

Chapter 56

Karla blinked uncontrollably, her eyes widening with disbelief and confusion, as she confirmed that Duncan was indeed standing there before her. The weight of the moment seemed to hang in the air, as if time had momentarily paused.

"Hi," Duncan said, breaking the silence, his voice filled with a mix of uncertainty and longing. He vaguely waved at her, a small gesture that conveyed both a greeting and a desire to connect.

As Karla processed Duncan's presence, Samuel and Ciara appeared a few feet away from her at the doorway, their concern and worry etched on their faces. The sound of her father's voice calling out to her snapped her attention away from Duncan, and she turned to meet his gaze.

"Karla, my dear?" Samuel's voice carried a mixture of love and concern, his words laced with a father's worry. Karla's eyes shifted from her father to Ciara, briefly assessing the emotions reflected in her eyes.

Without hesitating, Karla swiftly turned back towards the door and fumbled to retrieve her car key from her bag. Determination filled her as she held the key tightly in her hand, her mind set on escaping the tension and uncertainty that enveloped her.

"Hey, take me to any place!" Karla exclaimed, her voice filled with a mix of urgency and a longing for freedom. In a bold move, she threw the car key to Duncan, who caught it skillfully before stepping out of the house.

The sudden turn of events left Samuel stunned, his voice filled with a hint of desperation as he called out to his daughter. "Hey, you can not just leave with anyone," her father protested, his words echoing with a father's protective instinct.

Duncan, in a state of bafflement, opened the driver's door and stared at Karla in disbelief as she abruptly stopped and spun around to answer her father. The unexpected declaration that followed left Duncan momentarily speechless.

"He is not anyone. He is my man!" Karla blurted out, her words filled with a mix of defiance and a desire to assert her autonomy. The weight of her statement hung in the air, echoing with a newfound sense of determination.

What? Your man?

At that moment, Duncan was taken aback by the lie she had not intended to say but also felt a surge of pride washing over him. Karla, still facing her father but aware of Duncan's presence behind her, spun once again to meet his gaze. Their eyes locked, and in that indelible moment, a mixture of emotions passed between them. Duncan couldn't help but smile, feeling it was the best reaction so she wouldn't seem like a fool in front of her father.

With a newfound confidence, something pushed Duncan and he stepped forward and gently took Karla's hand, leading her towards the front seat of the car. He opened the door for her, motioning for her to sit. To Karla's surprise, she complied, her earlier determination now mingled with a sense of curiosity and anticipation.

As Karla settled into the passenger seat, Duncan closed the door and turned to face Samuel. With a nod of respect, he waved at Karla's father, silently acknowledging him. Then, with a sense of purpose, Duncan entered the car, started the engine, and drove off.

As Duncan continued to navigate the empty main road, a sense of

uncertainty lingered in the air. The weight of Karla's declaration, claiming him as her man, played on his mind, intermingling with the sense of responsibility he now felt towards her.

After approximately ten minutes of driving in silence, Duncan was about to break the silence and inquire about their destination when he noticed tears streaming down Karla's face. Concern etched across his features, he glanced at her, his voice filled with genuine worry.

"Hey, what's wrong with you?" Duncan asked, his tone gentle yet concerned. He desperately wanted to understand the cause of her distress and provide comfort in any way he could.

However, instead of receiving an immediate response, Karla's cries intensified, her emotions seemingly overpowering her ability to articulate her pain. Duncan couldn't help but feel a pang of helplessness, unsure of how to console her in this moment of vulnerability.

As the car sped along, a gust of wind rushed in through the open window, causing Karla's hair to flutter and become disheveled. In an unexpected turn of events, the sight struck Duncan as mildly amusing, and a soft chuckle escaped his lips.

It wasn't that he found her pain amusing, but rather the contrasting image of her tear-streaked face juxtaposed with the playful disarray of her hair was an unexpected moment of levity in the midst of their emotional journey. However, as soon as the laughter escaped him, Duncan realized the inappropriateness of his response.

