

## **BadBoy 60**

### Chapter 60

#### **Candlelight dinner**

Ben and I are still holding hands as we walk down the stairs. A thin sheet of snow covers the pavement and the street. The height of the snow is nothing to worry about. As kids, we loved to play in the snow. My favourite part was smashing Hayden's face into the snowman. I always cried when he did the same.

We stroll to a car parked in front of our garage, Ben brings out a fob. A beep sounds, the front and back lights blink. Ben drags me to the passenger side and opens the door. I place a hand on the car's hood.

"What's going on?" I ask, a note of doubt creeping into my voice. "Where's your bike?"

We are the only two out in the snow which is slowly nipping at my skin. Ben scratches the back of his head. "At home?" He pushes me gently into the car but I refuse to budge. "Gracie, go in. I'll explain."

With that disapproving frown etched on my lips, I slide in and Ben shuts my door. He rushes over to his side and jumps in. My teeth clatter and I tug on the short sleeves of my gown. It is not appropriate for this weather but it flatters my bony figure. Turning on the heater to warm his hands, Ben offers me a tight-lipped smile as I drum my fingers on the dashboard, impatient for an explanation.

Ben rubs his palms and shudders. I snort, he pouts and I nearly forget my question when he takes my hand between his. I push one leg over my chair and tilt my upper body so I have full view of him. He does the same. I drag in a breath as his fingers stroke my temple and trail a line down to my chin. I fan myself with one hand because the car grows warm. He grabs that hand and litters kisses on my knuckles.

His lips are still pressed to my knuckles when he looks up to say, "I missed you, Gracie."

I swallow twice before the words form. "I missed you too, Benny." He breaks into a smile. I appraise him silently, taking in this sexiness beside me. If Hayden is the reason he showed up in a suit today, then he can have my cookies and the best brother award. Ben is hot. But in a suit, he's hotter. "You look good."

He starts the car. "You look better," he says with a wink and heat creeps up my neck. "Don't be shy."

Laughter colours his tone, I become self-conscious and hug myself. "I am not shy." He laughs. I duck my head and my hair falls into my face. I am fucking shy and curious to know if this is it. Is our date finally happening? He wouldn't go this length for nothing, right? I clear my throat. "Where are we headed?"

"Somewhere nice." I tuck a piece of hair behind my ear, expecting more but nothing comes.

The drive continues with a song playing on the radio. The volume is so low I can barely make out the lyrics so I make up my own. Ben places his hand on the console and I cover it. He steers the wheel with one hand and a fuzzy feeling spreads through my chest when he gives my hand a reassuring squeeze.

We sit in silence. I don't think I would have been able to speak if he had made a comment.

The roads are almost empty. I guess most people are indoors spending time with their family but here we are. I curl against the window, watching snow settle on the buildings we zoom past. Ben takes a smooth curve by the left. I hum in approval. I didn't know he could drive a car. Bikes and cars are not the same.

"I love the relationship you have with your brother," Ben says.

Talking about Hayden always makes me smile, this time is no different. "I like to annoy him." That's the best part about having a big brother. Ben chuckles and I slip my hand into his. "You called my mum?"

He doesn't look away from the road but his head dips in a nod. "To get her permission."

The darkness in the car conceals my heated cheeks. I tug the hem of my gown over my knees, knowing it can't go beyond that. Ben shuts off the radio, I look up but he's staring ahead. Even his side view is hot.

"How did you get her number?"

We turn into another street. The Christmas decorations on the houses lining the roads become more frequent. A row of restaurants with their names written in Christmas lights sit on each side of the street. Ben drives the car through the gates which automatically open on our arrival and my heart skips a beat.

The place is huge. A boy directs him to a parking lot and my jaw drops at the brands of cars available.

What is this place?

Ben faces me. He splays my fingers on the console and traces lines on my palms. I try to keep my gaze on him but my eyes keep darting outside to the lavish cars. This place screams expensive.

“About your mum’s number...” he says. “I might have gotten it from your phone when you weren’t looking.” He is watching me. Waiting for my reaction but I only shrug. Most importantly, I want to know why we are in this place. “Err... and the car...” He scratches behind his ear and offers me a jittery smile. “The car is rented.” I nod and he stops his movement on my palm. “Rented it for tonight.”

