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Zinnia's heart pounded in her chest as she witnessed the shocking scene unfolding before her. Marcus, with his towering figure, stepped forward, reacting quickly to prevent their mother, Laila, from stumbling to the floor after receiving a slap from Ma'am Luna. The force of the impact had caught Laila off guard, and she stood there, frozen, her eyes wide with disbelief.

It had been over two decades since Laila had last been slapped by her own mother, and the shock of the situation reverberated through her. She couldn't fathom how a simple act of interceding for her daughter, Zinnia, could elicit such a harsh response. The pain and confusion etched across Laila's face were palpable, and she struggled to collect herself in the aftermath of the unexpected blow. As she opened her mouth to talk, no words came out.

As the tension lingered in the air, Zinnia's gaze retracted from her shocked mother and turned towards her grandmother, Ma'am Luna. There was a mixture of disappointment and disapproval in Ma'am Luna's eyes as she stared at Laila. It was as if she had expected more from her, and held higher expectations of her than from her daughter. Zinnia's heart sank at the sight, feeling a wave of sadness and frustration wash over her.

Without uttering another word, Ma'am Luna abruptly turned and made her way toward her room, leaving a lingering silence in her wake. Her parting words echoed in Zinnia's mind, cutting through the heavy atmosphere like a knife. "Laila, you and your children are a bunch of inadequate fools!!" Ma'am Luna's harsh judgment hung in the air, leaving Zinnia feeling wounded and rejected.

As the weight of the situation settled upon her, Zinnia's thoughts raced. She couldn't comprehend the cruelty of her grandmother's actions or the disappointment expressed by her mother. It was a painful reminder of the strained dynamics within their family, a reminder that wounds from the past ran deep. 1

Taking a deep breath, Zinnia turned her attention back to Marcus and Laila, who were still processing the shock of the situation.

"Oh my goodness, did Mother just slap Laila?" Bella rhetorically asked, staring at Lisa who giggled as she nodded. "What did poor Laila do? She was merely just..."

Realizing that Bella was faking to be concerned, Laila glared at her, stopping her from talking further, and left for her room.

"Oh oh, I guess Aunt Laila is feeling dejected now," Lisa mentioned and clicked her tongue. "Tsk, tsk, tsk. She's so unfortunate to have two insignificant people as children..."

"You better watch your mouth now, Lisa," Marcus warned.

Lisa stepped forward, ready to face him. "Or what, Marcus? Will you shut me up?"

"Lisa, respect yourself," George cautioned.

"Please, father, I know what to do. It's Marcus here that needs to respect himself, not me."

"Exactly," Bella added, supporting Lisa.

Lisa chuckled as her gaze shifted to dejected Zinnia and walked up to her.

"Hey, cousin? What is wrong? I hope our grandmother's slap didn't leave you spellbound now, hm?"

With gnashing teeth, Zinnia held up a finger to Lisa's face, scoffing, "Get out of my face or..." She paused as her eyes caught Bella who approached her and sighed.

"Oh, Zinnia, what is it? Are you okay?"

"Get out, bitch." Zinnia eyed her and walked past her, heading up to her room and immediately, Bella and Lisa burst into laughter. Marcus hissed and left the house.

"You both are unbelievable. How can you be elated over Zinnia's fellow? This is wrong," George said.

"Please, Father, don't try to make us feel so bad for Zinnia. You clearly saw how she was happy the other day when grandmother punished me."

"What? You did something wrong and you got punished."

"Father, Zinnia was happy for my flop too, so why can't I be happy over hers?"

"I don't know what your mother is turning you into...."

"Please, Pop, give them a break. We should all be happy that Zinnia didn't get the deal because if she did then..."

George shot a glare at Aaron, forcing him to go mute. Aaron shrugged and motioned at the door before leaving the house.

"And there he goes off to a party. Stupid not," George remarked and headed to his room. Bella and Lisa watched him get to the top of the

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stairs before they locked eyes and burst into laughter, giving each other a high-five.

Meanwhile, back in the Walton business estate, Duncan and Karla got out of the building and headed to her car.

"So, good night, Ms. Annoying partner."

"That was not nice to say, anyway, Goodnight."

"Whatever." Duncan rolled his eyes and watched her stare at her car, reluctantly. "Get in."

"I don't think I can drive. Maybe I'll call a designated driver."

"Why?"

"My hands ache. You know, I was awake almost all through last night, preparing those papers. You can go ahead, I'll call someone to drive me home."

"Don't worry, problem queen. I'll drive you home."

"Oh, really?" Karla grinned as Duncan started walking over to the driver's seat. "Wait, you called me what? Problem queen?"

