

BadBoy 37

Chapter 37

I like Ben

Throughout the ride home, we don't talk. His kiss was unexpected but my reaction shocked us more. I can't stop thinking about it, replaying it like a broken record. I kissed Ben. What would he rate my kiss?

A pathetic two?

The wind slaps my hair into my face, fear of falling off the bike doesn't allow me to push the annoying strands out of my eyes. His body's warmth chases the cold seeping into my skin, I tighten my arms around his waist as we skip to a new lane. My cheek presses to his solid back, I try and fail to enjoy my second bike ride. He is moving too fast.

Without notice, Ben increases his speed. I yelp and my eyes clench shut. His body shakes with laughter.

"Relax, Juliet." My eyes open, I loosen my vice-like grip on his waist. If I didn't know better, I would think he loved having my tiny body pressed against his. "You only live once. And, you are in safe hands."

His words do nothing to reassure me, I only relax when we turn into familiar streets. The bike's engine shatters the silence, I look around to see if anyone is disturbed by the noise. No one is.

"We don't live once, we live everyday," I whisper against his neck. He throws me a backward glance and I smile. I have never fully understood that quote, it makes little sense. "But we only die once."

For the rest of the ride, he maintains a reasonable speed. We are a few blocks from my house when I realise he didn't ask for directions. I am not sure of our status after the kiss but we are not friends, he has no reason to know my house. He parks in front of my house and I take some time to arrange my hair.

"How do you know where I live?"

"I know a lot of things, Juliet," he murmurs and my stupid lips curl into a small smile.

What happened to: my name is not Juliet? I cast one look at my house, reluctant to go into the darkness. I want to stay here with him, pretend we are best friends or lovers. I like lovers better. His girlfriend. The sticker of a phoenix glued to Ben's bike catches my eyes, I frown at the faint image it provokes. A light switch goes off in my head, then it clicks.

"You have been here before," I blurt out. My eyes immediately search for the tree across my house, I stare at him with conviction. He was here a day after he lost his match to me. Ben shrugs. "I knew it." No, I didn't, not until a few seconds ago and I have been seeing his motorbike at school. "It was you. You were watching me." His fingers run through his hair, he rotates his shoulders carelessly as if to say: so what? He throws his other leg over the bike so he's facing me and my insides knot. "Why?"

"No reason." My finger pokes his chest, I narrow my eyes. "That wasn't the first time." My jaw drops, I force my mouth close before he utters a snarky reply. "I followed you after that match. Yeah," he says with a nod at the widening of my eyes. How many people have followed me home and I didn't notice? I never take my car, I use the public bus and walk the rest of the distance. "I wanted to know what the person who beat me looked like. And I saw you." His gaze trails my body, I shrink at his condescending tone. "Your cute necklace gave you away but I didn't want to believe it was you. I lost to a fucking girl. That's a first."

Though his tone is lighter at the end of his statement, I am still wary. I don't trust Ben. He didn't return my necklace. Throwing his words back at him, I spit out, "There's a first time for everything, Benny."

He laughs, I push one leg forward. The lights from a car passing through the street illuminate my face, I bow my head and almost throw up at the vomit coating one side of my boots. I am never wearing these shoes again. Ben tucks a hand under my chin after the car drives off, I swallow at the intensity in his gaze. He doesn't look at me like I disgust him but I have no idea what to call that hungry look in his eyes.

"We make a great team on stage, Juliet. We will make great partners in the ring." I don't dare look away. "What do you say?" I don't dare lie. He pulls my lower lip down to reveal my teeth, the action restricts my airflow and I forget how to function.

Is it me or is he leaning closer? Is Ben going to kiss me again?

His breath warms my face, my tongue wets my lip. I do everything but look away. I close my eyes when his lips brush mine. This time, I'll do better. I'll kiss him better. Seconds pass without another contact of

his lips, one eye pops open, then the second one follows. Embarrassment prickles my skin at Ben's smug smile, his tongue runs over his soft lips and he folds his arms on his chest, showing off his toned muscles.

Doesn't the cold affect him? Maybe not. His ego probably keeps him warm. It's bigger than my head.

"Juliet," he mutters. My hands disappear behind me when he stretches his. He grins. "Be my partner."

