

## When Night Grows Softer Hope Returns To Lead Us

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

### \*\*Chapter 16\*\*

Sophie leaned against the counter, her heart racing with anticipation as she prepared to share her thoughts with Helen. “I’ve been reflecting on our conversation the other day about the future of this place,” she began, her voice steady but laced with excitement. “I think I might have come up with a few ideas that could really help us keep this business thriving in honor of your husband’s legacy.” She paused, gauging Helen’s expression for any sign of interest or skepticism.

Helen’s brow furrowed slightly, her curiosity piqued. “Okay. What are your ideas?” she asked, her tone cautious yet inviting.

Sophie sensed a hint of reservation in Helen’s voice, but it was better than outright dismissal. With renewed determination, she pressed on. “Well, the coffee here is fantastic, but...” She hesitated as Helen raised a hand, interrupting her.

“When have you even tasted the coffee here?” Helen questioned, a playful smirk forming on her lips.

Sophie felt a wave of embarrassment wash over her. “I, uh, haven’t actually tried it yet.” Her thoughts raced as she recalled the few crumpled dollars she had tucked away in her pocket. She would need to splurge on a cup today—perhaps just a small hot coffee would suffice.

“I thought you liked coffee?” Helen’s brow arched in confusion.

“I do!” Sophie replied, her enthusiasm returning.

“Then why don’t you ever drink it while you’re on shift?” Helen pressed, her tone light but inquisitive.

Caught off guard, Sophie struggled to find the right words. “I didn’t want to spend the money on it,” she finally admitted, her cheeks flushing.

Helen turned to face her fully, her expression shifting to one of realization. “You get free coffee whenever you work. Didn’t I mention that?” she asked, her eyes widening in surprise at Sophie’s ignorance.

Sophie shook her head vigorously, her disbelief evident. How could she have forgotten such a crucial detail?

"I'm sorry, Sophie. That's my oversight," Helen said, her voice softening. "You can enjoy coffee while you work. Any drink is fine, just make sure it doesn't distract you from serving our customers."

"Of course! Thank you so much!" Sophie exclaimed, her excitement bubbling over. She couldn't wait to sample the drinks she had been crafting all this time.

Helen smiled, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "What drink do you want to try first?"

"A white chocolate raspberry vanilla latte!" Sophie declared without hesitation, her mouth watering at the thought.

Helen chuckled, then paused, a thoughtful look crossing her face. "Wait, I don't think we have white chocolate... What did you say?"

Sophie grinned, her cheeks flushing with a hint of embarrassment. "We don't, but I just thought of it one day while I was making a different drink. I've been craving it ever since."

"Hmmm, well, let me know how it turns out," Helen replied, her tone noncommittal but friendly.

Sophie seized the opportunity to launch into her ideas. "One thing I was thinking about is introducing a drink of the week or month. We could invite our customers to create their own winning drink recipes and write them down on a 3x5 card, including the drink's name, their name, and how to make it. Then, we could select one to feature each month or week and promote it."

Helen remained silent, so Sophie pressed on, her excitement growing. "This could really engage our current customers. And to attract new ones, we need to boost Sip and Drip's presence on social media. Imagine capturing photos of happy customers enjoying their drinks! We could even showcase the drinks our customers create. It would be fun to let everyone vote for their favorite."

Sophie paused, glancing at Helen for any sign of encouragement. When she didn't respond, Sophie decided to take a bold step. "For my last idea," she said, taking a deep breath to steady her nerves, "what do you think about adding cinnamon rolls to our menu?" She rushed on before Helen could interrupt. "We already have a commercial oven, so it's just a matter of stocking up on the ingredients. I usually arrive early, and if I come in a bit earlier, I could whip up some cinnamon rolls. I've been making them my whole life, and I've been told they're quite good. I could bake a batch for you to try. If you like them, we could do a trial run and see how it goes. If it flops, we can always drop it."

