

Chapter 51

As the woman reached Karla, her smile disappeared slowly as Karla jerked up and hissed.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Karla asked, roughly. Karla's hand trembled slightly as she held the photograph tightly, her eyes fixed on the woman standing before her. The weight of the past seemed to hang heavily in the air, as they both stood in the room, their emotions palpable.

With a mix of anticipation and apprehension, Karla released her grip on the photograph and let it fall onto the bed. It landed with a soft thud, its significance echoing in the silence of the room. She watched as the woman's eyes flickered towards the photograph briefly before returning her gaze to Karla.

"It's been long, Karla. I miss you," the woman's voice cracked with emotion, and she instinctively covered her mouth, her eyes welling up with tears.

Karla's expression remained guarded, her stare unwavering. She absorbed the woman's words, her face displaying a stoic facade. "I don't miss people like you, and I'm not sorry about it," she replied, her tone blunt and devoid of sentiment.

The woman nodded, her tear-stained face a mix of sadness and understanding. "You still hate me?" she asked softly, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Did I say that?" Karla retorted, her voice laced with a touch of bitterness.

"Your actions do that," the woman responded with a cheerful

expression. A fleeting moment of vulnerability passed over the woman's features, her eyes searching Karla's for some sign of forgiveness or acceptance. But Karla's expression remained resolute, a wall of disapproval between them.

Undeterred, the woman took a tentative step forward, her body language pleading for a connection, for some form of reconciliation. "Anyway, can I... hug my stepdaughter and my once-good friend?" she asked, her voice filled with a mix of hope and longing.

Karla instinctively stepped back, her disapproval etched on her face, denying the woman's request. The distance between them grew, a physical manifestation of the emotional chasm that had formed over time.

At that moment, the room seemed to hold its breath, the weight of their shared history hanging in the balance. Karla's gaze remained fixed on the woman, her emotions concealed beneath a hardened exterior. The photograph lay forgotten on the bed, a silent witness to their unresolved past and uncertain future.

The woman is actually Ciara Burton Jones and she's Ciara's stepmother. Things are far from being perfect between the two women and a lot of secrets and bitter truths are yet to be told. 2

(So keep reading on, dear readers.)

Ciara's voice trembled with concern as she asked, "What's wrong, Karla?" Her eyes searched Karla's face, hoping for some hint of understanding.

Karla met Ciara's gaze head-on, her tone firm but controlled. "You know what's wrong, Ciara," she replied, her voice devoid of any hint of anger or aggression. She didn't want to shout, to let her emotions overpower

her.

There was a flicker of shock in Ciara's eyes, a realization dawning upon her. She faltered for a moment, struggling to find the right words. Karla's chuckle broke the tense silence, causing Ciara's eyebrows to knit together in confusion. "What? Do you want me to address you as 'Mother'?" Karla's words dripped with sarcasm, tinged with a touch of bitterness.

Ciara shook her head, her tears threatening to spill over as she sniffed and managed a small, forced grin. "No," she said softly, her voice wavering. "I'm just a bit surprised you look good. It's almost a year since we last saw each other, and I'm happy to see you looking better."

There was a mix of emotions in Karla's eyes, a complex blend of skepticism and vulnerability. She studied Ciara for a moment, her guard still firmly in place. The weight of the past lingered between them, but Ciara's words held a glimmer of genuine concern.

Karla let out a sigh, a flicker of weariness crossing her face. "Appearances can be deceiving," she said, her voice softer now. "But thank you, I suppose."

Their eyes locked for a fleeting moment, a silent acknowledgment passing between them. The room was filled with unresolved tension and unspoken words, but beneath it all, there was a hint of longing for understanding and closure. The path forward remained uncertain, and whether they would find common ground or remain estranged was a question that lingered in the air.

Karla's words cut through the air like a sharp blade, filled with bitterness and resentment. They hung heavily between them, leaving a palpable tension in the room. Ciara's smile wavered, her eyes welling up with tears as the sting of Karla's words reached her.

