

BadBoy 62

Chapter 62

January one

I am wearing my boots. The combat boots my boyfriend gifted me on our anniversary. I catwalk to the front of my mirror and twirl. Hayden groans behind me. I spin in another circle to annoy him and he sends a pillow flying at me. I duck and the pillow hits the mirror. Picking it from the floor, I launch it at his head.

“I swear to God if you smile at that shoe one more time I’ll stab myself in the eye with a fork.”

My face contorts at the imagery his words provoke, he shoves a fistful of popcorn into his mouth. If he’s so pained, he shouldn’t be sprawled on the bed in my room, eating my snacks. Turning to the mirror with a bigger smile, I lower myself to my seat and inspect the boots on my legs. I can’t get over them.

They are so soft and bloody expensive. The heels are perfect, a few inches to boost my height. I tried not to check the price but that didn’t end well. It cost a fortune. The best part is the side zip. I can pull it off effortlessly without struggling to put it back on. I stretch my legs and grin. It matches my gown. Cinched at the waist and flowing freely to my knees. Hayden tosses popcorn at me but doesn’t say another word.

After sending another picture of my black combat boots to Maria, I push my phone into the drawer. I swear she won’t hear the end of it. Maybe this will convince her to rush back home from her Las Vegas trip. But I doubt it. I don’t think I’ll see her for the rest of second semester or school year and it sucks.

AGT accepted her video. My best friend is becoming a superstar. Second round of auditions starts in two weeks. Boot camps will commence immediately they select the winners of the second round. I can’t wait to see her on our screen singing to a live audience. Too bad I won’t be there but she has all my votes.

I touch the picture of our younger selves glued to my mirror and smile sadly. Today is the beginning of a new year but it doesn’t feel like it. Ben is too busy with his family dinner, he can’t even sneak out. If the auditions go right with Maria, she will not return to San Francisco in the near future. Maria being Maria, she might move to Hollywood from there. It’s her big dream. The world will recognise her talent soon.

My hand lowers to the drawer and my chest grows heavy at the box inside it.

The wristwatch I bought for Ben no longer looks as attractive. It's not as expensive as my boots. On the inside is a single line that says: I love you Benny. It is in cursive. I was so stoked when I asked Daddy to give it to his jeweller. Now I just feel ungrateful. Ugh. I place it flat on my palm and trace the inscription.

"What's that?" Hayden rolls to his stomach, elbows propped on the edge of the bed. His hair is in that tousled style but Mum finally convinced him to get a haircut for the new year dinner. "Let me see."

I hold up the wristwatch by the tip. "It's for Benny." Asher said Ben didn't like that name but he has never corrected me. I rest my head on the top of the chair. "I don't know. Compared to the boots, it's so cheap."

Hayden shifts into a sitting position, we share a glance in the mirror as he tries to make a neat mess of his hair. We are eating out tonight because Mum can't be bothered to cook on the first day of the year.

It's a day to be lazy. Sadly, Daddy agrees with her. I don't think he can ever say no to his wife. They are disgustingly in love. So, for most of today, we have eaten a bunch of unhealthy snacks and cookies.

"He'll love it." I grunt in reply. Hayden moves to stand behind my chair. He grips the edge of my seat and his jaw rests on my hair. I poke his cheek and he smiles at me through the mirror. I am happy he came home. "It's the thought that counts, not price."

Light catches the silver stones decorating the wristwatch, I nod in agreement. Ben will love it. He has a leather and gold wristwatch but I have never seen him with a silver one. I pick up my phone to text him.

Me: Thinking about you.

I smile at the blue tick that appears under my message. He already read it. I can't believe I was single three months ago. Hayden scoffs as my screen lights up with Ben's reply. I am smiling before I glimpse it.

Benny: Gracieeee. I miss you If I could leave, I would. I want to spend the new year with my girlfriend. *kiss kiss* Did I tell you? Plans have changed, we are going out to eat. She can't even make up her mind.

Benny: I almost forgot to say I love you. I love you.

Giggles spill from me, Hayden snatches my phone while I am still thinking up the perfect reply to beat his. His texts are always so cheesy, they never cease to make me smile. I jump to my feet and stretch my hand for my phone but he holds it above his head. It's no use fighting for it as he is a foot taller than I am so I stand there while he skims through my texts with a deep scowl etched on my lips.

