

Chapter 13 Suspicion

"He did," Eileen confirmed. "Jonathan was provoking him over the Apex Group's prime project."

Kian looked skeptical. "And what sparked Bryan's reaction? What did Jonathan say to you?"

Taking a moment to gather her thoughts, Eileen met Kian's gaze squarely. "Truthfully, it wasn't monumental. Jonathan couldn't handle being outdone by Mr. Dawson and took a jab at me to try and regain some pride. Mr. Dawson intervened before he could go further. Perhaps the alcohol played a part."

Kian probed further, "So, you're saying Bryan did that because he drank too much?"

Eileen replied, "The tension between Mr. Dawson and Jonathan is a constant undercurrent. It could have been Mr. Dawson's mood, or just Jonathan pushing his buttons. Mr. Dawson standing up for me was the right thing to do; after all, I'm his subordinate. If I get bullied, it'll reflect poorly on him."

Feeling her stance was reasonable and unshaken by Kian's inquisition, Eileen held her ground.

Kian gave a short laugh. "Fair point. Just keep a low profile in future incidents. It's best not to complicate things for Bryan, especially with the Muellers involved."

"I'll remember that, Mr. Warren," Eileen said, casting her gaze downwards.

With Kian gone, Eileen arranged a hotel lunch for Vivian and Bryan before deciding on a simple takeout meal for herself.

Eileen finished the meal and, without realizing it, succumbed to slumber at her desk, a testament to her recent sleepless nights.

It wasn't until Vivian called out to her that Eileen jolted awake.

Eileen's eyes fluttered open, her gaze landing on Vivian sitting beside her.

Vivian's expression held concern. "You've been looking exhausted lately. It's not like you to sleep on the job." She pointed to Bryan's office and continued, "If Bryan sees you asleep at work, there'll be consequences."

Aware of Bryan's policy against workplace lethargy, Eileen massaged her forehead. "My apologies, Miss Warren. It seems I nodded off."

Vivian's voice was gentle yet firm. "Come on, refresh yourself in the washroom. I'll accompany you."

Not fully awake, Eileen was led by Vivian to the shared washing area.

There, amidst the sound of running water, office gossip permeated the air.

"I always looked up to Miss Curtis, such an accomplished figure," someone said, their tone souring. "Now this? Disappointing."

Another chimed in, "It's one thing to mingle with the affluent, another entirely to entangle herself with a married man."

"And her position as Mr. Dawson's assistant? It places her in a different orbit from the rest of us."

Eileen paused, the weight of the morning's stares suddenly clicking into place. Was it because of this kind of gossip?

Had Judie ignored her warnings and let things escalate like this?

"Is this what you should do now, spreading rumors during work?" Vivian's voice cut sharply through the chatter, her presence commanding immediate attention. "Who started this ridiculous rumor?"

To the employees, Vivian was practically the future wife of their boss. Being caught in idle talk by her was no small matter, especially since Eileen seemed to be on friendly terms with her. The employees' faces turned pale.

"Miss Warren, we just overheard this from someone else..." Words

stumbled out of one employee, the guilt evident.

"It's the talk of the office. The source is unclear," another added.

"Eileen, we were just casually chatting. No need to take our words seriously."

Unconvinced, Vivian said, "Then tell me who exactly you heard it from. I'll find out who started this!"

"It was Charity from finance. She was skeptical at first, but she claimed she saw hickeys on Eileen earlier today, which seemed to lend credence to the rumors."

Vivian's reaction to the mention of hickeys was a brief lapse into silence, her eyes flicking to Eileen.

Eileen felt the weight of Vivian's gaze and self-consciously adjusted her clothing, though she was fully buttoned. Bryan had left a hickey just above her collarbone last night.

She wondered if it had been glimpsed when she bent down to prepare coffee.

Upon seeing Eileen's expression, Vivian realized Eileen indeed had hickeys on her. In defense, Vivian spoke up. "Being unmarried, it's quite ordinary for her to be in a relationship or live with her boyfriend. Besides, how could you spread such a rumor based on that?"