"Oh, I hope you're not going to cry to my dad now about how his daughter was so blunt with you, hm?"

Ciara managed to muster a weak smile, attempting to diffuse the escalating emotions. But Karla wasn't swayed. Her anger simmered beneath the surface, her voice laced with frustration.

"Karla, please, when are you going to put things behind and..." Ciara began, her voice pleading for understanding.

"No!" Karla abruptly raised her hand, silencing Ciara mid-sentence. Her eyes burned with a mix of anger and pain. "I'm not going to forget anything as long as you're alive because you're fucking bad!"

The room fell into an uneasy silence, the weight of their words hanging heavily in the air. Despite Ciara's attempts to bridge the gap, Karla's wounds remained raw and unhealed. The depth of their rift was evident, and it seemed that forgiveness and reconciliation were far from Karla's reach.

Ciara's shoulders slumped, her smile fading completely. She took a step back, her eyes filled with a mixture of regret and sadness. The gulf between them felt insurmountable, and the chance for a meaningful resolution seemed to slip further away.

Ciara's attempt to shift the focus away from their strained relationship and onto Karla's apparent worries seemed clumsy, yet she persisted. She observed Karla's guarded expression, searching for any sign of vulnerability before speaking.

"You looked worried and teary earlier. I guess it's because of a guy, right?"
"Ciara's voice held a hint of curiosity as if trying to find a common ground or a topic of conversation that could bridge the gap between them.

Karla, however, rolled her eyes in response, clearly uninterested in engaging in such a discussion. She preferred to keep her emotions to herself, not wanting to delve into personal matters with Ciara. But Ciara's unwavering gaze, filled with a mix of concern and determination, compelled Karla to respond.

"I wasn't crying," Karla replied curtly, her voice clipped and dismissive.

"So, it was...?" Ciara prodded gently, her tone softening, attempting to break through Karla's defenses.

Karla's frustration grew evident as she spoke, her words laced with irritation. "Can you just leave and don't anger me anymore?" she snapped, her voice tinged with a mix of hurt and anger.

Ciara's shoulders slumped, her attempts at connection falling flat. She recognized that pushing further would only escalate the tension between them. Taking a deep breath, she relented. "Okay. Dinner? We can eat together..." she suggested, a glimmer of hope still present in her voice.

But Karla remained unmoved, her resolve unyielding. "I don't have a late dinner. Leave my room," she stated firmly, her words leaving no room for negotiation.

With a heavy sigh, Ciara nodded, accepting the dismissal. She turned to leave, the weight of their fractured relationship hanging heavily in the air. The room felt emptier as she stepped away, leaving behind the remnants of a shattered bond and unspoken regrets.

Karla's sigh carried a mixture of regret and frustration as she slumped onto the bed, the weight of the strained encounter with Ciara weighing heavily on her. She buried her face in her hands, seeking a moment of respite from the emotional turmoil.

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Suddenly, her phone rang, jolting her out of her thoughts. Reluctantly, she retrieved it from her pocket, her eyes narrowing as she saw the caller ID display. "Duncan - Grumpy Jerk" with a mocking emoji mocked her from the screen, causing her to hiss in annoyance.

She glanced down at the photograph of her mother, a wave of conflicting emotions washing over her. In a soft whisper, she addressed the image captured within the frame. "It's the jerk calling, mother. Should I answer it?" Her voice carried a hint of uncertainty and vulnerability, unsure of how to navigate her relationship with Duncan.

Biting her lower lip, Karla contemplated her options. She fell back onto the bed, her back resting against the soft surface, her hands spread out to either side of her. After a moment of deliberation, she made a decision. She wouldn't answer his calls.

With a mix of determination and resignation, Karla set her phone aside and closed her eyes, seeking solace from the turbulent emotions that coursed through her. The room fell into a hushed stillness as she allowed herself a moment of peace, shielding herself from further potential conflicts and complications.