Hands crossed, my foot drums into the floor. I love my brother but this is one of his annoying moments. Thankfully, I'm still floating in the high from Ben's text so I am not super annoyed with Hayden. Ben ends all his texts with an I love you. I think it's his way of convincing himself that we are really dating. The same way he insists I end all our calls with an I love you. If I fail to do that, he won't end the call.

A pensive look takes over Hayden's face as he hands over my phone. I bump him on his shoulder.

"What is it?"

He shrugs. "You guys seem pretty serious."

His tone puts me on edge, I place one hand on my hip. "That's because we are." His lips quirk in a half-smile but he doesn't say more. "Just say it." I level him a cool gaze to mask the riot happening in my chest. The few times he spoke about Ben, it was always positive things. "Just fucking say it, Hayden."

"Language," he growls out.

"Fine." My shoulder slump. "What is it? Just tell me."

Grabbing the chair, he takes his seat and reclines on the dresser. "You have your whole life planned out. New York. Acting school. You have sent in your application, right?" Yeah. The deadline for regular admission is the last week of January. I didn't want to wait until then. "I don't think a..." he trails off and my brows shoot up. "I'm only looking out for you, Tessa. In a few months, you will be in different cities. Have you guys even discussed colleges yet?"

My head bobs. Hayden folds his hands under his chin. "We have."

“And?” The floor becomes more attractive. I start picking the popcorns littering the floor. “Tessa.”

Mum will have a fit if she catches me on the floor with my new floral printed gown but I am not thinking of her as I fold my legs under me and get comfortable on the floor. My conversation with Ben floats to the surface of my mind. He doesn't know about New York. Schools are one of the things we don't discuss. He hasn't mentioned any college and it is a bit scary since most deadlines are approaching

“He hasn't made up his mind.” At Hayden's intense stare, I expel a soft breath. “He might be undecided now but it doesn't mean anything.” Hayden's girlfriend was still in high school when he left for college. I was so sure they would end up together. But yeah, life happened. I massage my feet. Maybe Ben wants to take the year off to figure out his life. People do it all the time. “We will be fine.”

“If you say so.” We share a glance and I offer him a tight smile. He drags his chair close to me but on second thought, he joins me on the floor. “What if he decides to stay back here? Or move far from New York?”

Distance makes the heart grow fonder, maybe it will be the case for us or he will meet more pretty girls and forget about me. Ben is not that type of person but I don't have an honest answer for Hayden. Maybe we are moving too fast like my brother said but life is too short for us to let these thoughts inhibit us.

“We will make it work,” I say with more conviction. “I'll make plans. I'll save for it. We can visit each other once every month.” I continue listing ideas off my head, my smile grows bigger with each thought.

“College doesn't work like that,” Hayden says. “You will be busy.”

The confidence in his voice kills the hope building inside me. My heart slams against my chest. I swat his hand resting on my knee, he looks up with a frown. “You are not being a good big brother right now.”

It's January one, I don't need all this negativity, especially from him. So what if college works differently from high school? We should be allowed to enjoy these moments. Ben and I will be fine. We have to be.

“Sorry.” He stretches his hand for a truce. I roll my eyes. Daddy makes us shake hands after we quarrel. It signifies the end of whatever beef we have. I delay to offer him my hand. “You know you want to.”

Laughing, I grab his hand in a rough handshake. “Whatever. You are just jealous.” His nose crinkles and I jut my lower lip. Ben and I will be fine. My mum yells our names from downstairs, he chuckles and rises to his feet, dusting the invisible dirt on his pants. “Coming,” I scream at the door. Hayden helps me to my feet. “Why don’t you have a girlfriend?”

“Not worth it.”

A few seconds pass in a stare-down. I want to agree with him but Ben is worth every single moment of my time so I shrug. As if reading my thoughts, Hayden sneers. By this time last year, I would have agreed with him but I have Ben now. I love him. He arranges my bed while I apply final touches on my makeup.

“Where do you think Daddy is taking us?” he asks while I finger comb my hair.

Mascara? Check. Eyeliner? No, thank you. Shiny lip gloss? Hell, yeah. Hair flowing down my shoulders? Why not? Hayden ruffles my hair, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I spent minutes achieving this look.

“I’m thinking Dan and Dan,” he continues his one-sided conversation.

I shriek in horror. “Mum will kill him.”

That’s for me and Daddy. Our eyes meet, we erupt in laughter. Mum hates Dan and Dan more than she hates tapas. Maria’s mum brings us tapas every Christmas but Mum doesn’t have the nerve to refuse it.