Sophie's heart raced as she explained her idea. "The cinnamon rolls could attract non-coffee drinkers who might not usually consider stopping by. Once they're in the door for the rolls, they might discover a drink they love. It could turn potential customers into regulars," she concluded, exhaling the breath she had been holding and waiting for Helen's response.

Silence enveloped them for a few moments as Sophie busied herself with the tasks at hand, not wanting to pressure Helen for an immediate reply. Finally, Helen turned to her, a thoughtful expression on her face. "You've really put a lot of thought into this," she acknowledged.

Sophie nodded, a sense of pride swelling within her. "During my breaks, I've been going to the library, reading up on ways to grow our business," she confessed, her voice tinged with determination.

"I'll need to think this through and sort out a few details, but I genuinely like your ideas," Helen said, her tone warm and encouraging.

"Really?" Sophie asked, her heart fluttering with hope.

"Really," Helen affirmed with a smile that lit up her face. "Let's start with a trial. Write down what you need for the cinnamon rolls, and I'll bring some ingredients from home. We can make a practice batch tomorrow. As for the drinks, let's give it a shot. I'll pick up a chalkboard sign and some chalk today. You can start with that drink you mentioned, and we'll see how it goes. Regarding social media," she added, shaking her head with a hint of defeat, "I'm not sure about that. It's all a bit foreign to me."

Conclusion

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

**\*\*When Night Grows Softer Hope Returns To Lead Us by Asa Rowan Finn\*\***

Sophie felt the weight of her shoulders dropping as she spoke. "Honestly, I'm not very familiar with it either. I've never owned a phone myself, but my step-brother had one. He would always show me random things on social media." A bitter thought crossed her mind, one she kept to herself: Mostly, the things he showed were just to poke fun at me. "But maybe we can come up with something together," she added, trying to inject a note of optimism into the conversation.

"Perhaps Cynthia would have some ideas," Helen suggested, her voice tinged with uncertainty. The two of them returned to their tasks, the morning unfolding before them as they opened the shop just a few minutes later.

A sense of relief washed over Sophie after she had shared her thoughts. To her surprise, Helen had responded better than she had anticipated. Just the thought that Helen might consider even one of her ideas filled her with hope. One out of three possibilities wasn't a failure; it was a step in the right direction.

As the morning drifted by, Sophie found herself more engrossed in her work.

After her break, Helen approached her with an idea that lit up her face. "Sophie, I'm thinking of running out to grab that chalkboard we talked about. It'll only take a few minutes. Are you going to be okay here by yourself?" Helen inquired, her concern evident in her eyes.

"Absolutely! I've got this covered," Sophie replied with a confident nod. A few moments later, as Helen slipped out the door, Sophie busied herself making a drink for a customer who had just walked in.

"Hey Sophie," came a cheerful voice, and she looked up to see Kevin, his smile brightening the room.

"Hi Kevin!" she responded easily, her mood lifting. "What can I get for you today?"

"I'm feeling adventurous. Got any suggestions?" he asked with a playful glint in his eye.

"Oooh, I do! Should I spill the beans or keep it a surprise?" she teased, her excitement bubbling over.

"Surprise me!" he said, grinning widely.

With a spring in her step, Sophie rang him up, then turned away, her mind racing with ideas. This was her chance to experiment with a new drink she had concocted. She took her time crafting it, carefully measuring and mixing ingredients, ensuring she remembered each step since she was inventing it on the fly.

As she focused on her creation, the familiar jingle of the doorbell announced another customer. "Welcome to Sip and Drip!" she called out, her voice bright and welcoming, even without turning around. Once she was satisfied with her drink, she walked over to Kevin and placed it on the counter with a flourish. "All right, give it a whirl!" she said, her grin infectious.

Kevin looked down at the cup, his eyes sparkling with anticipation, then took a sip. He remained silent for a moment, savoring the taste, before taking another. "So, what do you think?" Sophie asked, her heart racing with hope.

"I don't really like it," he said, and Sophie felt her heart sink, disappointment washing over her. "I love it!" he exclaimed, his eyes lighting up with genuine enthusiasm.