That intense emotion creeps into his eyes, I manage to look away. Why is he doing this to me? Acting as if we are cool. This whole thing confuses me. Ben doesn't fancy me. He will never like someone like Mother Theresa, he just needs a partner. This is his way of doing things. Get me comfortable, then make a request, just like he did when he wanted me to show up for Asher's games. I can't let him manipulate me.

But my heart wants what it wants and it wants to please him. All sane thoughts fly out when he flashes me another grin. Shoving my hands into the pocket of my—his sweatpants, I say, "I'll have to ask my coach."

Ben's arms circle my wrists, my mind muddles as he drags me to stand between his legs. Our foreheads almost touch, he's still smiling when he releases my hands. I shake my partially wet curls, letting it frame my face but he pushes my hair into a messy bun and my breath ceases again. I am in love.

"So, you do fight?" he teases.

A blush rises to my cheeks when he winks. I hate how easy it is for him to evoke a physical reaction from me but my heart never listens to my brain. He drops my hands and pathetic me misses his touch. I am stupid to think we have a future together after a silly kiss that only happened for him to prove a point.

"Never said I didn't," I snap. He lifts a brow and frowns. I am forced to say, "Sorry." His scowl worsens my guilt. It feels like I ruined the start of something great by overthinking it. "Thank you for the ride."

"No biggie, Miss." No, I need him to call me Juliet. His flat tone confirms my fear, I throw him a sad look and his face hardens. No, I want his smirks and arrogance. "Now we are even." My confusion must have been obvious, he rolls his eyes. "You gave me a ride last time, I gave you one today. We are even. I don't owe you a favour anymore."

Struck by his words, I shuffle backwards. His sweatshirt doesn't seem to protect me from the chilly air. "You never owed me anything. I didn't do it so you could repay me. I wasn't thinking about that."

Conflicting emotions flash across his face but surprise stands out the most. "So, what were you thinking? Why did you do it?" I shrug, he snorts in disbelief. He makes my overthinking feel like a joke. How else did he arrive at his conclusion? He needed a ride and lucky for him, I was there. Plus, I got to see Asher. "You pick up random boys from school?"

I let out a sigh. When my eyes open, I am calmer. "You are not a random boy." His lips curl into a smirk. Pompous cutie. No, he's not cute, he's hot. "I did it because you needed help. I would have done it for anyone else." He wiggles his brows, I smack his shoulder, "Someone from school, not a random dude. It's just a ride, Ben." I might have a big, fat crush on him but he needs to get over himself. "No biggie."

"If you say so." I do. Some of us know how to be kind, it is what it is. "Thanks for the ride."

Weirdo.

Another second passes, my thought drifts to our kiss and I scratch the back of my neck. Are we going to talk about it or was it just a little experiment to him? It was more than that to me, it was my first kiss, another item off my bucket list. I catch Ben staring at my lips, our eyes meet and he averts his gaze.

At least, I am not the only one affected by the kiss. God. His lips are so soft, I will gladly kiss him everyday.

"Um, thanks for the ride. Thanks for helping me out today." I motion to my outfit. "I'll return this later."

"Na. Keep it," he says, waving my request off. "I do..." I follow his gaze to see what snagged his interest and the light in my parents room go off. Mum. It has to be her. Great. Now, I have to explain what a boy was doing in front of our house. "I think you need to go inside." As much as I don't want to, I have to. Ben must have sensed my hesitation, he pulls me in for a brief hug and offers me a real smile. "Go. Night, Juliet."

But I don't move and he doesn't try to force me. He chuckles. I grin, comforted by the fact he also wants to be here with me. He points to the house. "Who was that? Your dad?" I shake my head. "Mum?" I nod. He pouts, I look away to stop myself from pressing my lips to his. Why does everything about him have to be so sexy? I bet I look like plain Jane when pouting. It's unfair how God spent so much time on one person's beauty. "I have to go, don't I?"

A shy smile springs to my lips and my head jerks in a nod. Ben starts his bike. "Night, Romeo," I scream at his retreating figure and he honks twice. My heart flutters, butterflies dance in my belly. I like Ben.

I really, really like him.