

Badboy 73

Chapter 73

Change of plans

The boys are arguing about their football team. Again. It started as we were about to enter the cafeteria. Ben's team must have lost because he's the most aggravated. We have our trays in front of us but they are still arguing. The girls look bored as hell, myself included. Liam's girlfriend yawns for the third time.

"You okay, babe?" Liam asks her.

"Yeah."

Lies. We are bored. We keep sharing glances each time the boys start on about a player from their team. I'm starting to think joining Ben at his table is a horrible idea. We always eat at my table. Since Maria is gone, it's just us. I like it. But I don't want to be the girlfriend who keeps her boyfriend from his friends.

Ben pecks me. "You are not eating." A hand cups my face, my cheeks grow warm as his friends stare. I shift on his lap, his free hand slips to my waist. He smirks, fully aware of his effect on me. "Babe."

Olivia lifts a carved brow and I hide my face in Ben's shoulder. One of the downsides of sitting on Ben's table is tolerating her. As long as she's on the other side of the table, we are good. She and Noah. But I'm cool with Noah. He's okay. Ben's shoulders vibrate with laughter at my shyness and he strokes my back.

I sit up. Meeting his gaze, I take a big bite of my burger and he grins in approval. He's so easy to please.

Christine, I think that's her name, Liam's girlfriend giggles. "You guys are so cute."

"Oh, yeah?" Ben says. She's the most friendly among the girls. Olivia and her minions have barely spoken a word since I sat at their table. Noah is being Noah. Making jokes that has everyone at the table cracking up. Ben uses one hand to steal fries from my plate. He got his but it's finished. "I think Gracie is cuter."

Christine nods. "I agree."

I fight the smile spreading to my lips. Christine is pretty. Like Olivia's level of pretty. Tall with a curvy body, long blonde hair, flawless face and a cheerleader. Unlike Olivia, she barely uses makeup. And she's nice.

From my side view, I catch Olivia glaring at me. I hate her too. When our eyes meet, she looks away and stabs her lettuce. Poor salad. Noah wraps his arm around her shoulder and whispers something into her ear that makes her smile. He lifts his head to me and winks. In return, I make a gag face.

Ben doesn't notice our odd exchange as he begins another argument. My friendship with Noah is largely influenced by the knowledge of his past and part guilt for thinking the worst of him. Noah is not the kind of person I would befriend on a regular day. If he told the truth in his letters, then he is not dating Olivia.

The thought makes me grin. When she scowls, I stick out my tongue. She's so lonely, no one wants her.

Minutes later, we exit the cafeteria. Ben slings an arm on my shoulder, I slide mine around his waist. He walks me to the front of my class and opens the door. I locate my seat and he takes the one beside it.

"You were so quiet during lunch," he says.

Resting his head on the desk, he smiles. I mimic his position. We have five minutes until my next class.

"It was a bit overwhelming." His brows furrow and I lick my lips dry. "They are cool people," I say to make him feel better. They are cool people minus the queen bitch and her dumb minions. "I like them."

"I like that you like them," he replies. "Thanks, babe." I give his hand a small squeeze. With him, I want to do more because he appreciates even the little things. Ben is the kind of person you want to please. We sit in that comfortable silence, smiling at each other. I love him. "It's exactly one week from today."

A weight crushes my chest at his statement. Our first fight is next week Friday, 8 pm. If my parents don't change their mind, we will leave San Francisco the next day, Saturday morning. I overheard them talking about it last night. These days, all I do is eavesdrop on their conversation and pray for a change of heart.

Ben stretches his arms in front of him. They tremble a little. "Are you nervous?"

"A little." More than a little. But not because of the fight.

"Don't be," he says with so much confidence I lose my doubts. "We will win. I believe in us."

Before I form a reply, he stands. Stopping by my seat, he plants a kiss on my temple. "Gotta go now." My heart swells with pride when he peeks at his wristwatch. He wears it every day. "Take care, babe."

"You too. Love you."