Sophie blinked in surprise, her spirits lifting again. "Really?" she asked, her voice tinged with disbelief.

He chuckled, shaking his head. "That's not quite the way to sell drinks, beautiful. You need to convince me that I'm going to love it!"

A smile spread across her face. "Well, to be honest, I wasn't sure how it would turn out. It was my first attempt. It's a white chocolate raspberry vanilla latte," she explained, a hint of pride creeping into her voice.

He gazed at her, astonished. "You just whipped that up without even tasting it first?"

Sophie nodded, a little sheepishly. "Well, we can't have that," he said, sliding the cup back toward her. "Taste it. It's amazing," he insisted.

Sophie hesitated, caught off guard. Just as she was about to take a sip, a sudden voice cut through the air, sharp and unexpected. "Sophie!" The anger in Torin's voice jolted her, and she looked up in shock to find him standing off to the side, waiting impatiently.

"Sorry," she said quickly, turning back to Kevin. "Maybe next time. I need to take orders."

She noticed the disappointment flicker across Kevin's face, but he masked it with a smile. "Catch you later, beautiful," he said, stepping aside as Torin moved into position in front of the register. Yet, Torin's gaze wasn't on her; it was fixated on the police officer who had just exited the shop.

"Can I help you?" Sophie asked softly, trying to diffuse the tension that seemed to hang in the air. She couldn't quite comprehend what had triggered Torin's sudden anger—perhaps it was simply the wait in line?

Corin turned to face her, and Sophie felt a chill run down her spine at the fury in his eyes.

Taking a small step back, she watched as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, attempting to rein in his emotions. When he opened his eyes again, they were locked onto hers. "I'll take whatever he had," he said, nodding toward the door Kevin had just exited.

Sophie hesitated, looking up at him. "Um, I don't think you're going to like it," she murmured, a hint of concern in her voice.

In truth, she believed he would despise it. He had always opted for a black dark roast, the bolder the flavor, the better. The thought of him suddenly opting for the sugary concoction she had just created felt utterly implausible.

"I'll get a large black dark roast as well," he added, dismissing her comment entirely. Sophie shrugged, resigned, and rang up his drinks, her fingers moving mechanically.

As she told him the total, he reached for his cash, but then abruptly pulled his hand back. Confused, she looked up at him. "Did you go shopping yet?" he asked, his voice low and probing.

Sophie froze, uncertainty flooding her. She hadn't gone shopping, but she wasn't sure if it was wise to admit that to him. "I can see from your hesitation that you haven't. Go buy what you need with the money, Sophie. If you don't, I'll take matters into my own hands," he warned, his tone leaving no room for argument.

Conclusion

18

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

**\*\*When Night Grows Softer Hope Returns To Lead Us by Asa Rowan Finn\*\***

Sophie felt a shiver race down her spine, a sensation she could not shake off. The powerful presence of Torin loomed over her, and though a part of her was tempted to challenge him, the overwhelming weight of his authority made her hesitate. She found herself grappling with the request he had just made, a request that felt impossible to fulfill. Instead of voicing her doubts, she reached out for the money once more, her fingers brushing against the cool bills. This time, he relented and allowed her to take it.

With a quick exchange of change, she spun around, her heart racing as she focused on preparing the drinks. Her hands trembled slightly, betraying her nerves. She concentrated hard, trying to recall the precise method she had used to craft the first drink. After what felt like an eternity, she finally completed the task and carefully carried both cups over to Torin. "Here you go. One large black dark roast and one white chocolate raspberry vanilla latte," Sophie announced, her voice steady despite the turmoil within.

She observed as Torin picked up the raspberry drink first. His gaze remained locked on hers, a silent challenge that sent her pulse racing. He tilted the cup back and took a sip, his expression inscrutable. After what felt like a lifetime, he set the cup down, his face betraying no emotion. "Yep. I don't like it. You can have it," he stated flatly, turning away without another word and striding across the shop.