Quickly regaining his composure, Duncan reached out to Karla, his laughter fading into an apologetic smile. He tried to convey through his eyes that his amusement was not at her expense but rather a momentary lapse in judgment.

"I'm sorry," Duncan said softly, his voice laced with sincerity. "I didn't mean to laugh. Are you okay?" He gently placed a hand on her shoulder, offering comfort and support, ready to listen.

When Karla gave no response, Duncan went on to make fun of her.

"Gosh, you look worse than a joker crying like a child."

As Karla continued to cry, her emotions overpowering her, she remained unaffected by Duncan's taunts. However, Duncan, realizing the inappropriateness of his words, felt a wave of remorse wash over him. He understood that his attempt at humor had been insensitive and regretted his actions.

"Sorry for that," Duncan apologized, his voice filled with genuine regret. "If you're crying because of the lie I told you last night, then I'm truly sorry."

Confusion flickered across Karla's tear-streaked face as she rolled her eyes and pouted, looking at him. His words seemed to have caught her off guard, and she struggled to comprehend his sudden change in demeanor.

"What?" she muttered, her voice laced with a mix of curiosity and skepticism. She locked eyes with Duncan, searching for sincerity and truth in his gaze.

"Yes, I apologize," Duncan reiterated, his expression earnest. "Look, I didn't mean to lie to you, and I..." His words trailed off, unable to fully articulate his remorse and regret.

At that moment, a flicker of understanding passed between them. Karla suddenly comprehended the sincerity behind Duncan's words, recognizing the remorse in his eyes. The realization softened her

previous skepticism, and a hint of forgiveness emerged within her.

"You're forgiven," she muttered, her voice barely audible as she tried to suppress her blush, her cheeks warming with a mix of emotions. Duncan, noticing her reaction, arched a brow, his eyes reflecting a mixture of surprise and relief.

Silence filled the car once again, but this time it carried a sense of understanding and forgiveness. Karla's tears gradually subsided, and the weight of their shared moment of vulnerability hung in the air.

Duncan's grip tightened on the steering wheel as he tried to maintain his composure. Feeling curious and unsettled, he couldn't stop himself from asking. "So, why did you say that?"

"What?" Karla appeared oblivious.

"That I'm your man."

Karla began to feel increasingly uncomfortable and she gulped and hung her head. She had made the comment about him being her man without much thought, but now she realized the implications it could have. She didn't want to create an awkward situation between them, but her curiosity got the better of her, and she couldn't resist asking. "Why did you take my hand and open the door?"

Duncan felt trapped by her question. He had been caught off guard by Karla's earlier remark, and now her question about why he had taken her hand and opened the door only intensified his curiosity and unease. As he continued driving, he wrestled with his thoughts, searching for a suitable response. His internal struggle grew, eventually reaching a point where he could no longer focus on driving. Feeling the need to address the situation, he pulled over to the side of the road, hoping that by doing so,

he could provide Karla with a satisfactory response.

As the vehicle came to a stop, Karla turned her gaze toward Duncan, her eyes searching for an answer. She desperately wanted to understand his motives, hoping that his explanation would put her at ease.

Duncan, feeling cornered by her question, sighed and finally spoke. "I don't know, Karla. I guess I just did it without thinking." He shrugged.

His response was far from what Karla had hoped to hear. It left her feeling even more unsettled, unable to discern what his actions truly meant.

Duncan's disappointment grew as he sensed that his explanation had fallen short of Karla's expectations. He couldn't shake the feeling that he had missed an opportunity to express his true emotions. However, he could not bring himself to confess how her words had affected him earlier, leaving him with a strange sense of pride.

Karla, unaware of Duncan's internal struggle, accepted his explanation with a nod. She leaned her head on the headrest, feeling a mix of emotions herself. Despite the lingering disappointment, she couldn't help but appreciate Duncan's presence in her life. His timely interventions had made a significant impact on her, and she wanted him to know that.

"You always arrive at the right time," Karla said, a genuine smile gracing her lips as she glanced at Duncan.