

Chapter 70

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"Lies. I can see through you, Karla," Julie said, her tone teasing yet persistent. "Tell me the truth now. He's your boyfriend."

Karla, caught off guard once again, was taken aback by Julie's assumption. She coughed and lightly spat out the sip of water she had taken unintentionally. Regaining her composure, she replied, "What the fuck? He's not my boyfriend."

Julie's playful smile persisted as she continued to press for answers. "Hmm. So who is he?"

Karla hesitated for a moment, contemplating how much she wanted to reveal. Finally, she gave in, her voice filled with reluctance. "He's... nobody," she reluctantly admitted.

Julie cleared her throat in a funny manner, clearly not convinced by Karla's response. It was evident that she believed there was more to the story than Karla was willing to share.

As Julie continued to eat without pressing for more information, Karla found herself smiling, relieved that the topic had seemingly dropped for now. She couldn't help but reflect on her encounter with Duncan earlier that day. He had been unexpectedly supportive and caring, offering his assistance when she least expected it.

At that moment, Karla recalled the doubt that had crossed her mind. She had wondered if his claim of coming to Asheville was merely for a business deal, and if he had no real interest in seeing her. It had left her feeling uncertain and slightly disappointed.

Just as those thoughts lingered, Rose made her way towards the door to

leave and said to Karla's hearing, "I'm going now, Miss Karla."

Karla snapped back to the present and replied, "Yeah, my regards to your family." Her mind still preoccupied with the encounter with Duncan, she hoped that perhaps there was more to their connection than she had initially suspected.

As she was about to resume her thoughts, Julie leaned forward, speaking almost in a whisper. "Rose didn't bid me good night, probably because she figured I'm not as kind-hearted as you," she said, a mischievous smile playing on her lips.

Karla frowned slightly, momentarily taken aback by Julie's comment. However, she quickly realized her cousin was only teasing. Shaking her head, Karla let out a soft chuckle, knowing that Julie's playful nature often led to such remarks.

Just as the atmosphere lightened, the sound of the door being opened and closed quickly reached their ears. Curious, Karla instinctively poked her head to catch a glimpse of whether Rose had left or someone else had entered.

To their surprise, Rose's voice could be heard amidst heavy footsteps, causing both Karla and Julie to be momentarily startled. They turned their attention toward the source of the sound, and Rose emerged into view.

"Miss Karla," Rose's voice carried a sense of urgency as she approached them, her footsteps echoing in the room. The unexpected interruption left Karla and Julie curious and slightly on edge, wondering what had caused Rose's sudden appearance.

"Rose, are you okay?" Karla inquired, concern evident in her voice as she

noticed the urgency in Rose's eyes.

Rose took a moment to catch her breath before responding, "Sorry, I just wanted to ask if Duncan came all the way to Ashville and brought you here."

Karla hesitated for a moment, glancing at Julie before nodding in confirmation. "Yes, he did. Why do you ask?"

Rose's expression shifted, a mixture of confusion and amusement crossing her face. She muttered to herself, "Oh, I thought he said he wasn't going to do that?" She chuckled softly, leaving Karla and Julie intrigued by her cryptic comment.

Sensing there was more to the story, Julie chimed in, unable to contain her curiosity. "What is it, Rose? You want to say something about him, right?"

Rose paused, contemplating her response. Finally, she took a deep breath and spoke, her tone filled with a mixture of amusement and mischief. "Well, let's just say Duncan might not be as straightforward as he seems. There might be more to his actions than meets the eye." Her words hung in the air, leaving Karla and Julie eager to uncover the hidden layers behind Duncan's intentions.

She attempted to leave in amusement when Karla stopped her and Julie pressed on.

"Come on, Rose, spill what you've got. You've got more to say about him, right?"

Reluctantly, Rose locked eyes with Julie and began to reveal. "Yes. Actually, he was here early this morning to check up on Miss Karla," she confessed.

Karla's disbelief was written all over her face as she sat up in astonishment. "What? Are you for real?" she exclaimed, trying to process the unexpected revelation.

Rose nodded earnestly. "Yes, Miss. He seemed genuinely worried about you, although he tried not to show it. I could see it in his eyes."

