

BadBoy 68

Chapter 68

Yes or no?

Ben is annoying me. Really getting on my nerves. I saw him hugging Olivia in front of the art room and he wants to give me shit for talking to Noah. I don't like Noah. I am only tolerating him because he is Let.

"Is that what this is about? The attitude?" he asks. I shrug. "Did Olivia say anything to you?"

The fry loses its taste in my mouth but I keep munching to keep my mouth busy. Maybe he will go away. If Maria was here, she would have chased Ben from our table. I miss her. Ben taps my knee for a reply and I press my legs together. I am tired of talking about Olivia. She ruins my mood even in her absence.

Hoots from the football jocks table draw my attention to Noah. His gaze holds mine captive and a chill runs through me. A cheerleader is on his lap but his eyes are fixated on me. He was begging me to accept his apology before Ben arrived. When Ben looks his way, he darts his gaze to the chic on his leg.

Moments later, I feel someone's eyes on me but I don't care to find the source. It has to be Noah. I hug myself and say, "I don't want to talk to you." I am lying. I want to talk to him but I don't want to talk to him if we will discuss Olivia. She already ruined this year for me and it has barely started. Ben lied to me. "Go away."

Ben lets out a sigh. He drums his fingers on the table, places his other hand on the bench. "I understand but I want to talk to you." I almost smile at the longing in his words. Sexy Benny. "After that, I'll leave."

The smile disappears. He wants to leave me again. Hearing it hurt more than it did in the morning and I dig my nails into my knees. First, he lies to me, now, he acts like he doesn't want to be here.

"Speak."

Ben chuckles. It's a delicious sound I have missed hearing and I find myself turning to him. He grins, showing off his perfect dentition. I lick my lips and look away to my tray. I miss having his lips on mine.

"You look so cute when you're angry," he says.

My insides melt. I fight the silly smile struggling to make an appearance. He knows what his words do to me. He is not buying my forgiveness with a compliment. If he doesn't want to be around me, why is he here?

"Too bad you won't be around me anymore to see the cuteness," I say and it shuts him up.

The air of playfulness hovering above him evaporates and the tiny voice in my head reminds me of how much of an asshole I have become. It's not my fault. He made me this way. I care about him so much and what I got in return was a lie that ruined the rest of my holiday. He should have told me.

He is quiet for so long I become edgy. Nervousness builds inside me, I steal a peek at his clean shaven face as he lowers his bag to his legs. Should I tell him? I count backwards, on the number five, I stand.

The cafeteria is half-empty. Noah and the cheerleaders are at their table but preparing to leave. I grab my bag on the floor in a bid to leave before the bell rings. But there's one problem. Ben is blocking my way out. The available options are: climb the table or ask him to move so I can leave. I prefer the former.

"Remember when you first told me you loved me?" he says. My jaw ticks and I grip my bag. I remember clearly and my feelings haven't changed. Thoughts of him consumed me all through my morning classes. His happiness still remains one of the most important things to me. "And I asked how you would know."

Goosebumps break out on my skin when he finally looks up to me and my heart thuds gently against my ribcage. His forehead wrinkles and a wedge appears between his brows. "Well, I don't think you love me again." His smile is so sad. My knees turn to jelly. "I'm not happy, Gracie. You're not making me happy."

I set the bag to the table and lower myself to the bench. I don't like it when he's sad. "Benny."

Ben shakes his head to stop me from talking. His fingers comb his hair, he lets out a heavy sigh. There is nowhere left for me to hide so I suck it up and meet his sad gaze head on. A corner of his lips twitches.

"Remember that day at the gym when you were going to give up on us because of something Olivia said to you." His words hit harder, I twist my hands on my laps. I can't look away from him and his eyes scroll over my face, taking in my anxiety and discomfort. "You didn't even give me a chance to defend myself."

Our conversation from that day rolls back in slow motion. Every single thing he told me hits me square in the face. I know what he's driving at but I don't want to hear it. I don't want to feel guilty. He offers me that sad smile again. I squeeze my hands harder and he hugs his bag tight as if seeking strength from it.

"What did I say?" A lump wedges in my chest, it tightens. I open my mouth but say nothing. "To tell me if something's bugging you but you didn't. And now you are giving me attitude and it's making me sad."

"Benny," I say in a small voice.