My throat clogs, I have to clear it twice. “What’s happening tonight?”

“Our date?” He coughs while patting his chest. His nervousness makes me less nervous. “Our date,” he says with more confidence. “It’s tonight.”

Holy cow.

It is really happening. We are on our first official date. I manage to smile at him but my inside is a mix of happy emotions. He leans forward to kiss me, I slide my hands into his hair and kiss him back, pouring all the words I cannot say into our kiss. Our foreheads touch, he smiles so hard my heart jumps.

“Our date,” I whisper and he nods. Tears gather in my eyes, he bops my nose. “I love you.”

His smile is bigger and it does something strange to my body. “I love you more.”

In that moment, everything is right and we are in love. A beep interrupts our moment, he peeks at his phone and slides it back into his breast pocket.

Ben doesn't allow me to do anything. He pulls my door open and curves his elbow for me to slide my arm through. A sliver of excitement runs down my spine. I giggle at nothing in particular and Ben chuckles.

The whole place is shiny with intricate details on the designs. My excitement bubbles to the point I have trouble standing. The chandeliers hang low but away from reach above some tables and the white tiles reflect the lights. Music plays from hidden speakers, waiters in uniforms pause at different tables, tending to the diners with polite smiles.

The diners carry on their business without a care in the world as we locate the table Ben booked for us. Our table is by the window. I take the seat across from him and we smile at our images on the window.

A waitress approaches our table, she offers us a curt nod and starts on the usual formalities. I let Ben make our order. My finger circles the cork of the complimentary bottle of wine on our table. The label glued to the bottle shows it's a non-alcoholic wine and my nerves settle. No alcohol for me yet. I pass Ben a wary look when he whispers something into the waitress ear, she nods and takes her leave.

"What did you tell her?" I ask.

Ben spreads his hand on the table, I rub my palm over his to create friction and he pulls back. The sound made by spoons and forks connecting with plates filters in and out of my ears. Ben straightens up.

"Told her you are my girlfriend," he answers.

Bloody liar.

Ben folds his napkin into a triangle and a pink hue stains his cheeks. Is he shy? He confirms it by avoiding my gaze. I like shy Ben.

The waitress returns with our meal. She sets a glass candle holder with an artificial flame on the centre of our table and sends a polite smile to both of us. Ben pops the bottle of wine open, I clap like a child experiencing her first snow as it foams at the tip. Hiding his smile at my excitement, he winks and my cheeks start to hurt from smiling too much.

This feels like more than a date but I am loving every moment of it. I look above Ben's head to a couple as young as us. They are probably still in highschool. Their faces and dressing tells it all. The lady is stunning. My hands lower to my knees and the ugly heads of insecurities show themselves.

"Am I your first girlfriend?" A drop of red wine escapes the bottle and trickles into my glass. Ben takes a moment to reply, then his head bobs. The insecurities grow at his answer and I tuck my hands between my legs. Why me? I am not special. Ben sets the bottle on the table. "Have you ever been on a date?"

His hands disappear under the table. "This is my first."

Seconds pass with none of us asking a question and he fills my flute with more wine. My face scrunches as I take my first sip and make a throaty sound. I taste raspberries and something else but the overall sweetness is the reason I down the rest of the content with a cheetah-like speed. If it's sugary, count Tessa in.

"Is it good?" Ben asks, already moving to pour me a second round and I nod.

Ben opens the bowl our waitress left and an aroma wafts into my nostrils. Rice and peas served with diced plantain and jerk beef. Ben slides a plate across to me. My eyes close as I savour the juiciness of the beef on my tongue. Everything is right. I open my eyes to see Ben smiling at me and my smile fades.

To take the attention off me, I point to the candle holder. "Why do we have a candle on our table?"

One look around and my cheeks warm. We are the only table with a candle. Ben holds his chest in mock horror. "Candle light dinner, babe." I cover my mouth, laughing with reckless abandon. "I hope it counts."

Unable to speak, I can only nod. It does. It's the perfect candle light dinner.