A mixture of emotions washed over Karla. The fact that Duncan had taken the time and effort to check up on her without her knowledge left her both surprised and elated. "Oh my, and he didn't tell me he was here," she murmured, her eyes lighting up with a newfound sense of joy and appreciation.

Rose continued, sharing more details. "I also told him you were in Asheville, and he mentioned he wasn't going to come over. So, when I saw you both return together, I assumed he had just coincidentally spotted you nearby."

Karla's mind raced as she tried to piece together the puzzle. Duncan's unexpected visit and his concern for her well-being added a layer of complexity to their relationship. As she reflected on Rose's words, she couldn't help but feel a renewed sense of curiosity and intrigue about the true nature of Duncan's intentions and what he really was.

Sensing Karla's daze, Rose spoke up once more, her voice filled with a hint of hope. "He seems to care, Miss Karla, and I hope something starts soon between you guys."

Karla's lips parted in awe, surprised by Rose's comment. "Huh? Rose, nothing is ever going to happen," she replied, a touch of resignation in her voice.

Rose sighed softly, understanding Karla's perspective. "Alright then. But

please, don't tell him I told you about his visit this morning. I actually promised him that I wouldn't."

Karla nodded, reassuring Rose. "I won't say a word."

With a grateful smile, Rose bid Karla goodnight and left the room, her grin hinting at the mischief she had just caused.

"Argh, people like Rose are unbelievable," Julie chimed in, her frustration evident. "She told you something she was specifically asked not to reveal."

Karla sighed, feeling torn between the newfound information and the promise she had made to Rose. She knew that keeping Rose's secret was the right thing to do, but the curiosity about Duncan's intentions continued to linger in her mind.

Karla took a long glance at Julie across the table, sensing the need to clarify her thoughts about Rose's intentions. "Hey, Cousin, don't assume things just because Rose said something. She genuinely cares about me," Karla emphasized.

Julie raised an eyebrow, her curiosity piqued. "Really?" she inquired, eager to hear more.

Karla nodded, a small smile tugging at her lips. "Yeah," she confirmed. Setting her spoon down, she found herself unexpectedly opening up about Duncan. "You know, Duncan is a strange guy. I've always found his attitude off-putting. But after his actions today, I can't help but rule out the idea of him being stone-hearted."

Julie's interest grew, leaning in closer to listen intently. "What happened? Tell me everything."

Karla's grin widened as she shared the details of Duncan's unexpected visit and his genuine concern for her well-being. She spoke about the way he had tried to hide his worry, the surprise she had felt when Rose revealed the truth, and the shift in her perception of him.

As Karla spoke, she realized that her own perspective on Duncan had started to shift. The walls she had built around him based on past experiences began to crumble, allowing room for new possibilities. It was a surprising and welcome revelation, one that she couldn't help but share with her cousin.

"Julie, that guy, Duncan, is nice. You won't agree probably because you just met him but I feel something about him. It's strong and I just want to get closer and..." Karla's voice trailed off as she suddenly realized what she was saying. The words tumbled out of her mouth before she could stop them, and she felt a mix of panic and vulnerability. She had always been secretive about her romantic life, never sharing her feelings or thoughts about men with anyone, including Julie.

Julie, taken aback by Karla's sudden confession, stared at her cousin in surprise. She had known Karla to be guarded and reserved when it came to matters of the heart. In all the years they had known each other, Julie couldn't remember a single instance when Karla had opened up to her about a man. The unexpected revelation left Julie speechless for a moment, processing the significance of Karla's words.

Clearing her throat in a strange way, Karla found herself stuttering, "I... uh, I didn't...mean any of what I said, y...you know..."

As Karla stumbled over her words, Julie could sense her sudden realization that she had unintentionally revealed a vulnerability and knew she wanted to guard herself again. It was as if the floodgates of

Karla's emotions had momentarily opened, allowing Julie a glimpse into a side of her cousin she had never seen before.

"Karla," Julie said gently, her voice laced with a mix of curiosity and concern, "I had no idea you would soon feel this way about someone."

Intending to be dumb, Karla asked, "Huh? What do you mean?"