Sophie stood frozen, staring at his retreating figure, a mix of confusion and disappointment swirling within her. She glanced down at the cup, wrestling with her thoughts. Hadn't she told him he wouldn't enjoy it? So why had he bought it in the first place? Once she was sure he wasn't looking, she lifted the cup to her lips and took a quick sip. As the rich flavors danced on her tongue, she closed her eyes in bliss. It was exquisite.

When she opened her eyes again, she found Torin's intense gaze fixed on her from across the room. He gave her a subtle nod before exiting the store, leaving Sophie in a state of bewilderment, her mind racing with questions.

"Did I miss anything?" Helen's voice broke through her thoughts as she entered the front door, arms laden with supplies.

Sophie turned to her, a smile creeping onto her face. “I sold one of my drinks,” she replied, her excitement bubbling over.

But she kept the details of the second drink to herself. “To who?” Helen inquired, her curiosity piqued.

“The police officer—Kevin,” Sophie revealed. “He said he liked it.”

“Well, of course he did! But he doesn’t count. We need to find someone else to try it,” Helen declared, her tone matter-of-fact.

Sophie blinked, perplexed by her friend’s reasoning. “Why doesn’t Kevin count?” she asked, genuinely confused.

Helen’s eyes sparkled with amusement. “Because he likes you, dear. So naturally, he’s going to say he enjoys the drink,” she explained, as if it were the most obvious truth in the world.

Sophie couldn’t help but laugh at that. “He doesn’t like me,” she insisted, still chuckling.

“Hmmm,” Helen replied, a teasing tone in her voice. Sophie brushed it off, returning to her tasks. When the shop quieted down, she took a moment to jot down the ingredients she would need for the cinnamon rolls, handing the completed list to Helen.

“I think that’s everything,” she said, a sense of accomplishment washing over her.

Helen glanced over the list, nodding in approval. “Perfect. I’ll grab the stuff after work.”

A pang of guilt tugged at Sophie’s heart. She wished she could contribute, to buy the ingredients herself, but her pockets were empty. Not wanting to burden Helen with her worries, she kept her thoughts to herself. Soon enough, it was time to clock out for the day. Sophie hurriedly made her way to the library, the wind biting at her skin, a chill creeping into her bones. Her stomach growled in protest, reminding her of the less-than-appetizing dinner from the previous night, and she silently hoped for something better this time.

The hours at the library dragged on, each minute feeling like an eternity. Finally, relief washed over her as it was time to head to Hope House. As she approached the front door, she half-expected to see Liam waiting for her. Instead, her heart skipped a beat when she spotted Torin in the lobby, engrossed in a phone conversation.

In a moment of panic, she pivoted and retreated back through the library, a grin breaking across her face as she navigated the aisles of books toward the seldom-used side entrance at the back. She slipped out the door, carefully ensuring it closed soundly behind her.

“Going somewhere?” a deep voice rumbled from behind her, causing her to jump and whirl around.

“You scared me!” she exclaimed, her heart racing.

“Liam told me about your little escaping stunts,” Torin said, arms crossed over his broad chest, a playful smirk dancing on his lips.

Sophie swallowed hard, feeling small under his imposing stature. An awkward silence fell between them as they engaged in an unspoken staring contest, but the sudden gust of wind sent chills racing through her. Torin’s expression darkened, if that was even possible. Before she could react, he shrugged off his suit coat and extended it toward her.

“Put it on,” he commanded, his tone leaving no room for disagreement.

Sophie hesitated for a moment, then took the coat from him, wrapping it around her shoulders. As the warmth enveloped her, she was surprised by how comforting it felt. She inhaled deeply, only to be met with the intoxicating scent of him. It was overwhelming, leaving her feeling slightly dizzy. Realizing she had zoned out, she quickly focused, only to find him waiting for her response.

“What?” she asked, her voice lacking confidence.

“Where is the coat I gave you?” he asked, his irritation evident as he repeated his question.