The crowd fell into silence.

Vivian continued, "Enough of this. If I catch wind of you talking about this again, there will be consequences."

Upon hearing that, the group of people left, leaving only Vivian and Eileen there.

In the privacy of the restroom, Vivian sought confirmation. "Eileen, was I correct? Do you have a boyfriend now?"

With a small, restrained smile, Eileen replied, "Yes."

Vivian furrowed her brow. "But Bryan seemed to think otherwise when I

inquired him about this earlier."

"That's to be expected," Eileen said. "I don't talk about my personal matters with him."

Vivian nodded. "Right. Your boyfriend must be quite a catch, right? Let's go out for dinner together sometime."

Eileen managed to say, "I'd love to."

Vivian turned to wash her hands. "Eileen, upon reflection, my earlier request was out of line. However, could I ask another favor of you?"

Eileen, caught off guard for a second, hesitated before answering, "What would that be?"

"Just let me know every day when you drop Bryan off at home after work and pick him up in the morning," Vivian said with a comforting pat on Eileen's shoulder. "And remember, if the rumor mill starts again or if you face any form of harassment, come straight to me. I won't let you be treated badly."

It now dawned on Eileen that Vivian got close to her because of her position as Bryan's assistant. Vivian was essentially using her to get what she wanted.

"Appreciated, Miss Warren. I'll keep you updated on that," Eileen responded, her guilt towards Vivian dissipating.

"Please, just call me Vivian. It's a shame our schedules hardly align. We could be out enjoying a drink instead of feeling worlds apart," Vivian said.

Before Eileen could say something, Vivian continued, "No formalities between us. Consider me a friend, and I've mentioned to Bryan about lightening your workload. Perhaps you can keep me company when he can't."

Vivian's intent was evident; she wanted to be close to Eileen.

Since Vivian's arrival, a chair by Eileen's desk had become her regular spot. Except for her time staying in Bryan's office, she often engaged in light conversation with Eileen and assisted with tasks like document deliveries and coffee runs.

It was after ten o'clock in the evening that Eileen saw Bryan again.

Kian had come to pick Vivian up earlier, a routine that seemed set to become a regular occurrence. Eileen found herself thinking that Kian was a great brother to Vivian.

Eileen chauffeured Bryan to his residence, the silent journey ending at Oak Villas.

Watching Bryan step into his home, Eileen promptly informed Vivian of his arrival with a brief text.

After receiving Vivian's response, Eileen left. As she drove away, a niggling thought took hold—would Bryan make an unexpected visit to her place tonight?

Considering Vivian's inquiry about Bryan's arrival times, Eileen entertained the thought that Vivian might want to drop by his place or have recruited another person to monitor him. The idea weighed on her.

Compelled by a mix of caution and concern, Eileen sent a warning to Bryan. "Mr. Dawson, Miss Warren has concerns about your late-night outings. She suspects you're seeing someone else."

She had wanted to directly tell Bryan not to come to her place again, but she had stopped herself. She believed Bryan would be smart enough to get the hint of her text.

Bryan didn't reply to her text. She didn't know if he hadn't seen it or had chosen to leave her on read.

Feeling uneasy, she changed the password to her place, preferring to ward off any unwelcome visits from Bryan than risk an embarrassing encounter.

As night fell, she received a call from Roderick. Judie's faint murmurs were in the background; she was clearly with him now.

"Eileen, I hope I didn't disturb you at this hour." Roderick's voice was cautious.

With the day's gossip at the forefront of her mind, Eileen's response was

forthright. "Just pass the phone to Judie."

After a pause, Judie's voice came, "Hey, Eileen?"

"Can you tell me the full price for the house you want in the school district?" Eileen asked.

Judie's excitement was palpable, barely contained. She believed her earlier scheme had worked and that Eileen was going to give in and buy the house for them.

"I was just looking at a spacious four-bedroom—it's perfect for when Roderick and I start our family. And of course, there must be a room for your mother; she'll live with us in the future. The total price is around two million. Do you want me to send you the details of the house later?" Judie said.