After a while of waiting in anticipation for Duncan's call that never came, Karla couldn't help but feel restless. She paced back and forth in the living room, trying to distract herself and appear unaffected. Deep down, however, her thoughts kept drifting back to him, and she couldn't shake off her longing for his call.

Eventually, her weariness got the better of her, and she decided to retire to bed. As she lay there, her mind still preoccupied with thoughts of Duncan, she couldn't help but express her frustration. "Can't he keep on calling even if I don't pick up? He's so selfish and -" She bit her lower lip,

trying to stifle her annoyance.

Just as she was about to succumb to sleep, her phone chimed, indicating a new message. A glimmer of excitement sparked within her as she reached for her phone, hoping it would be a message from Duncan. However, her elation quickly turned to disappointment as she read the message.

"Good night," it simply said, accompanied by an angry bird emoji. Karla's face fell, her disappointment evident. She couldn't help but feel let down by the lack of effort and the absence of any meaningful message from him.

"His humor sucks," she muttered under her breath, a mix of exasperation and a hint of amusement tugging at the corners of her lips. Despite her frustration, she couldn't help but find a small hint of amusement in his attempt at humor, albeit a rather poor one.

With a sigh, Karla set her phone aside, realizing that sleep was the best course of action. She closed her eyes, hoping that tomorrow would bring a better understanding between them and perhaps a more meaningful conversation. Also, wished for a less complicated moment with her father the following morning.

Meanwhile, restless and unable to find peace, Duncan tossed and turned on the couch. It wasn't the discomfort of the couch that bothered him but rather the restlessness that gnawed at him from within. He couldn't help but feel a tinge of unease after sending Karla the message. 1

"I called and she didn't pick up, so why didn't I just forget about her?" he pondered, frustration evident in his thoughts. He let out a frustrated hiss, questioning his own actions. Despite the unanswered call, he couldn't seem to shake off his lingering thoughts about Karla. The thought of



letting go completely seemed difficult to fathom.

"I'm sure she didn't read the message. It's still fine," he reassured himself, attempting to rationalize his own unease. He convinced himself that it didn't matter if she hadn't seen the message, and he resolved to move on and forget about her.

Just as he was about to close his eyes and drift off to sleep, his gaze wandered across the room, landing on his wife, Zinnia, who lay on the bed across from him. The sound of her snoring reached his ears, interrupting his thoughts. A mischievous grin spread across his face as he observed her in her oblivious slumber.

The sight of Zinnia, snoring away, somehow lifted his spirits. It brought a momentary respite from his restless thoughts. The contrast between his frustrations with Karla and the amusing sight of Zinnia snoring provided a brief sense of amusement.

As Duncan sat up on the couch, the image of Zinnia diligently cleaning and washing the house earlier replayed in his mind. The memory brought a renewed wave of laughter, causing him to chuckle uncontrollably. The sound of Zinnia's increased snoring only added to his amusement, and he couldn't help but find humor in the situation.

Startled awake by the sound of Duncan's laughter, Zinnia opened her weary eyes, glaring at him. Her tiredness was evident, and she let out a frustrated groan as she pulled the bed covers over her head, seeking refuge from Duncan's laughter.


Still smirking, Duncan gazed at Zinnia, finding amusement in her exasperation. "You seem so exhausted, but please lessen your snores," he teased, his voice filled with playful mockery. "Make sure you wake up early tomorrow, okay, dear wife?"

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"Damn you," Zinnia retorted, her voice laced with irritation. She expressed her frustration by hiding beneath the covers, attempting to block out the world and Duncan's teasing.

Duncan's smirk widened as he leaned back, finding satisfaction in the playful banter. With a sense of contentment, he finally settled down and closed his eyes, ready to drift off to sleep.

"Sleep well in the next hours you've got because tomorrow, I will make sure your torments continue." His smirk lengthened as he placed an arm above his head. Closing his eyes, he drifted to sleep with a gratifying smile on his face.

 Gem Lynne author

“Hello guys, hope you enjoyed this chapter.”

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