His face conveys all the emotions he feels. He lets his guards down so I can see how my actions affect him. The guilt twists my guts and I push forward so our knees can touch.

"You made me sad too," I whisper.

"How will I know if you don't tell me?" Ben hesitates to take my hand so I take his. I bring it to my face, he half-smiles and my heart does a little flip. He still likes me. I place my free hand on his knee, he covers my palm and my skin sings under his touch. "What did I do? You have to talk to me. I always listen."

My shoulders sag. It feels like I ruined a good thing over something so silly. I could have asked about it.

"Are you mad?"

"A bit. More sad and disappointed." My lips purse. He pulls his hand from my face, his eyes find mine. "I needed you last night and you lied. I was in front of your house. I could see you. You lied to me, Gracie."

A brief silence ensues and my insides knot with guilt. I want to look away but he's staring intently at me. I gulp. His disappointment is palpable, the sadness in his eyes doubles. I know the moment he is talking about. I was in the room, trying to force myself to sleep after a long talk with Hayden. He leaves today.

Knowing Ben was half the reason for my crankiness, his text irritated me. If I knew he was in front of the house, I wouldn't have lied. I wasn't there for him when he needed me and the guilt gnaws my insides.

“You lied too,” I state. I stare at my feet and count to ten. It’s a lame excuse but he might understand my reason. I won’t lie to him again. I will be a good girlfriend. Lifting my gaze to his face, my words rush out. “You went to dinner with Olivia and her mum. And you didn’t mention it when I asked. It hurt me too.”

“Because I didn’t want to ruin your mood.” He did anyway. “You don’t like talking about her. There was no need to mention it if it just happened.” Ben stops me from wringing my hands. “Liv is a family friend. Her mum was with us.” I sigh. “Is that your reason for giving me attitude?” My head bows in shame and his silence intensifies my remorse and guilt. “We didn’t speak for eight days. And today you lied again.”

My head snaps up. “You went eight days without speaking to someone you claim to love.” When he says it like this, I realise I am a bigger asshole than I thought. “Gracie,” he calls out in a soft voice, “were you or were you not avoiding me? You left your house earlier because you knew I would be there.”

A lump blocks my throat. He knows me too well. I scan his face to determine the level of his anger but his expression is blank. A muscle in his jaw ticks, he sets his bag on the space between us. He’s furious.

“I know when you’re lying, Gracie. Don’t you dare lie to me.” I swallow harder. “Yes or no?”

How does he expect me to answer that? I dump his bag behind me and inch closer to him. His hands circle my wrists to keep me from tugging on his shirt and the warning in his eyes stops my struggles.

“Yes,” I answer in barely above a whisper.

Ben drops my hands. Hurt flickers across his face and it shatters my heart. He retrieves his bag from the bench and rises to his feet. His lips curve into a smile that doesn’t reach his eyes as he pushes the straps of his bag over his arms. My throat closes up and I force myself to my feet so we are facing each other.

“Benny.” My hands wrap around his waist and cheek presses to his chest. “Please wait.”

Prying my hands from his torso, he hunches a bit so we are at the same height. His hands lower to my shoulders. “You hurt my feelings, Gracie. You really hurt my feelings. And I’m very disappointed. I’m mad at you.” My lower lips tremble and a tear leaks to my cheek. “I don’t want to talk to you right now.”

"I'm sorry." I swipe a hand over my cheek.

His thumb trails the path the lone tear creates on my cheek. "I know," he whispers and straightens up. "But I'm still hurt. You have to learn to talk to me. It doesn't matter what, if it bugs you, tell me."

"Benny, I'm sorry." His lips move in a grim line. "Are we breaking up?" The pounding of my heart drowns every sound in the cafeteria and my insides knot with fear and anticipation. We can't break up. "Benny."

If he breaks up with me, I'll hate myself. I fist my hands at my sides to stifle the urge to hold him.

"Do you want to break up?" I shake my head. His lips quirk. "I don't want to break up too." My chest sags in relief and I stare at his pink lips. We have not had a proper kiss this year. "But I need to cool off."

"Okay." He can do that. I nod again. "I love you, Benny."

Ben gives my shoulders a small squeeze instead of hugging me. I hate it but I am grateful for any form of body contact. He pecks me, his lips linger on my cheek for a moment or two. "I love you too, Gracie."