

Chapter 236 Thank You For Lying

Third person

“Hey... Is everything okay?” Kayden paced into Nina’s room, watching her eyes carefully until she darted them away.

She closed and locked the door behind him. “Uh, yeah. I think so. Just... something I wanted to talk to you about. Before I lose my nerve.”

He pressed his lips together, nodding. Trying to think of some words to say while his mind was distracted, coming up with a dozen different possible reasons why Nina might be acting like this.

“Come here,” she said, moving to the bed and taking a seat perched on the edge. When Kayden sat down beside her, so close their thighs were touching, she regretted not planning on sitting somewhere else, anywhere other than a bed, for this chat...

“So?” he prodded gently. “What’s up?”

“I know you and I,” Nina started, “we’re not committed. We’ve never talked about being exclusive. But we’ve gotten real close since I started staying here, and so I... I just feel like I need to tell you something.” She blurted out the next part quickly, before she could stop herself. “I slept with someone else, Kayden.”

His reaction wasn’t quite what she expected. Actually, she’d had no idea what to expect. But it definitely wasn’t this. He looked away and laughed. It was a dry, cheerless chuckle, but to Nina it still seemed inexplicable.

Until he dropped his head, started nodding, and said, “So did I, actually.”

Now it was Nina’s turn to mirthlessly chuckle. “Oh. Okay.” She felt a mix of emotions upon hearing this, but the most predominant one was simple relief. “Okay. So where does that leave you and me?” Suddenly it felt like her throat was plugged with cotton, like a pill bottle. She swallowed down the hesitation, though, coughed her throat clear and continued.

“What do you want out of this relationship?”

“I don’t know, Nina.” Kayden hung his head again, letting it drop even more dramatically this time. “Ugh. I’ve thought about that a lot, sweetheart. Sometimes I think I love you, but other times I just don’t know.” He muttered a few curses under his breath and rubbed his eyes. “Fuck, I don’t know why I just said that. God, what a fucked up thing to say, I’m sorry Nina, I shouldn’t —”

Nina interrupted him by putting her hands on the sides of his face and forcing his head up. Forcing him to turn and look at her.

“Hey,” she said. “It’s okay. I didn’t want to say something like that either, it sounds crazy and, uh, kinda mean.” She paused to laugh at herself, shaking her head. “But shit, I honestly feel just the same way. So I’m glad you said it.”

“What’s wrong with us?” Kayden’s tone was sarcastic but his curiosity on the topic was completely sincere.

Nina dropped her hands and shrugged. “Nothing wrong with me,” she said, a wry smile now tugging at one corner of her mouth. “I dunno about you.”

Kayden stretched his neck to the side and easily adjusted it into alignment with a little pop. He’d been feeling guilty about the doctor for weeks, but didn’t realize until this moment that he’d internalized the tension into his body so much. He was feeling like an actual weight had just been lifted off his shoulders.

“That’s true,” he said, scooting back farther onto the bed and readjusting into a more comfortable position. “You’re perfect.”

Now Nina narrowed her pretty brown eyes at him, shaking her head. “Enough of that,” she said, but she made a beckoning gesture with her hand like “gimme more...”

“You are,” he said, swatting at her hand. “I mean it, Nina. You’re one of a kind. Cool as fuck. Without a doubt the hottest sex I’ve ever had. I mean, you’re addictive. That’s why I call you sugar.”

She leaned over and stroked his short black beard. “I think I know,” she said, returning to the more serious subject matter. The smile on her lips began to falter. “The love thing. Maybe we... love each other like friends? There’s obviously more than that between us, but maybe that’s a part of it. I just care about you a lot, Kayden. You’re awesome and I hope I know you forever. I don’t want to lose you. But you and I... we’re not in love, are we? Wouldn’t we... I dunno, know it if we were?”

Kayden frowned. “Yeah. Maybe you’re right. Makes sense, when you put it that way. I care a lot about you, Nina. But when I think about settling down, I just...”

Nina nodded. She did not need him to fill in the blank. “So maybe... we should just be friends?”

