

Chapter 84

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When Lady Zelda heard Duncan mutter about "dealing with the enemies," she was puzzled and sought clarification.

"What do you mean by 'dealing with the enemies'?"

Duncan, caught off guard that she had overheard him, quickly composed himself, putting his phone back into his pocket and shrugging.

"I was just kidding," he replied, trying to downplay his remark. He didn't want to worry his mother or create unnecessary concern. Sensing her skepticism, Duncan redirected the conversation, "So, how did you see the updates of the business?"

"Well, you insisted on showing them to me, even though I fully trust in your capabilities, my son. You've been doing a great job, especially considering it's only been a couple of months since you took over. I'm proud of you."

Her words brought a smile to Duncan's face, and he felt a surge of pride and gratitude. He appreciated his mother's unwavering support and belief in his abilities. Her hand on his and her leaning posture conveyed her affection and encouragement.

"I'm proud of you, Duncan."

Feeling encouraged by his mother's support, Duncan expressed his gratitude, although it felt a bit unusual for him to address her as "Mother." Nevertheless, he mustered the words, appreciating the significance of the moment.

"Thank you, Mother," Duncan said, his voice carrying a hint of

unfamiliarity.

Lady Zelda's smile widened upon hearing him address her as "Mom," but she couldn't help but notice the slight uneasiness in his tone.

However, she understood that their relationship was evolving and that it might take time for Duncan to fully embrace this new dynamic.

"Soon, you won't feel weird addressing me as your mother," Lady Zelda thought to herself, determined to strengthen their bond even further. "Our connection will grow stronger than ever, surpassing the bond we had when you were just a child."

As their conversation drew to a close, Lady Zelda sensed that Duncan needed to leave. She withdrew her hand from his, and he stood up from his seat.

"I will take my leave now."

"Wish you all the best, son," Lady Zelda said, her voice filled with love and pride.

Duncan smiled warmly, the uneasiness from earlier fading away. He knew that he was fortunate to have such a supportive and caring mother by his side. With her words echoing in his mind, he left the room, feeling a renewed sense of determination and a deep appreciation for their evolving relationship.

Back at the Walton's Company, Duncan made his way to his office with a big smile, his mind buzzing with thoughts of his next plan of action regarding Peterson.

However, as he entered his office, he was taken aback to find Karla seated before his desk, engrossed in reading a business magazine. His initial

reaction was to express his surprise and annoyance.

"What are you doing here?" Duncan asked, feigning an unpleasant tone, causing Karla to rotate the chair to face him.

Karla looked up, slightly startled by his tone, and replied, "You're back?"

Duncan, not missing a beat, retorted sarcastically, "No, I'm still out." His attempt at humor was met with an eye roll from Karla as she stood up from her chair.

"Don't you have anything to do today, Karla?" Duncan questioned, his voice carrying a hint of impatience.

Karla stared at him for a moment, her expression unreadable. Then she shrugged, seemingly unaffected by Duncan's question. "Not really," she replied casually.

Duncan's irritation grew as he questioned her presence once again. "Then why are you back here? You should be handling your father's business. I can't believe he entrusted his company to a carefree woman like you."

Karla raised an eyebrow, a hint of defiance in her eyes. "Whatever. I bet you can't tell him that to his face," she retorted.

Duncan felt a surge of frustration at her remark, his pride stung. He was about to respond with a sharp retort when a knock on the door interrupted their exchange. Both Duncan and Karla turned their attention to the sound as Babette entered with a cheerful face.

"Hello, sir," Babette greeted, her voice filled with warmth. "I heard you're back, so I decided to come in and remind you of what you seem to have forgotten."

Duncan's irritation subsided momentarily as he recognized the significance of Babette's words. He knew exactly what she was referring to.

He approached Babette with a sense of purpose. Despite his serious demeanor, there was a touch of gratitude in his eyes as he shook his head slightly, indicating his disagreement with her earlier suggestion.

"You came to remind me of the celebration," Duncan said, his voice filled with a mixture of gratitude and determination. "Babette, forget about the celebration or a little party. I can't do any of that. I will celebrate when I get a bigger contract."

Babette looked at Duncan with a hint of disappointment, her eyes reflecting her hope for a moment of joyous camaraderie. She opened her mouth to protest, but Duncan interrupted her gently but firmly. 1

"Oh, but..." Babette began, her voice trailing off as Duncan cut her off.

"Look, Babette," Duncan continued, his voice softened with sincerity. "You helped me with the presentation, and you deserve a big appreciation, honestly. I couldn't have done it without you."

As Duncan was speaking, the door swung open, and Nicholas, Babette's assistant entered the office. Nicholas's presence interrupted the conversation momentarily, but Duncan quickly regained his focus.

"So, you can tell me what you want," Duncan said, his voice now carrying a note of determination and a touch of pride. "And I'll give it to you. Anything."

Babette's eyes widened with surprise and a glimmer of excitement. She couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Really, sir?" she responded, her

voice filled with a mixture of disbelief and gratitude.

Duncan nodded, a genuine smile spreading across his face. At that moment, he showed that beneath his serious and driven exterior, he recognized and valued the contributions of those around him. He was willing to go above and beyond to express his appreciation and make sure his team felt acknowledged and rewarded for their efforts.

With Karla and Nicholas still present in the office, Babette couldn't contain her excitement and blurted out her desire without thinking.

"A hug?!" she exclaimed, her voice filled with surprise and joy.

