

Badboy 76

Chapter 76

I am okay

BEN

On Monday, I caught Gracie staring at me with a sad smile. I asked if she was okay, she said everything was fine. On Tuesday, she suggested leaving school to spend time together. I turned it down because I didn't want to make that a habit for us. She is a great student with good grades and perfect attendance.

Now, she's telling me they are leaving merely hours before they have to move to another city. The more I think about it and the obvious signs I chose to ignore, the angrier I become. She made me promise not to get mad knowing fully well I will be upset. My hands clench in my pockets, I release my breath slowly.

I am okay.

I survived before she came into my life. I will be fine again when she leaves. Everyone always leaves. Dad left, Mum moved in with Josef. I became the second choice. It was only a matter of time before Gracie left.

A painful smile tugs my lips when I stop in front of my bike parked beside Gracie's car. Good thing I suggested coming in our own rides or I might have been stranded if I took her advice. I kick the bike to life and drive out of this place. Tonight was supposed to be a celebration but she had to ruin it for us.

What's the point of all the training? The time at the gym if she won't be here till the All-Rounder finals.

I reach home in one piece and jog up to my room to discard my outfit that partially smells of her. My phone vibrates in my pocket, I don't care to check the caller. It has to be her. I don't want to talk to her.

Shoving my jacket into the wardrobe, I grunt when my toe kicks the wall, hopping on one leg to reduce the pain. A box falls off the last compartment of my wardrobe and the letters tumble out. I sit cross-legged on the floor and sift through them. There are a lot from her. I pick out a note. It hurts to read it.

Forget hydrogen, you're my number one element.

Hydrogen is the first element on the element table. I snicker as hard as I did the first day I received the note. Only Gracie can come up with corny lines and make them sound so cute. My chest tightens, I push it into the box and pick another. My hands tremble and the note almost falls. I don't want her to go.

You are sweeter than 3.14! I've got my ion you, babe.

I burst out laughing. A few tears slip out of my eyes. She gave me this in literature class. I had no idea what Ms Eva was saying but she kept ranting and I was forced to tune her out. The reminder hurts. I guess I am not as sweet as pie anymore. She no longer has her eyes on me, she has them on New York.

There are a lot of notes spread out on the floor. I stop sifting through them and return them to the box I shove into the wardrobe. My phone beeps. Mum. She wants to know what time I will be bringing Asher tomorrow.

It was supposed to be in the morning so I could spend the rest of the day with Gracie but plans have changed. The phone rings before I finish typing my reply to her. I hope she's not calling to invite me for the weekend.

"Hey," she says.

"Hey."

I kick my legs out in front of me and rest my back on the door of the wardrobe. The silence lingers for too long and she clears her throat. It's the way with us. She calls and doesn't know how to steer the conversation. I prefer to text her to avoid this awkwardness. Jumping to the bed, I stare at the ceiling.

She has not spoken a word yet. "Mum?"

"Ben," she says. She clears her throat again. I don't mean to make her uncomfortable sometimes but it just happens. And she never stops trying which makes me feel guilty afterwards. "I sent you a text."

"I was just about to reply," I tell her.

A long pause. I adjust the pillow under my head and roll to my side. She might think I'm lying. I ignore her calls a lot. Most times, she calls for the same reasons. To check on me or invite me to her house.

"It's alright," she whispers. "Are you coming?" I answer in the positive. "Will you stay?"

A headache begins to build, my eyes close. I massage my forehead. Do I want to be there? Asher will be with me, that's one plus to going. She won't be there either. Nobody speaks about her. Not even Asher.

On a sigh, I say, "I'm not sure."

The octave of her voice drops. She replies, "Let me know when you make up your mind, okay?" I grunt in reply. "You know you are always welcome here." A sound between a half-laughter and a grunt escapes me. Right. I am always welcome to watch her and her husband gush over each other. "I love you, Ben."

Love you too.

The call ends with a click and I place the phone on my chest. Memories spill over me but I force them in my mind's archive where they have been for very long. I sigh. The events of today roll over me in slow motion. The excitement, the thrill.

Gracie ruined everything.

She is leaving me. I swipe up on my screen.

There are missed calls and texts from her. I ignore all of them. What does she have to say? It doesn't change anything. While I am contemplating my next move, Olivia text pops in and I sit up. It elicits a small groan from me but I am thankful for the distraction because it allows me to think of someone else. I type a reply that is half useless, half helpful.

Me: ignore them.

Liv: I can't ignore them if they are being so loud. What doesn't she understand? I hate that woman.

Mrs Beckham wasn't always this bad but things have changed. Sadly, kids always have to suffer for their parents' decisions yet they are never asked for their opinions before parents make those decisions.

Why birth them?

Me: sorry. Don't think about it.

After a moment's thought, I pick up my phone to send a new text. I might regret it.

Me: want to come over? I think Asher is asleep.

Liv: what would Gracie say?

Me: that it's a bad idea?

She will get mad and try so hard to pretend she's not jealous of Olivia. If only she saw what was behind the facade, she would understand she had the best life among most of us in the graduating class of 2019.

Liv: yeah, I think I'll just stay here. G'night.

She should. Olivia and I will always be friends but her presence here will upset Gracie. I don't want to upset her. I groan and grab my head in my hands. I don't know why I care about what she thinks when she's leaving. She wasn't thinking about it.

Me: night.

Liv: Christine was right. You guys are so cute and you look good together.

Warmth spreads through me. It must have taken a lot for her to admit this. Smiling at my screen with the intention of showing Gracie to convince her that Olivia doesn't want me in that way. My birthday kiss was a grave mistake, we both understood that.

Liv: if you tell her I said this, you are dead to me. I will deny it.

That means I'll have to swear Gracie to an oath of secrecy before showing her these texts.

Me: don't let them get to you, k? Sleep well.

The bed squeaks under me as I shuffle to the edge, I locate my slippers and saunter out of the room. The lights in Asher's room are off, I tiptoe inside and sit on his bed. I guess I might have to stay the weekend with him so I don't spend the rest of tomorrow sulking. He stirs in his sleep then a hand grabs my wrist. I stroke his arm and he lets go of me.

"Benny?"

"Yeah. It's me, Champ."

The phone vibrates again, I pluck it out of my pocket and switch it off. Gracie is not only leaving me, she is leaving Champ. How do I tell him she left? My fingers run through his hair. He loves it when I do that. I like it when Gracie massages my scalp or trims my brows. It hurts but her kisses soothe me.

"How was your date?"

"Awesome."

"Hmm. How's Tessa?"

I climb in bed with him, he creates more space for me. "She's good. She's travelling."

“When will she be back?”

My heart jumps to my throat. I ball my hand into a fist and clear my throat to be able to speak. “I don’t know.” He makes a sound of disapproval and I offer a one hand shrug in the dark. “How was school?”

“Okay. Nothing interesting happened.”

I listen to the sound of his breathing, when I am certain he’s still awake, I say, “Mum called.”

“Are you staying?”

“Yeah.”