Sophie felt a twinge of guilt wash over her. She debated lying but instinctively knew that would only lead to more trouble. Lowering her gaze, she avoided his intense stare. “I left it at the shop,” she admitted quietly.

“Why?” he asked, a single word that carried the weight of his expectations.

Sophie’s mind raced as she struggled to formulate an answer, the chill of the wind forgotten in the face of his unwavering scrutiny.

19

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

**\*\*When Night Grows Softer Hope Returns To Lead Us by Asa Rowan Finn\*\***

Sophie felt a surge of frustration rise within her, a tempest of emotions battling for dominance. She wanted to blurt out, “Because otherwise, my roommate will steal it!” but the words remained lodged in her throat. Instead, she found herself snapping, a tone sharper than she intended. “I just had to, okay?” The words tumbled out, laced with an edge that surprised even her.



Torin regarded her with a piercing gaze, one that seemed to delve deeper than mere surface observations. Sophie quickly averted her eyes, feeling exposed under his scrutiny as if he could see into the very depths of her soul. "Do you not like it?" he inquired, his voice calm yet tinged with an underlying tension. "I can get you a different one, or you can choose one with the money I gave you," he added, the latter part of his statement rising in intensity, revealing his growing frustration.

"No, no, it's absolutely beautiful. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever owned," Sophie exclaimed, her voice suddenly faltering. Why did she have to say that? She chided herself internally, feeling her cheeks heat up. The silence that followed felt heavy, almost suffocating, as she shifted her gaze to anywhere but him. When the stillness stretched on, she took a chance and looked up, only to realize it was a grave miscalculation.

Torin stood there, his dark gray button-down shirt hugging his muscular frame, and Sophie felt an unexpected flutter in her chest. He exuded strength and confidence, and she was momentarily breathless, overwhelmed by the intensity of his presence. Desperate to escape his penetrating gaze, she looked down, pulling his jacket tighter around her shoulders as if it could shield her from the whirlwind of emotions swirling within her. How on earth was she going to navigate this tangled web she had woven?

"Come on," he finally said, breaking the palpable tension. "I'll walk you to your car."

With a gesture, he beckoned her to start moving, and in a moment of foolishness, she complied. She walked to the end of the sidewalk, her heart racing as she turned to face Torin. "Um, the thing is... you see, I don't actually... have a car," she managed to stammer, her voice barely above a whisper. She stole a glance at his face, searching for any hint of understanding, but his expression remained inscrutable.

"Seriously?" he asked, his tone low and incredulous. "How do you get back and forth to work each day?"

"I walk," she replied, trying to sound cheerful, though the weight of the truth hung heavily in the air.

Torin's demeanor shifted, his eyes darkening as he regarded her with a scowl that made her stomach knot. "What time do you have to be at work each morning?" he asked, his voice steady but laced with concern.

Sophie hesitated, glancing up at him before quickly looking away again. He didn't seem pleased, and the last thing she wanted was to add fuel to the fire. "Um, it's a little different every day. Sometimes I get there a little later than other days. Tomorrow's going to be a different time altogether," she rambled, her words tumbling out in a nervous rush.

"What time?" he pressed, his voice slow and deliberate, as if he were trying to extract the truth from her.

"Five," she blurted out, her heart racing.

"You leave your house at five?" he asked, disbelief coloring his tone. "In the dark?" His voice rose slightly, echoing his astonishment.

"Uh, sort of, well not exactly," Sophie stammered, feeling the heat rise in her cheeks. "I'm not in the mood for your games!" he thundered, his frustration palpable.

"Four-thirty. I leave every day at four-thirty. Well, technically, starting tomorrow I have to be at the shop at four-thirty. So I'm guessing I'll leave around four. I'm not sure if that will be every day or not. We're trying..." Sophie's voice trailed off as she caught the look on his face.

In a swift motion, Torin pulled out his phone and held it to his ear, his gaze never leaving her. "You're taking Sophie home, now," he commanded before ending the call. Without another word, he turned on his heel and began walking away. It took Sophie a moment to process what had just happened; she was expected to follow him. She hurried to catch up, her mind racing as they approached the parking lot.

