

Badboy 90

Chapter 90

It is time

BEN

The play is today. I'm not sure there's a need for me to be there since the female lead is suspended. Whitney or someone else I don't remember is the backup but it's useless, she doesn't recall her lines.

I will not embarrass myself in front of the whole school.

Who needs the play anyway? I only joined drama club to tease Gracie. I kick my tires until my foot screams in pain. I don't want to think about that girl.

Donning my helmet, I start for Olivia's house. She's back home but confined to bed rest. That devil spawn isn't home and won't be back for about a week. I hope his parachute fails on his skydiving trip.

It will be fun to hear his screams as he falls to his death. He will experience the fear and the pain he put her through. I kill the engine when I'm in front of her house. Olivia is not coming for the play and I am missing my first class by coming here instead of being at school. School is not as fun without Gracie.

I knock twice before the door opens. Mrs Beckham steps out without letting me in. It is the first time I'm seeing her at home since Olivia returned from the hospital. She doesn't deserve to be a mother.

"What do you want?"

Her blonde locks are the same as Olivia, her face is an older version of her daughter. If she was my age, I would have pushed past her. But this is not my house. If I want to see my friend, I have to tolerate her.

Hate burns in my eyes as I stare her down. Shame on her. "I'm here to see Liv."

Leaning on the wall, she crosses her arms. Her eyes do a slow sweep of my body. "You must be joking. After your girlfriend tore her face, you want to see her? For what, Benjamin? You're not seeing Olivia."

There are so many things wrong with her reply but I take an involuntary step back like her words have the power to hurt me. Maybe they do. Gracie's words hurt me. Even if I try, I can never forget them.

"The next time I see you here, I'll have you arrested."

A soundless laughter escapes me. The hate, the long buried anger rushes to the surface. Her lips curl in distaste and my fists clench and unclench. Words I would never say to her on a regular basis spill out of me.

"You're the one who should be arrested, Mrs Beckham. You don't know the first thing about being a mother." My chest heaves, we stare at each other in surprise and shock. "If you had spent more time with your daughter, maybe she wouldn't have gone around bullying people. Olivia used to bully Gracie."

"So that's enough reason to attack her?"

"She didn't attack her." I don't want to spend time defending Gracie but I won't be silent if she's falsely accused. Taking another breath, I try to explain. "At first, Liv was bullying people because it was the only way she would get your attention."

Mrs Beckham starts laughing like I made my reply up. I don't know why people never believe me.

Mum didn't believe me back then. The memories from the past are clearer. All those nights I have tried to forget. My chest tightens and I remember. I remember her. Her smell. The feel of her hand on my crotch, right before taking my penis into her mouth. A stinging wave of dizziness hits me.

Not now, please. Go away.

It doesn't go away. I am that little boy again with nowhere to hide after she's done desecrating me.

Mrs Beckham is no longer laughing. She straightens up to speak but I don't give her the chance to do so.

“Instead of trying to figure out why your daughter acts the way she does, you bring in a stupid man who molests your own daughter under your own roof.” She gasps but I am not done. All the things I never worked up the courage to tell Josef and my mother, I say it to her. “What kind of mother are you? I know. You are a horrible mother. You are the kind of mother who harbours her daughter’s rapist. The mother no child ever wishes to have.”

I don’t see it coming until her palm lands on my cheek. A tear leaks to my cheek. She is not the only one I’m angry at. I’m angry at Tessa. I’m angry at my mother. I’m angry at Josef but she is the worst of them. Mum and Josef have tried to be better but this awful woman won’t even make any efforts.

“Get out.”

She doesn’t need to say it twice. I am on my way out of the forsaken place. Someone calls me. Olivia. But I don’t look back. She can sort out her issues on her own for today. I need to figure out my future if I don’t get this scholarship.

The ride to school is a blur. I regain myself when the school building comes into view. It’s a half day today because of the play. I push through each class without an idea what the teachers are talking about. After the last class, I join the others at the theatre.

