

Chapter 71

Finally, Karla took a deep breath, gathering her courage as Julie prepared to press further. Nodding slowly, she bit down on her lip, a mixture of apprehension and vulnerability evident on her face. She knew she had to open up and share her concerns.

"This woman... she became his first female friend, and I feel insecure because... I think she likes Duncan too," Karla finally admitted, her voice tinged with a hint of worry.

Julie's eyes widened in surprise, her initial excitement giving way to a more empathetic expression. She reached out to comfort her cousin and friend, her tone reassuring.

"Come on, Karla. You can't say that. No matter what, go for your love. Trust in your heart."

Karla sighed, her gaze fixed on the ground as she continued to share her apprehensions.

"But he has a better relationship with her than me. It's hard to believe, but we actually started on a bad note," Karla confessed, her voice filled with a mix of sadness and disbelief.

Julie gasped, unable to comprehend how someone could dislike Karla. She waved in disbelief. "Meaning?" Julie inquired, her voice filled with concern.

"Duncan... he disliked me on our first encounter," Karla admitted, her voice tinged with a hint of hurt.

"What? How?" Julie exclaimed, her disbelief evident in her voice.

Karla sighed, a hint of frustration coloring her words. "He thought I was crazily nosy and... argh, I don't know what else," she hissed, hanging her head in disappointment.

Julie shook her head, refusing to let Karla wallow in self-doubt. She placed a comforting hand on Karla's hand, offering reassurance.

"Come on, Karla. You shouldn't feel like this. You can't be certain that he likes this woman just because they have a better relationship right now. I'm sure he'll come to appreciate you soon."

Karla's eyes brightened slightly, a small smile forming on her lips as she squeezed Julie's hand. Gratitude filled her voice as she spoke, her words carrying a hint of nostalgia.

"Thanks, Julie. Your presence and your words sometimes remind me of my late Mom."

Julie's expression softened, her heart touched by Karla's sentiment. She responded with sincerity, hoping to bring comfort to her friend.

"I'm happy if remembering her doesn't bring you sadness. Remember, you deserve happiness and love, Karla."

Karla let out a sigh, her emotions still in flux. She shook her head, indicating that she had recently had an open and honest conversation with Duncan, which had helped alleviate some of her sadness.

"That's good to hear," Julie responded, a glimmer of relief in her voice. Trying to shift the focus to something else, she asked about Karla's father. "So, you went to your family house last night. How was your father doing? Did you guys have a chance to talk?"

As Julie's question hung in the air, Karla's mind immediately went back to the unpleasant encounter she had with her father. The memory of his uncontrollable anger directed at her for not being kind to Ciara, and how she had left the house, resurfaced, casting a shadow over her thoughts. Feeling the weight of the moment, Karla dropped her spoon, her appetite momentarily forgotten.

Sensing that something was amiss, Julie picked up on the change in Karla's demeanor. Concern etched on her face, she gently probed further.

"You and your father are still not on good terms?" Julie asked softly, her voice filled with empathy.

Karla could only nod in response, her eyes downcast, the strained relationship with her father still a source of pain and discord in her life.

Julie's sigh deepened as she absorbed Karla's words, her concern for Karla growing. Setting down her own cutlery, she leaned in closer, a mix of empathy and gentle reproach in her voice.

"What's going on, Karla? Do you really want to keep being estranged from your father?" Julie asked, her eyes searching Karla's for a glimpse of understanding.

Karla's expression turned pained as she responded, her voice tinged with a mixture of sadness and frustration. "I can't help it, Julie. As long as Ciara is in our lives, I can't fathom the idea of reconciling with my father. You know how much he hurt me by marrying her, and he knows that he will keep causing me pain by having her as his wife. I can't stand Ciara."

Julie's brow furrowed, a hint of conflict in her eyes as she tried to find the right words. "But... Karla, she hasn't done anything wrong. Neither has your father," she gently reminded her.

Karla's voice trembled slightly as she countered, her emotions raw and tangled. "Ciara was my best friend, Julie. And now she's my stepmom. It's just... it's too much for me to bear."

Understanding the depth of Karla's emotions, Julie reached out and placed a comforting hand on her friend's arm. "I know it's complicated, Karla. And it's okay to feel conflicted. But maybe, with time and some open conversations, you can find a way to heal and rebuild your relationship with your father."

Karla looked into Julie's eyes, searching for solace amidst the turmoil. She nodded slowly, acknowledging the truth in her friend's words, even if the path forward seemed uncertain and challenging. But her anger and frustration grew, and she groaned in exasperation. She couldn't let go of her intense hatred towards Ciara, and the memories of the betrayal only fueled her emotions further. She turned to Julie, her voice filled with bitterness.

"That bitch, Ciara. You know, when I confronted her years ago, suspecting that something was going on between her and my dad, she denied it. And now she shows up one day as my dad's new wife. And you're telling me that my dad hasn't wronged me?"

Julie tried to interject, her voice pleading, "Karla, please, L..."

But Karla cut her off, her tone resolute and filled with pain. "No, Julie. He betrayed my trust, just like Ciara did. My dad promised me he wouldn't get married again. And yet, he chose Ciara as his wife. Why her? Why of all people?"

Julie searched for the right words, struggling to find a way to ease Karla's pain. "It's his choice, Karla. And maybe... maybe it's love."

Karla sneered, the bitterness in her voice palpable. "Love? Nonsense. How can it be love when it feels like a betrayal to me? I can't just accept that."

Julie fell silent, her heart aching as she witnessed the depth of pain in Karla's eyes. Across the table, she maintained eye contact with her friend, her expression filled with empathy and understanding.