“Maybe.”

Nina held her hand out, offering to shake on a new arrangement. “Friends?”

Kayden reached out and almost took it, but paused at the last second and pulled his hand back a few inches. “Friends who... have sex?” he suggested with a guilty smile.

Nina ran her tongue along her top teeth, actively pondering the request. “Hm. Maybe.” Her hand was still poised in the air, waiting.

He grasped it and shook before she could say more. “Friends who maybe have sex. Deal.”

Their clasped hands dropped, together, down to the bed.

Nina couldn’t help but slide her fingers up to Kayden’s wrist. Then they drifted lightly up the length of his strong, muscular arm. She wanted to feel his arms around her again, but couldn’t figure out if it was a bad idea.

He watched her curiously, unmoving. If Nina was making up her mind about whether or not they were going to keep hooking up, he was content to wait patiently till she was done thinking it through.

“Something else I wanted to ask you,” she said.

He raised his eyebrows.

“Kayden, this might make me sound naïve, but... is this mission you’re going on extremely dangerous? I know it’s war, and I know nothing’s certain. I just...” She had to look away now, fixing her eyes to the ornate gold and cream wallpaper, before she could continue. “It’s not a suicide mission, is it?”

He leaned closer to Nina and took hold of her hand again. “It’s not a suicide mission,” he said, his voice deadly serious. “We will be prepared, Nina. Battle is always dangerous, yes. Vampires... are dangerous. But we have a good chance. We wouldn’t be going, if we didn’t know what we were doing.”

Nina swallowed heavily, bobbing her head. Trying to make the good parts of what Kayden just said stick in her brain. Good chance... not a suicide mission...

“Where’s this coming from?” Kayden narrowed his eyes, watching Nina press hers tightly shut. He was trying to make sense of the deep fear he suddenly smelled on her.

The truth was that the Gamma warrior’s words, once Nina considered them in the cold light of day, had her very worried for all of the most important people in her world. The lieutenant had seemed resigned to a distinct possibility that he was not returning from this journey the pack was taking this weekend.

“Ah,” Kayden breathed, nodding with sudden understanding. “Did one of my guys say something to you?”

Nina bit her lip, trying to decide how to answer.

“Don’t worry about that, sweetheart. It’s an old line. Come on, Nina. A soldier telling you he’s off to war, sure to die? He only said that so you’d let him fuck you.”

Nina laughed and threw a pillow at Kayden’s face. He snatched it out of the air before it could hit its intended target.

“Thank you for lying to me,” she said. “I appreciate the effort.”

“Any time.” Kayden tossed the pillow over his shoulder. Nina was too smart to believe this lie completely – she saw through it immediately – but it felt good on his lips. Better than the truth would have.

The truth was that the Beta knew full well that his pack was heading into a pretty bad situation. But there was simply no other option. There was no time to waste. The vampires had gotten such a quick and deep foothold in the werewolf world, and had slaughtered so many innocents already. They had to be stopped as fast as possible, even if it meant taking a big risk.

Even if it meant plunging headlong into the King Pack’s riskiest mission ever. And that was saying something. This pack had done some pretty crazy things together during the last war.

This coming battle was new terrain, though. There were several very specific things that could go badly wrong.

They were literally going to jump off a cliff into a pit of vampires.

Yes, the truth was that every man in the vanguard fleet – the ones going down into the caves first with Alexander and Kayden – had resigned himself to dying this weekend.

Kayden rose to stand and pointed his feet in the direction of the door. “You know, if I told you the truth, I’d be just as bad as him. The other guy.”

Nina arched a perfectly shaped eyebrow up at her friend. “Is that your roundabout way of saying you also want to fuck me before you go off to die?”

He shrugged, giving her an innocent smile.

She rolled her eyes. “Well, I told Fi I’d meet up with her after I talked to you. But I’ll think about it, boo. No promises though.”

She didn’t really need to think about it. She wanted another night with Kayden, too. At least one.

Especially if he really was about to die.