

Badboy 89

Chapter 89

Gone

The video is gone. I refresh the page again. Nothing. It was there last night before I slept. The door to my bathroom creaks and I enter. Splashing water on my face, I do the necessary and return to my room.

It's odd sitting in my room on a school day. I think I miss school. I move to the window to sit, frowning at the lawn in front of the house on the other side. The streets are empty. As empty as my heart. I miss Ben. There's no use trying to contact him. He will not pick. My head turns slowly at the sound of a knock.

The door opens to Mum. "Hey." She is dressed. "I was thinking we could go out. Do something fun." To cheer me up but I am not up for anything. She moves closer. I hug my knees to my chest. "What say you?"

"I think I'll just stay inside today." Her hand lowers to my back, she traces random shapes on my spine. "I have homework to catch up on." There's nothing to catch up on or do inside. I don't have any friends who would care to keep me updated about school. "You can go. Have fun. I'll be in here having fun too."

My voice is too flat. Mum sighs and takes a seat opposite me. "I don't like your mood."

Me neither. "It's fine. The video is gone."

"Oh, good. I spoke to your principal." She kicks off her shoes and leans against the window. "Tessa, are you sure you will be okay by yourself?" Her concern is so laughable. I am fine. Maybe not exactly fine but I can be by myself for a few hours. "Cheer up, okay? Two weeks will be gone before you know it."

And we will be on our way to New York.

"Mum. Can I tell you something?" Her arm brushes my leg. It's a move that loosens the knots in my belly. "Do you remember the play?" Her face pinches into a serious mask of concentration and my toes curl. "The Romeo and Juliet play, it's this Friday. The Dean of SAS is coming." She gives me a confused look, I laugh a little and go on to explain SAS is an art school. "Benny applied to SAS."

Her face is blank. I chew the inside of my lips. "Benny is Romeo and I'm Juliet." If he will not pick my calls or texts, then he will have to talk to me on stage. "If there's no Juliet for Romeo, the play won't hold."

And if it doesn't, Ben might miss out on his scholarship. Yeah, there is a backup Juliet but she has never been on stage because I am always present.

"What do you want me to do?" It's a far stretch but I make a suggestion that sounds strange coming from me. Mum frowns, then hugs me. Planting a kiss on my hair, she says, "Okay. I'll see what I can do."

"Mum?" I call out when she's at the door. My breath comes out in white puffs. Her head tilts when I say nothing. I am doing the right thing but the tiny voice in my head thinks otherwise. That Ben will never talk to me again if I do this. "It's about Olivia." Her body goes rigid, she storms towards me like the overprotective mother she is. I love her. "It's fine, Mum."

Concern is all over her face, my laugh does nothing to help. "Are you sure?" The pad of her thumb runs up and down my cheek. "Did she put up another video?" Her nostrils flare slightly. "You're scaring me."

Because I'm unsure. What if I lose Ben forever by doing this? I take a deep breath.

"It's not that bad." I pat the spot beside me, sitting up to create more space for her. She gives me a side onceover, then nods for me to continue. "I think Olivia needs help," I whisper. Mum laughs. It starts off slow until she is bent over, laughing too hard to care. "Mum, I'm serious. It's not a laughing matter."

"Theresa, she put that video of you," Mum intones like I forgot. "She bullied you." Ben bullied me too but we are past that. "Of course she needs help."

Again, I am faced with those second thoughts. Did she really put up a video? It could have been anyone like Ben said. Noah. Zoey. Every other person who was there that night is a suspect. If she didn't put up that video, Ben will never forgive me.

"I know." I shake my head to clear my thoughts. "I'm not even sure she's the one." Mum waves off my reply. Like me, she's convinced the only person who has a motive is Olivia. But we will save that talk for later. "Mrs Beckham is getting a divorce."

The news hit her by surprise. "Since when?"

"Since I don't know. Ben told me."

"Ben?"

"Yeah, they are good friends." I am picking the thread of my shorts again. "We went to her house one night and her eye was swollen." I leave out the details Ben told me. As much as I hate Olivia, I know no one deserves to live like she is doing. "Mrs Beckham's boyfriend hits her sometimes."

Mum's hand lowers to my knee, she meets my gaze with a hint of doubt. I remind myself I am doing the right thing. Olivia may be too old for child services protection but she can get help away from her family.

"I'm not lying, I swear." My eyes water. I feel like an asshole all over again for putting Ben in the position to pick. "She covers it up with makeup." I wonder now if she has always loved makeup or her looks are motivated by the scars she has to cover. "Lots of it. I don't know if we can help. Ben is really worried."

Mum dabs my wet cheeks with a handkerchief she pulls out from her side pocket. "Ben?" My head bobs and I sniff. She's smiling as she returns the handkerchief. "Ben is who you are worried about in this mess?"

"I'm worried about Olivia too but Ben doesn't want to talk to me. I think we broke up."

Her brows furrow. "Why?"

It made sense then when I asked him to choose but I can't voice out the reason without sounding stupid. Mum nudges me with her elbow, she won't let this pass until I tell her. I make a show of preparing for it by coughing and clearing my throat.

"I asked him to pick. I know, it was stupid. He was worried about her, then I asked him to pick between the both of us." She slips an arm around me and I rest my head on her shoulder. "And he picked her."

“Oh, honey. That was not the perfect time.” I know that now. “I’m sure he will get over it.”

He won’t.

“Can you help? Talk to someone. Ben says he molests her too.” Mum curses and slaps a hand over her mouth immediately. I am in full ranting mode as I spit out the rest of the details. I don’t tell her about Ben’s feelings. I want to but I can’t. But I make sure to let her know Mrs Beckham’s boyfriend sexually harasses her. She curses again. “I don’t understand the details but her mother won’t do anything.”

“Are you sure of what you’re saying?” Mum doesn’t let me speak, she squats in front of me. With a hand under my jaw, she says, “Sweetheart, you can get into big trouble for this if you are wrong.”

For some reason, the words to reply her fail me. I start crying. She engulfs me in a hug, rocking us from side to side till I calm down. “I’m not lying. It’s why Ben is so mad. I shouldn’t have made him choose.”

“You shouldn’t have but the damage is done now.” I nod against her chest and she takes a small step back to face me. “I’ll talk to Mrs Beckham.” My head shakes. Olivia could get into more trouble. “You know there’s nothing I can do if she denies your statement? Are you sure Olivia will talk?”

“I don’t know.”

Mum squeezes my shoulders and takes her leave. The room is too quiet and my thoughts threaten to suffocate me. I connect my phone to the speaker and put the music on the highest. But it doesn’t help.

Seconds later, I am on my way to Olivia’s house. I don’t have a plan so I sit in the car for a little while, thinking up scenarios and how they end. My car overlooks the side of her room, if her window was open, I would be able to see into her room. If I remember correctly, it’s almost the same size as mine.

I sit up when her windows fly open. A male figure stands in front of it, looking into the street. I slide down my seat, hoping Ben doesn’t notice my car. He walks away from the window and I do the most stupid thing by dialling his number. It rings uninterruptedly, then his voicemail comes up.

He’s ignoring me.

For my sanity, I stop trying after the fifth ring. I don't know why I kept expecting the response to change after each call. Minutes, maybe hours later, I put the car on drive. I'll come back later when there's no Ben.