Ben, she won't bother me. "Honey, I don't think Ben is good for you anymore."

No. Ben is perfect for me. I am the fuck up. He did nothing but try to support his friend. I shouldn't have put him in that position to begin with. What did he even mean by he has no more words for me?

“You have become someone else since you started dating him.” It’s not true. I have only become a more daring version of myself. I am more confident than I was before him. “Sweetheart, you missed classes. You beat a fellow student because of him.”

“It’s not because of him.” I retract my hands from her grip. “She had it coming a long time ago.”

Mum doesn’t buy it. She’s convinced Olivia’s menace stopped after Halloween night. It kind of did. Mum places a hand on my leg. If Daddy took care of the bills, he knew what I did. Hayden must know too.

“What happened?” she asks. I remind myself she is my mother, she is on my side. Excusing myself to retrieve my phone, my heart skips. There are missed calls from Daddy and Hayden. Hayden, I can handle. Daddy, I’m not so sure. I stagger back to her with an uncertain smile. The jitters return when I open the site. She accepts the phone. “What is this?”

The front page is still the same as last time. She is frowning at the caption. I hit play on the video. “Just watch it.”

The video starts but I don’t stay to watch. I scuttle to the end of the bed and Mum raises a brow. I plug my fingers into my ears and try to shrink into myself. It doesn’t help so I start counting the seconds.

One hundred and fifty seconds later, Mum lays a hand on my back. She is furious. “Olivia posted this?” My arm lifts in a slight shrug. She is the only one who calls it crawl-crawl. “Tessa, are you sure?” I am not sure of anything anymore but my head dips in a nod. Mum stands. “I need to make a call.”

The door shuts quietly behind her. Alone again, my thoughts circle back to Ben. I don’t know why I dial his number but I do. No response. I send him a text, chat him via WhatsApp. Ben reads the messages but doesn’t reply to any of them. The ache in my chest grows from the size of a pebble to the size of an apple. He has picked his side and it’s not mine.

Tears fill my eyes, I toss the phone to the bed and pick it back up. Still no response from him.

Me: Benny, I’m sorry. Please forgive me.

What am I sorry for?

I'm not sure I know either. But I don't want us to be done. I still love him. Tears are streaming down my face now, shamelessly. My phone beeps and I rush for it. I hiss. There is a new text but it's from Hayden. I wipe my nose before replying.

Hayden: are you okay? What happened?

Me: it's a long story, can I tell you tomorrow?

Hayden: sure but are you okay?

Me: I don't know. Ben won't talk to me.

It's the first time I am discussing my issues about Ben with my brother. Since they are both guys, Hayden might be able to give me some insight on how to move forward with him. The three dots show Hayden is typing. A few seconds pass and the dots disappear. My shoulders sag when a single line text appears.

Hayden: what does Ben have to do with anything? He's the least of your worries right now, Tee.

Hayden: Is he the reason you beat her?

The fact everyone is quick to blame this on Ben worries and annoys me. They act like I can't think on my own, as if I need his permission to hit people. It is true that I am a different person since Ben but I like to think it's the good kind of different. They should be proud of me for standing up to my bully.

Me: I'll tell you everything tomorrow.

Hayden: OK. Be careful. I love you.

I hide under the covers but I can't sleep. My thoughts centre on Ben and only him. I unlock my phone and skip to the gallery. Hundreds and hundreds of pictures stare back at me. Pictures of him. Pictures of us.

Daddy's name appears on my screen. I mutter a small prayer before picking. "Tessa? Are you there?" he says at my silence. "Did I wake you?" I reply in the negative. "I just got off the phone with your mother."

I gulp. Here comes the big punishment. Daddy is not one to get angry but the few times he does, no one likes it. He becomes brutal with his words, striking you hard with his opinion without care for how it will make you feel. The shame you feel hearing him speak in that manner is supposed to be the punishment.

"Are you okay?" He sounds worried.

His question comes as a shock. I expected worse. I sigh softly. Now, I miss him more. I want my daddy.

"Yeah, I guess." I pull the cover over my head. He doesn't say more so I add, "Are you mad at me?"

"I don't endorse that behaviour but I'm glad you stood up for yourself." A grin springs to my lips but it is gone with his next words. "Listen, Tessa. You and your mum can come over this weekend. It will be good for you. Us. Don't worry about the house or the bills, we will stay in the hotel until everything is ready."

His call already calmed me to an extent. "I'll think about it." He laughs and goes silent again. "Thank you, Daddy." He thanks me too but I wave off his gratitude. I am the one who has more reasons to be grateful. "Thank you for not getting mad at me. For reminding me about how much you love me. For always being you. For always being on my side."

"Of course I'm always on your side." I smile through my tears. He understands how it should be. When you love someone, you automatically take their side. But Ben isn't on my side. "I have to go now."

"I love you."

"I love you too, Tessa. Don't think about it. Two weeks will be gone before you know it."

If only it was that easy. I murmur a reply and the call ends with a click.