"Hey, I know someday you were going to love someone but I didn't see it coming this time. Why didn't you ever mention him before? You've always been so secretive about your personal life."

Karla's eyes darted nervously, her cheeks flushing with a mix of embarrassment and apprehension. She hesitated for a moment, grappling with her own vulnerability before finally responding, "I guess... I've always been afraid of getting hurt, Julie. Opening up about my feelings for someone feels like exposing myself to the possibility of disappointment or rejection. But with Duncan, it's different. There's something about him that makes me want to take that risk, to let my guard down and see where it leads."

Julie leaned forward, genuinely intrigued by Karla's unexpected revelation. She could see the conflict within her cousin, and the desire to connect with someone while simultaneously grappling with her fear of vulnerability. It was a delicate balancing act, and Julie wanted to support Karla in navigating this unfamiliar territory.

"I understand, Karla," Julie reassured her cousin, her tone warm and empathetic. "Opening up your heart to someone can be scary, but it's also incredibly brave. If Duncan makes you feel this strongly, then maybe it's worth exploring. Just remember that I'm here for you, no matter what happens. You don't have to face this alone."

A mix of relief and gratitude washed over Karla's face as she absorbed Julie's words. The weight of her secret had been temporarily lifted, replaced by the comfort of knowing she had someone she could trust and confide in.

"Thank you, Julie," Karla responded, her voice filled with a newfound sense of hope. "Your support means the world to me. I never thought I would find someone who understands, but knowing that you're here for me gives me the courage to embrace anything my heart yearns for."

Julie smiled, reaching across the table to squeeze Karla's hand gently. "No matter what happens, Karla, remember that you deserve happiness and love. I believe in you, and I'll be here every step of the way."

"Aww, thank you," Karla said. "Well, I feel less bothered now I've opened up to you, Julie. You know talking to you kind of rejuvenates me."

"I'm glad that happened. I wish I could be around most times so we could get to spend more good times together and have all these love talks."

Karla frowned, scratching her head. "Who told you I was in love?" She asked as she laughed softly.

Julie chuckled softly at Karla's question, enjoying the lightness that had returned to their conversation. She could see the mix of amusement and confusion on Karla's face, and it brought a smile to her own.

"Well, Karla," Julie replied playfully, "sometimes a person's expression, the way they talk about someone, and the spark in their eyes can give it away. And when I saw you talking about Duncan, there was something different in your voice, a twinkle in your eye. It was as if you were talking about someone special, someone you care deeply about."



Karla's confusion seemed to deepen, her brows furrowing. "But how could you tell just from that? I mean, you've only just met Duncan, and I didn't even explicitly say I was in love."

Julie shrugged, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Call it intuition, Karla. Sometimes you just have to trust your instincts and pick up on those subtle cues. Besides, as your cousin, I've known you for a long time, and I can sense when something is different or when you're smitten by someone."

Karla's pout transformed into a playful grin as she shook her head. "Well, I guess I can't hide anything from you, can I? You always know me better than I know myself."

Julie laughed, a warm and genuine sound. "That's what family is for, Karla. We have a special bond, and I'm here to support you through thick and thin, even when it comes to matters of the heart. So, tell me more about Duncan. I want to hear all about this special connection you feel with him."

Julie's eyes widened with anticipation as she observed Karla's reluctance to delve deeper into the matters of her heart. She could sense that she was holding back some things, and it only fueled her excitement further. Leaning in, Julie couldn't help but prod Karla, her voice filled with enthusiasm.

"Go on, tell me. Who is he? And... does he love you?"

Karla, however, seemed to brush off the first question, her mind fixated on the thought of Duncan's affections. Her gaze turned distant as if lost in her own thoughts.

"I don't know. Actually, there is this woman I'm scared he's into, Julie,

though...there's an age difference between them."

Julie noticed the shift in Karla's expression, a flicker of concern mixed with something else. Sensing that Karla's mind had wandered elsewhere, she urged her to open up.

"You doubt he loves you?" Julie inquired, her voice laced with curiosity.

Karla's response was a sudden silence. The question seemed to have rendered her speechless, caught off guard by her own uncertainties and insecurities.

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