"Karla," Julie spoke softly, her voice laced with compassion, "I understand that you feel your father meant to hurt you by marrying Ciara. But perhaps, there's another perspective to consider."

Karla shook her head, her voice filled with frustration. "No, Julie. It was all planned. They got married while I was away, and they deliberately kept it from me. Ciara, my damn best friend back then, deceived me. Isn't that just terrible?"

Julie took a deep breath, her hand still resting on Karla's. She gently squeezed her hand, a gesture of support. "Yes, Karla, it is terrible. I can't deny that. But maybe, just maybe, there's more to their actions than meets the eye. Maybe they thought they were protecting you in some way."

Karla's eyes narrowed, her brows furrowing as she considered Julie's words. The anger and hurt were still present, but a flicker of curiosity sparked within her. "Protecting me? How could their betrayal be a form of protection?"

Julie met Karla's gaze unwaveringly. "I don't have all the answers, Karla. But sometimes people make choices believing they are acting in the best interests of others, even if it doesn't seem that way. Maybe your father and Ciara had their reasons, flawed as they may be."

Karla sighed, her grip on Julie's hand tightening. "I don't know if I can ever understand or forgive them, Julie. But I appreciate your perspective. It's just... It's so hard."

Julie nodded, her voice gentle and reassuring. "I know, Karla. Healing takes time, and it's a difficult journey. Just know that I'm here for you, no matter what you decide."

"I know you always got my back. Thank you, Julie," Karla appreciated.

"You're welcome, Cous. I'll always get your back." Julie felt a surge of hope as she noticed her words striking a chord with Karla. She could sense that her message was resonating with her, even if only to a small extent. Taking a deep breath, Julie continued, trying to get her point across.

"Also, if you could see things from your father's perspective, perhaps you wouldn't be so angry with him for marrying Ciara," Julie explained further in a gentle manner, hoping to provide a fresh perspective. "You know, he probably fell in love with Ciara despite her being your best friend and the significant age gap. It's also possible that he was considering your feelings when he decided to keep their secret marriage hidden from you for a few months, and I agree, that was wrong."

Karla, however, responded with a dismissive gesture, rolling her eyes in apparent annoyance. It seemed as though Julie's attempt to reason with her had not been entirely successful, at least for the time being. "Ciara doesn't deserve my forgiveness. By marrying my dad, she hadn't just hurt me but has also disrespected my Mom who showed her so much love when she was alive. I hate how our things turned out. I just fucking hate it!"

As Karla continued to express her anger and hurt, Julie listened attentively, understanding the depth of her emotions. It was clear that Karla was deeply hurt by the actions of both Ciara and her father, and she was not ready to forgive Ciara just yet.

"Karla, just..."

"She hurt me and I don't think I can ever forgive Ciara. Period."

"Karla...?"

"I know you are really close to my Dad. You consider him like your father too, other than an uncle, but don't try to force me to do anything for his well-being..."

"Karla," Julie said softly, trying to interject in a calm manner. "I know Ciara hurt you, and it's completely valid for you to feel that way. I am not trying to force you to do anything for your father's well-being. I just want you to consider different perspectives and possibilities. I care about you, and I want to see you heal and find some peace."

Karla's response was resolute. "I don't care," she declared, her voice filled with anger and pain.

Julie let out a laugh, though it was a gentle one, devoid of mockery. She leaned back in her seat, realizing that pushing the matter further at this moment might not be helpful. However, just as she settled into her seat, her phone beeped, interrupting the conversation and shifting their attention elsewhere.

Julie picked up her phone, acknowledging the interruption. It seemed that, for now, the discussion would have to be put on hold as she attended to the message or notification that had come through. She

started scrolling through, checking some important news notifications she got while Karla picked up her spoon. A video caught her and the unbelievable amount of views a recently uploaded video had got with massive comments forced her to click on it.

Julie's eyes widened as she watched the video, her surprise and intrigue evident on her face. Karla's curiosity was piqued by Julie's reaction, and she leaned in closer, eager to find out what had captured her cousin's attention.

"Oh my goodness," Julie exclaimed, unable to contain her astonishment. "You will not believe what I am seeing." Her voice held a mix of excitement and disbelief, causing Karla to snap her eyes toward Julie, her own curiosity now fully piqued. "What is it, Julie?" Karla asked eagerly, her gaze fixed on Julie. "Come on, tell me!"

Unable to contain her excitement any longer, Julie turned the phone towards Karla, showing her the screen. "Look at this," she said, her voice filled with a mix of shock and excitement. "It is a video, and it has an unbelievable number of views! And the comments... they are going crazy!" Julie's finger tapped on the screen, drawing Karla's attention to the overwhelming response the video had received.

Karla's eyes widened as she took in the sight. The sheer magnitude of the video's popularity and the flood of comments left her astonished. "Wow," she breathed, her own excitement now matching Julie's. "What is the video about? Why is it getting so much attention?"

Julie raised a finger, signaling for Karla to pause for a moment. Karla looked at her with a curious expression, wondering what Julie had discovered. Julie then walked over and took a seat next to Karla, eagerly handing her the phone so she could watch the video herself.



"Hold on for a second. First, Isn't this the guy...?"

"Who?" Karla glanced at the screen, her eyes scanning the figure that Julie pointed out.

"Your heartthrob."

Karla arched an eyebrow, snapping a glance at Julie. "Duncan?!"

Julie nodded and Karla returned her gaze to the screen. Her eyes widened in surprise.

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