

Badboy 74

Chapter 74

### **A cool city**

“Did you know about this?” I ask Hayden while dragging my pyjamas bottoms over my legs. Tucking the phone between my shoulder and ear, I arrange the mess on my dresser. “Daddy is travelling tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” he replies, “Mum told me.”

Dinner was a horrid affair. They didn’t stop talking about it. How can they be excited at uprooting me from here and moving to another city? I expect Hayden to say more but he doesn’t. He likes the idea.

“Are you going to try and stop them?” I ask.

The poster on my door doesn’t offer me any comfort. Her smile doesn’t fuel me with the drive to be a better fighter. It’s not about the fight as much as it is about leaving Benny. I collapse to the bed with a sigh, my head hangs between my shoulders. I stand, then sit back. Hayden drags in a breath, I clench my fist on my knee in anticipation of what he will say.

“Stop them from being happy?”

At that, the knife in my gut twists and my eyes water. I want them to be happy too.

“Tessa?” he calls out but I don’t answer.

A sob catches in my throat, tears roll down my cheek and blur my vision. Did he really have to say that? I’m not the bad guy. Swiping the back of my hand against my eyes, I flip the switch. My chest tightens, my heart hurts too much. I pry the phone from my ear and crawl into bed, taking solace in the darkness.

Hayden’s breathing from the other end of the phone reminds me the call is still in progress. Sometimes, he talks without thinking. I pluck the phone from the bed to end the call when his voice comes on again.

“You don’t want to go?” Hayden whispers.

“I never said that,” I blurt out. I fist the sheet and stare at the ceiling. “Don’t put words in my mouth.”

“Yep. You don’t want to go.” He snickers, the sound aggravates me and my eyes twitch. “Maria is not there anymore. You don’t have any friends in BH, you should be jumping at this chance to leave there.”

Yes, big brother. Thanks for reminding me about my lonely, miserable life before Ben and my inability to make friends. Because he was the school’s golden boy doesn’t give him the right to mock the introverts.

“Goodnight, Hayden.”

I cut the call and shove the phone under my pillow. It rings almost immediately but I ignore it. He should go talk to his friends or someone else because I’m tired. Minutes later, a knock sounds on my door. Light from the corridor streams into my room as the door opens. Mum stands at the doorway, watching me. I hold my breath and count the seconds until she leaves. Unfortunately, she takes one step into my room.

The bed sinks with her weight, she pulls the cover over my chest and tucks a stray hair behind my ear. I release my breath slowly so as not to alert her, she pushes one leg on the bed and slides in beside me.

Great.

“Are you awake?”

“No.”

Mum chuckles. She props her elbow on the second pillow, her other hand continuously runs over one part of my face. I know she can’t see me in the dark but I squeeze my eyes shut. Maybe she will go away.

“Hey. Hayden has been trying to reach you.”

Of course he will call her. He knows I can hold a grudge. “I don’t want to talk to him.”

My arms move under the covers but she still finds them and sandwiches a hand between hers. I listen to the sound of her breathing until I can't take the silence any longer. Pushing myself up till my back connects to the headboard, I bring my knees to my chest. Mum flips the lamp on the nightstand, casting a soft glow on the bed.

"What's going on with you and your brother, huh?" I shrug. "Don't give me that, Theresa Grace. Hayden asked me to talk to you. He wouldn't say anything but I have an idea what might be the problem." Mum releases a heavy sigh that hangs over us for a second. "You are not happy about moving to New York."

"It's not that," I whisper in reply.

My teeth sink into my lip, my jaw touches my knee and I wrap my arms around my legs. I don't meet her gaze so she shifts till she's seated in front of me and crosses her legs. Mum takes my hands and smiles.

"Then it's what? Talk to me." She releases my hands, leans back with her arms behind her to support her position. I don't like how she's staring at me so I keep shut and lower my gaze to her feet. "Sweetheart."