"Yup, get in."

Karla shrugged, smiling. She unlocked the car and threw the key to Duncan who caught them and both entered the car. She told him her house address and he drove her there.

Twenty minutes later, getting to the address, Duncan's eyes were fixed on the magnificent sight before him. Through the windscreen, he gazed in awe at Karla's house, which turned out to be an impressive penthouse.

Commented [Ma1]:

The sleek, modern design and the breathtaking view from the top left him momentarily speechless.

Pulling into Karla's driveway, Duncan parked the car and turned off the engine. As he stepped out of the vehicle, Karla was already making her way towards the entrance. Her graceful movements and radiant smile caught his attention, and he followed her, feeling a mix of excitement and anticipation.

Karla pushed open the door, and they both walked into the penthouse. The interior was just as stunning as the exterior, with tasteful simple decor and an aura of luxury that enveloped the space.

"So, you live here alone?" Duncan asked, wanting to confirm if his instinct was right.

"Hm." Karla nodded. "I live alone. Welcome to my house."

"Thank you."

Karla almost blushed as a smile flashed on Duncan's face as he glanced at her before looking around.

As they settled in, Karla kindly suggested that they have a few drinks together.

"I didn't come here to drink. I'm leaving."

"Come on. You owe me, you know."

"Really?"

"Yeah, for my good work. You can just pay me by having a few drinks with me."

Duncan agreed, intrigued by the prospect of not wanting to owe her anything. Though he knew having a few drinks wasn't enough to pay her for her thoughtful help.

Karla headed down to her bar and got some bottles of wine for them and they started drinking. Unbelievably, Duncan found himself drawn to her charm and charisma, and he was eager to spend more time in her company.

Glass after glass of wine was poured, and as the evening progressed, Karla's words became more animated and her laughter filled the air. Duncan watched her intently, captivated by her inebriated state. He was surprised to find her even more endearing and cute as she babbled on, not noticing she was drunk, her voice taking on a soothing quality.

At that moment, Duncan couldn't bring himself to interrupt her or stop her from speaking. He found solace in her uninhibited expression, appreciating the vulnerability she showed in her drunkenness. As she continued to share stories and thoughts, he listened attentively, cherishing the connection that was forming between them.

Duncan's admiration for Karla grew with each passing moment. It wasn't just her beauty or the luxurious surroundings that captivated him, but also the genuine and unfiltered version of herself that she revealed in that vulnerable state. He realized that beneath the exterior of wealth and sophistication, there was a person with depth and authenticity.

At that moment, Duncan made a silent promise to himself to treasure this unexpected connection. He would remember Karla, not just as the owner of an impressive penthouse, but as someone he found truly captivating. And as the night went on, he allowed himself to be swept away by the magic of the evening, savoring the enchanting presence of

the woman before him.

When it was almost 10 pm, Duncan decided to leave. He was about to stand up but she grabbed him, stopping him.

"You jerk, you want to leave me?"

"Sorry, I have to go, Karla."

Karla pouted, frowning. "No. You did not say anything, you just listened to me."

"You are drunk, Karla. You need to sleep."

"Really?"

Duncan nodded, stopping himself from laughing as he stared at her.

She reached out and grabbed his face, leaning forward. "Why do you look at me like that, Duncan?"

"What do you mean?"

"Sometimes with so much dislike. It hurts me for no reason."

"I found you annoying."

"Me too. And?"

"I don't think you are witless. What you did for me today...I won't forget it and I will not look at you with so much dislike anymore."

"Really? Ah ah ah." Karla hung her head, laughing. She abruptly jerked it up, almost startling Duncan. She narrowed her eyes as she stepped at him.

Karla, what...?"

"Shh, please."

Duncan found himself mute as she slowly brought her face closer to his till it was less than an inch away, then she dropped her gaze to his lips. She tilted her head, closing her eyes as she was about to kiss. As if being pushed, Duncan slipped his hand around her neck, drawing closer, until he heard footsteps and saw a middle-aged woman emerge. His brows lifted in shock and the woman's eyes lit as she stared at Karla whose lips were almost contacting Duncan's before he arose quickly.

"Oh, Duncan. You jerk," Karla mumbled as she leaned back and slipped into sleep, a smile dancing on her lips.

"You are Duncan, right?" The woman asked, walking up to him.

"Yes. And, you are?"

"Rose Morgan."

 Gem Lynne author

"Hello guys, hope you enjoyed this chapter? Duncan said Karla was cute and they almost kissed. I'm sure you guys didn't like the woman that interrupted them 😊..."

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