Miss Jota is a nervous wreck. She walks over to me and grabs me by my shoulders. “Romeo, I need the real Juliet. Your Juliet.”

Gracie’s replacement overhears us and Miss Jota turns to her with a shrug. “Sorry. You are not it.”

She is right. Whitney is an awful Juliet and I don’t want to kiss her. I don’t want to kiss anyone.

Whitney runs out of the hall crying, Miss Jota shakes her head and walks away, muttering something about overgrown sensitive kids. Knowing she is not always this way makes it easy to let her comment slide. I join the guys decorating the stage and start glueing cut out shapes to the wall to suit the theme.

“Chop chop, we don’t have all day,” Miss Jota screams at us. “Get working, boys.”

The boys and I share a look. We are almost done. If she had taken so much as a glance at us, she would have seen that. I leave to rehearse my lines for the last time. The dressing room is full, people move in and out in a hurried frenzy. I take one step inside and stop. Juliet's seat is occupied by the original Juliet.

She's not alone. She's talking to Noah. I take my seat in front of the mirror while waiting for the makeup artist that will transform me to a mediaeval teen. Noah stops talking when he notices me. He tries to catch my eyes but I pick a pink brush to dust my face. He will return to his conversation pretty soon.

"Tessa?" Miss Jota yells from the entrance. She has been doing a lot of that since today. Her eyes hold the questions I couldn't ask. Gracie turns to her with a smile. Noah's hand remains on the back of her chair. I grit my teeth. What does he want from her? He needs to stay away. "What are you doing here?"

Miss Jota is happy to see her but the news of her suspension already went round. She is not supposed to be here. If the principal finds out, her suspension will be extended. I don't want that. Someone taps me. The boy smiles. He must be from one of my classes. He holds up my outfit and I accept it with a smile.

"The principal allowed me to be here." I shrug out of my shirt and pull on my breeches. My ears strain to catch her words but her voice lowers. She says something I don't hear but it sounds like, "I'll leave too."

Whatever it was, it makes Miss Jota grin like she won the lottery. I am done dressing when the makeup artist arrives. Evan. We have one class together. He tries to strike a conversation but I'm not interested.

Soon enough, he finishes with me and skips to the next person. I watch him transform Gracie to another person. Her wig is longer than her hair. She runs her fingers through it and looks away when she catches me staring at her. Minutes later, everyone files out of the room but I don't move an inch from my seat.

Gracie stops at the door, she leans on the frame without meeting my gaze. She wants to say something. I don't know what I'll say in response to her. I've missed her calls and texts. None of that was a mistake.

"Benny." I glare at her through the mirror and she looks to her feet. Her cheeks are too pink. I don't know if she's blushing or if it's the powder from the makeup. "Ben." I don't want her to call my name. It makes me miss her. I don't want to miss her. I don't want to talk to her unless it is necessary. "I'm sorry."

“For what?” As soon as the words are out of my lips, I slap my palm over my forehead. “Forget I said that.”

I didn’t mean to talk to her.

Gracie twiddles her hands. I stop waiting for her response and walk out of the room. She can’t even say anything because she has nothing meaningful to say. I never make requests and the first time I do, she refuses to help and she is supposed to be my always and forever. I am only protecting Olivia because no one protected me from my abuser. I’ll never put her in an uncomfortable position. But it’s like she said, it’s not her business.

I stop behind the curtain where the rest of the cast are gathered. We look quite the picture in our outfits. I stand away from them with that familiar feeling. It’s like before Gracie. Lonely in the midst of people.

We hear Miss Jota’s voice from the curtains. She says something and a round of applause greets her statement. The guests must be here. I shudder with nervousness and take an instinctive step back when Gracie joins us. She stands with the rest of the cast and my heart squeezes. Gracie looks too sad.

Miss Jota walks out to give us a pep talk, our heads bob in understanding. It is time.