A moment later, a sleek black Land Rover came to a halt. The driver's door swung open, and Liam emerged, his demeanor relaxed as he greeted her. "Cat girl," he said with an easy smile, but Sophie was too lost in her thoughts to return the gesture. She glanced at Torin, but his face was like granite, revealing nothing of his thoughts or feelings.

Without uttering a single word, Torin turned and strode away from her, leaving Sophie feeling like she had just plunged into icy waters. What had she done to provoke such anger? She couldn't quite grasp it, but the weight of his disappointment hung heavily in the air. She watched him for a moment, surprised when his ever-present companion appeared at his side as if summoned by some unseen force.

"Come on," Liam said gently, his tone soothing as if he were coaxing a frightened animal. "Let's get you in the car and get you home." He guided her toward the back door, and without thinking, she slid inside, her mind racing with thoughts of how to extricate herself from this tangled situation.

"Where to?" Liam asked as he settled into the driver's seat, his eyes glancing at her in the rearview mirror.

Sophie hesitated, the urge to lie bubbling up within her. She considered asking him to drop her off at a house she passed on her walks, but the thought of being discovered there and facing the consequences chilled her. "Just go straight for a while," she finally replied, her voice steady.

The minutes passed in silence, the weight of unspoken words filling the air. Sophie struggled to find something to say, her mind a flurry of thoughts. Finally, she mustered the courage to ask, "Why do you drive a car like this?"

“Because I like living,” Liam replied with a chuckle, the lightness of his words contrasting sharply with the tension that still lingered in her heart.

Conclusion

20

Continue Regular Chapter Reading Below

**\*\*When Night Grows Softer Hope Returns To Lead Us by Asa Rowan Finn\*\***

Sophie found herself utterly baffled by the conversation, but she chose to let it slide for the moment. The atmosphere in the car fell into a hushed stillness, a quiet that enveloped them both for a brief span of time before Liam broke the silence. “You comfortable back there?” he asked, his voice laced with a hint of concern.

“Yes,” Sophie replied softly, her voice barely more than a whisper.

“He’s not angry with you,” Liam reassured her, his tone gentle yet firm. Sophie met his gaze in the rear-view mirror, catching a fleeting glimpse of his expression before he redirected his focus to the road. The silence that followed felt heavy, laden with unspoken words and emotions. Sophie remained silent, and Liam offered no further comments, leaving an invisible wall between them.

As they drew nearer to Hope House, Sophie felt her heart begin to race, each beat echoing louder in her ears. “This is my block,” she announced, surprised at how steady her voice sounded despite the turmoil inside her.

“Okay,” Liam replied, his voice steady. “Which house?” he inquired, his curiosity evident.

A wave of panic crashed over Sophie. Her mind raced, desperately searching for an alternative, a way to avoid the inevitable. But, ultimately, she slumped back into her seat, surrendering to the reality of the situation. “Hope House,” she murmured, her eyes fixed on the dashboard, unwilling to confront the look she feared would be on his face.

The car fell into an oppressive silence. Moments later, Liam shifted the vehicle into park right outside Hope House. He remained quiet, the tension palpable in the air. Sophie stole a glance at him, finding him staring straight ahead, lost in thought. Time to make her escape, she thought, her mind racing with a mix of dread and determination.

“Thank you so much for bringing me here,” she said, her voice surprising herself once again with its clarity. “I don’t suppose there’s any way to keep this just between us?” she asked, a glimmer of hope in her eyes.

Liam remained silent, his expression unreadable. Finally, he swung open his door and stepped out. He walked around to her side and opened the door for her. Sophie hesitated for a moment, then climbed out, feeling the weight of the coat she was still wearing. As he shut the door behind her, she felt a wave of uncertainty wash over her.

Unsure of where to go next, she instinctively walked toward the front door of the house. Liam lingered by the passenger side, leaning against the vehicle, his presence a comforting yet painful reminder of the moment.