Karla, caught off guard, opened her mouth in astonishment, while Nicholas's eyes widened in disbelief. Though not knowing each other, they exchanged quick glances, clearly taken aback by Babette's unexpected request.

Sensing the shocked expressions on their faces, as well as Duncan's own surprised reaction, Babette quickly tried to amend her statement.

"N...no, sir," she stammered, her voice filled with embarrassment. "I was just kidding."

Duncan, however, wore a warm smile and shook his head gently. He could see the genuine happiness and appreciation in Babette's eyes, and he wanted to honor her request in his own way.

"You deserve it, Babette," Duncan said, his voice filled with sincerity. With that, he stepped forward and pulled Babette into a heartfelt hug.

Karla stood there, her lips still parted in surprise, while Nicholas watched in astonishment. Duncan's unexpected gesture left them both speechless, each grappling with their own emotions.

For Babette, it was an incredible moment. It felt like a dream come true, as her hard work and dedication were acknowledged in such a warm and personal way. In that embrace, she felt appreciated, valued, and most important of all, for her, it was a sign of a beautiful relationship with Duncan whom she had been secretly crushing on.

Just as Babette was on the verge of mustering the courage to reciprocate the hug and savor the rare moment, Nicholas, consumed by a wave of jealousy, tapped her in an odd and untimely manner. Startled by the interruption, Duncan released his hold on Babette, breaking the embrace.

"Ms. Swan," Nicholas interjected, his voice tinged with an air of urgency. "We have something to check on, and that's why I'm here."

Babette's smile faltered briefly, but she quickly composed herself. "Oh, okay," she responded, her voice masking any disappointment she might have felt. She offered a polite smile to Duncan. "Thank you, sir."

"You're welcome," Duncan replied, his tone slightly distracted as he turned his attention to his desk. He swiftly grabbed his jacket, signaling his departure from the office. Karla, sensing the shift in the atmosphere, hurriedly followed him, leaving Babette alone with Nicholas.

As Duncan left, an uncomfortable silence descended upon the room. Babette's smile gradually faded, replaced by a more guarded expression. She directed her gaze towards Nicholas, her eyes searching for an explanation or some semblance of understanding.

Nicholas, however, appeared indifferent to the impact of his actions.

Still feeling a mix of disappointment and frustration, she couldn't help but confront Nicholas about his unusual behavior. Her tone turned cold as she asked, "Nicholas, what did we have to check on?"

Nicholas responded curtly, his own tone laced with a hint of bitterness, "Nothing. You seem so happy to have gotten a hug from the boss earlier, hm?"

Babette's eyes widened, her frustration mounting. She opened her mouth to retort. "Yes, and you..."

But before she could finish talking, Nicholas abruptly interrupted her.

"Excuse me," he said dismissively, his cold expression remaining unchanged. With that, he turned and left, leaving Babette standing there, bewildered by his reaction.

"What the heck is wrong with him?" Babette muttered to herself, her annoyance evident. She rolled her eyes, exhaling deeply as she tried to shake off the encounter with Nicholas.

Meanwhile, outside the building, Karla caught up with Duncan, her curiosity getting the better of her. She couldn't help but question him about the unexpected hug.

"Why did you hug Babette?" Karla asked, her voice tinged with a mixture of surprise and intrigue.

Duncan paused for a moment, inhaling deeply as he turned to face Karla. "She deserved it," he simply answered, a note of conviction evident in his voice. "She's been working really hard, and she's been helping me a lot."

Karla's brows furrowed slightly as she processed Duncan's response. Her concern started to manifest as she questioned his decision. "I know. But giving her a hug... isn't that a bit much?" she asked, her voice tinged with a hint of unease.

Duncan's expression shifted, and he looked at Karla with surprise. "What? Why do you sound jealous?" he asked, his tone reflecting a mix of confusion and frustration.

Karla let out a frustrated sigh, feeling a surge of emotions rising within her. "Damn it," she muttered under her breath. "I'm not. You should have just..."

Duncan interrupted her, his voice firm and slightly exasperated. "Enough. I don't want to be around you if you're going to constantly argue. Actually, that's only what you do best, arguing."

Karla's eyes widened, taken aback by Duncan's response. She had not expected his reaction to be so blunt and dismissive.

"But earlier we were cool, right?"

"Felt like," he shrugged.

She tried to interject, wanting to clarify her intentions, but Duncan's phone rang, cutting off their conversation.

Duncan retrieved his phone and glanced at the caller ID, momentarily distracted from the tension between him and Karla. The interruption provided a brief respite, allowing both of them a moment to collect their thoughts and emotions.

As Duncan stared at his phone screen, Karla stood there, her expression a mix of frustration and confusion. She wondered if she had unintentionally overstepped a boundary or if there were underlying issues between them that she hadn't fully recognized.

Realizing who was calling, a smile appeared on Duncan's face as he

answered the call. "Hello?"

"Duncan, it's me, Peterson."

"What do you want?" Duncan asked with a strong tone, indicating his abhorrence.

After a few seconds of silence, Peterson said, "Duncan, sorry for the other day."

Duncan's expression softened slightly, but he maintained his guard. "Keep your apology to yourself. It's useless."

"Fine, I will do as you say. Please, I need your help."

Duncan's smile widened, a mischievous spark in his eyes. "Wait for my call then." With that, he hung up, smirking.

Curiosity piqued, Karla, who had been nearby, couldn't help but inquire. "Was it Peterson Rogers?"

Duncan nodded, his smile lingering as he finalized the next plan of action in his head.