If I say anything, it will only make her feel bad. I don't want to ruin their chance at happiness.

"I don't understand why you're not happy." Because she wants to separate me from my boyfriend. How can I be happy? "Maria is in Las Vegas. It's about a minute from New York," she says with a small laugh that dies off when I don't respond. It is not that close. "Sweetheart. What's wrong? New York is where your dreams are."

"New York is a great place," I add because I have been quiet for too long. "It's a cool city."

"Just cool?" She folds her arms under her boobs and scoffs. "Is this because of Benjamin?"

"Ben," I correct.

“Ben,” she mutters with mild disgust like the name annoys her. Maybe I am reading too much into her facial expression. My palms are fast growing clammy, I wipe them on the sheets and hug a pillow to my chest. “Your daddy found a school for you. It will help your application into NYU, your dream university.”

Her voice is heavy with disappointment and I squeeze the pillow as if it will protect me from her words. Mum is not angry but she is not happy with me either. I swallow. She shakes her head with a sad smile.

Her hand sweeps over my room. “And you want to throw away your future because of a guy? A guy you just started dating.” Tears trail down my cheek. I hiccup. “We raised you better than this, Theresa.”

“Mum...” I clench my hands at my sides. “You know I want to go to NYU. You know I would gladly...” My voice cracks, she pulls me into her arms and strokes my back. “I don’t want to leave Benny. I love him.”

Ben’s daddy left, not by choice but he left either way. His mum too. I can’t break his heart.

Mum laughs so hard I disengage from the hug. “Oh, Tessa.” She palms my face. I purse my lips and she laughs harder. Her chest sags and her eyes search my face. “I will see what I can do. Don’t—” She holds a finger up at the wide grin that breaks out on my lips. “Don’t get too excited yet. I’ll talk to your daddy.”

I nod vigorously and she sniggers. She’s the only one who can convince him. I am staying here with my Benny. We will figure out NYU when it’s time, for now, we will enjoy the rest of high school together.

“I love you, Mum,” I tell her. “You are the best mum in the world.”

“Hmm.” Mum gets off the bed. I lay on my side, chest bursting with pride. “You should get some rest.”

Staring into Mum’s eyes, there’s a hint of sadness in them. My throat clogs. In my excitement I forgot to consider what this might mean for her and Daddy. If Daddy stays back, he will lose the job in New York. And that means late dinners, no time for his wife and kids. We will be back to square one all over again.

“Mum?” She halts. “It’s fine if we move to New York.” Her brow jerks up, I try to play it off. “I shouldn’t throw away my future cos of a boy.” Ben is not just any boy. Looking unconvinced, she nods. “Love you.”

She places a kiss on my temple. "Love you too. Get some rest, okay? Your daddy leaves in the morning."

Darkness descends over the room, Mum shuts the door on her way out. I retrieve my phone. There are three missed calls from Hayden and a text. I roll my eyes and tap on the text. He's an ass but I love him.

Hayden: sorry, Tee

Me: asshole

My phone pings. The light from the screen illuminates my face. I chuckle at his text. Yep, he's an idiot.

Hayden: guess that means I'm forgiven

Me: maybe

Hayden: PS: if I'm an asshole, you're also an asshole because we share the same gene.

Hayden: Did you talk to Mum?

Me: yeah. I want them to be happy too.

Hayden: we will figure something out.

I doubt that but I let myself believe it. Closing his message, I tap on Ben's name. My fingers hesitate to hit send on the message I composed. A second later, I delete the sentence and type up something short.

Me: are you awake?

Benny: barely. Wassup?

A sigh leaves me and a weight settles in my chest. I hate keeping secrets from him. Staring at the screen for so long causes my eyes to water. I guess I will tell him on Monday. We can spend the week together.

Me: the ceiling

Benny: smarty pants. Wassup with you?

Me: missing you. Love you. Sleep well.

Benny: sleep well, Gracie. I love you