“Sophie,” he called out just as she reached the door. She turned back to him, and her heart sank at the sorrow etched across his face. “I can’t. I’m sorry,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper. Sophie felt a lump form in her throat, but she didn’t respond. Instead, she opened the door and stepped inside Hope House, refusing to look back.

Once inside, Sophie bypassed the dining area and headed straight for her room. Relief washed over her as she noticed it was empty. She sank onto her bed, suddenly aware of the suit coat draped over her shoulders, Torin’s coat that felt like a tangible reminder of everything she was trying to escape.

Frustration bubbled within her. She would have to hide it, she decided. Just as she was about to remove the coat, the door swung open, prompting her to spring to her feet. She hastily took off the coat and tucked it beneath her pillow, sitting in front of it like a child hiding a secret. Her roommate glanced at her but said nothing, merely retrieving something from her drawer before leaving the room again.

Sophie quickly knelt down and stashed the coat with her other belongings. When she stood up, her gaze fell upon a note resting on the dresser. Curiosity piqued, she picked it up and recognized Amy’s handwriting. It was an invitation to meet at dinner to discuss something important. A sigh escaped her lips; the last thing she wanted was to join the dinner crowd, but she knew she had no choice. Oddly enough, though she expected her stomach to grumble with hunger, it felt numb, mirroring her emotions. With a resigned heart, she left her room and made her way to the dining area.

As soon as she entered, her eyes landed on Amy and Olivia. The bright smile on Amy’s face signaled that something positive had unfolded. Sophie grabbed a plate of food and settled down beside them, managing to take several bites while Amy animatedly spoke.

“So, I got a new job, one that I think is really going to work out,” Amy announced as soon as Sophie sat down.

“That’s so great! I’m really happy for you,” Sophie responded, her voice filled with genuine enthusiasm. She took a moment to sign to Olivia, inquiring about her day. Olivia’s response brought a smile to Sophie’s face, and she felt a warm sense of connection as they communicated.

As Amy continued to share the details of her new job, Sophie felt a swell of pride for her friend. “It sounds amazing! What can I do to help?” she asked, eager to support her friend.

Amy hesitated, her expression turning uncertain. “I got permission for Olivia to be here, and you too, if you’re willing, in the afternoons. The job is from two-thirty to ten-thirty,” she explained, her eyes searching Sophie’s for understanding.

Sophie's mind raced momentarily. Balancing her own schedule with such late hours would be a challenge, especially given how early she had to rise each day. Amy continued, "I'm really sorry to ask this of you. I know it's a lot, and you absolutely don't have to do it. I can find someone else or work something else out."

Placing her hand gently on Amy's arm, Sophie reassured her, "It's totally fine. This is a great opportunity." Relief washed over Amy's face, and Sophie felt a sense of satisfaction knowing she could help.

"Are you sure this isn't too much?" Amy asked, her brow furrowing with concern.

Sophie smiled warmly at both Amy and Olivia. "Of course not. I'll learn more sign language," she promised, determination shining in her eyes.

Amy eagerly signed to Olivia, who beamed back at them, her joy infectious. A pang of affection hit Sophie's heart at the sight of Olivia's smile, solidifying her resolve to do whatever it took to support these wonderful people. "When do you start?" Sophie inquired, her curiosity piqued.

"Tomorrow. Is that okay?" Amy asked, her voice tinged with hope.

"Perfect! You've cleared it for me to get in early, right?" Sophie replied, her mind already calculating the logistics.

Amy nodded enthusiastically. "Renee said you can get in at two."

Sophie nodded, her mind racing ahead. "That should work. I'll aim to be there by two-fifteen at the latest. Is that enough time for you?"

"Yes, absolutely. It's only a few minutes away. Thank you so much for doing this. I don't know how to repay you," Amy said, her gratitude evident.

Sophie smiled brightly. "Just take care of that precious girl of yours."

Conclusion