Ben halts at the door, pressing two fingers to his lips, he blows me a kiss that turns me into a giggling teenager. I am going to marry him.

The rest of school flies by so quickly, so does our training at the gym. I drive into our street with a grin on my lips. If today's training is anything to go by, Ben and I will be kicking asses come next week.

My smile fades when I remember I am yet to tell Ben the news. I don't know why I am delaying. The guilt doubles once I step into our house. There's a travelling box in the middle of the parlour and Mum is on the floor sealing a few boxes. My bag drops to my feet, she looks up and her lips break into a smile.

Mum wipes her hands on her hips as she comes to stand before me. I am stiff in her embrace and she pulls back to stare worriedly at me. I fake a smile when Daddy walks into the parlour with another box he stacks on the one Mum was messing with. He wiggles his eyebrows at me and turns back into the room.

"You're late today," Mum says. "What happened?"

"Got caught up with something." My gaze wanders to the boxes. Our parlour looks a mess. There are boxes everywhere like people are moving out. Wait! I step out of her embrace. "What's going on?"

“Oh.” Mum pulls me to sit beside her on the floor. Pushing a box between us, she slaps a white tape to it and labels it with blue ink. “Nothing. Change of plans.” The wedge in my chest jumps to my throat. This cannot be good. I place my hands on my laps and wait for her to ruin my life. “Go get ready for dinner.”

I suck in a shaky breath, Mum arches a brow and the words I should have spoken dissolves. I hear myself say, “Yes, Mum.” I walk to the door to pick my bag and stop at the foot of the stairs. “I’ll be right down.”

My steps are wobbly as I hurry up the stairs and into my bathroom. I grip the sink, trying to force myself to calm down. Words keep floating in my head, threatening to suffocate me. What change of plans?

I touch a hand to my wet cheeks. I don’t want to leave. A second later, I dash to my room to retrieve my phone. I don’t know why I dial Ben and start pacing as I wait for his number to connect. He’s not picking.

He finally picks. “Babe?” My voice catches, I place a hand over my mouth to suppress my sob as I lower myself to the bed. “I was about to call you,” he says. A low sound jumps out of my throat. I should tell him now before it is too late. Sweat breaks out on my forehead, he whispers, “Gracie, are you okay?”

“Yeah.” I press my palm to my forehead, my twin image stares back at me from the vanity mirror. I seem to have aged in minutes. “Was missing you.” He laughs. I picture him grinning. “Called to say I love you.”

“Love you too.” He pauses. There’s shuffling in the background. “Asher wants to say hi.”

Asher and I chat for a while, I bid both of them goodnight and return to the bathroom. Mum screams for me to hurry up and I go through the motions of bathing and dressing up without fully being present.

I meet them downstairs, table set with the meals already served. They are sitting side by side so I take the opposite chair. They converse in low tunes while I get started on my dinner in silence. It is always this way with them but tonight, it annoys me. Mum stops eating to stare at me, Daddy does the same.

“Tessa?” Mum says. I sip slowly from my glass. “Are you okay?”

They want to take me away from my Benny, how can I be okay? I nod. Daddy cocks his head in that way that shows he doesn’t believe a word I said but he doesn’t question me. It’s his fault this is happening.

“You said something about a change of plans,” I say. Mum pauses on slicing her steak. My hands wrap around my glass, my feet rap into the floor. I am more nervous about asking her of the new plans than hearing them. She lowers her cutlery to her plates and folds her hands. “You didn’t tell me the change.”

“Ah, yes.” Mum beams. “Your dad has to resume on Monday,” she says. “So he’s leaving tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” She nods. This is not the plan. We were supposed to leave together next Saturday. Three of us. Tomorrow is too soon for me to leave Benny. Oh, my God. He will hate me for keeping this from him. I will hate myself. I squeeze my lips and wipe my clammy hands on my knees. “What about us? Are we going?”

They don’t notice my discomfort. Mum sighs. “I wish we were, sweetheart but we will join him next week as planned.” Her countenance changes, her fingers dart between both of us. “Me and you. Are you excited?”

“Very.”