

Chapter 83 Into Mr. Howard's Pond Of Admirers

Chris had never shown this side to Sandra before. His eyes, usually so calm and detached, now flashed a clear warning leaving Sandra visibly distressed.

"Understood, Mr. Howard," Sandra responded, knowing all too well that any further comment might provoke unbearable repercussions.

She nodded briefly and then quietly left the CEO's office.

As Sandra quickly exited, visibly upset, Kimberly paused thoughtfully before turning her attention back to Chris. She noticed that he was now looking at her, his expression much softer than the stern, uncompromising look he had worn just moments before.

"Do you have something on your mind?" Chris asked, his voice calm, suggesting he sensed she wanted to speak.

Kimberly, fighting back an odd sensation, managed a smile and casually flipped Chris's black pen between her fingers.

"That assistant of yours, Sandra, she looks up to you with such admiration and affection. It's clear she's taken with you," Kimberly said.

Upon hearing this, Chris's eyebrow lifted slightly, his eyes momentarily resting on Kimberly's delicate fingers as they played with the pen. The contrast between her pale skin and the dark pen drew his gaze, making him briefly clear his throat.

His eyes then slowly returned to Kimberly's face, which was bright and inviting her playful half-smile unchanged.

"And then? What are you getting at?" he asked.

"Nothing much," Kimberly replied, her gaze intense as she looked at him a moment longer before redirecting her attention to her laptop screen.

She added with a nonchalant air, "It just seems you're rather sought after romantically."

Kimberly felt a twinge of frustration, struggling to put her feelings into words.

She had assumed Chris was unaware of Sandra's feelings, believing that was why he kept her as his assistant.

Yet, when she met Chris's insightful gaze, she realized he had known all along.

Still, he chose to keep an assistant who adored him, seeing her daily.

His motives were now clear. He was merely stringing Sandra along.

This insight brought a self-deprecating smirk to Kimberly's face. She lamented that even in a different life, her judgment of men remained as flawed as ever.

She had once thought Chris was unlike Felix, but now it seemed that all men were cut from the same cloth.

Chris was just better at hiding who he really was.

What was the phrase again?

She had believed she was special to him, only to realize she was just another face in his crowd of admirers.

Ugh, what a jerk!

Kimberly remembered Chris's confession during their time on the yacht and quietly ridiculed him in her mind, convinced he was just a player.

Chris, oblivious to her inner thoughts, sensed the tension between them. He guessed that Kimberly might be unsettled by Sandra's affection for him, which made him feel somewhat powerless.

"I'm not interested in her," he said earnestly.

The reason he kept Sandra close was because she was Bryce's sister. He had saved them from a human trafficking ring abroad, and they had remained devoted to him.

Sandra had become an invaluable assistant, trained by her brother. With Bryce now employed by Declan, Sandra had stepped into the now-empty assistant role.

Kimberly merely replied with a noncommittal "I see," keeping up her neutral facade.

"Actually, Mr. Howard, you don't need to justify anything to me. Whether you're interested in her or not isn't my concern."

Upon hearing this, Chris's brow furrowed, and he felt a surge of irritation. He abruptly swiveled her chair to face him, looking intently into her detached eyes. "If it doesn't matter, then why are you bothered by her feelings for me?"

Kimberly remained silent for a moment.

She certainly wouldn't confess. She widened her eyes a bit, pretending to be clueless. "I'm not!"

"You are!" Chris's handsome features grew stern, his voice assertive. "If it didn't bother you, you wouldn't be upset about my secretary having feelings for me."

Kimberly let out a derisive laugh.

She reclined against the back of her chair and asked, "Which eye of yours saw me upset?"

Chris stayed silent, his eyes locked on hers, as if attempting to pierce through her pretense.

The two exchanged glares, their exchange reminiscent of a petty squabble. If Felix were present, he would likely tease them, saying, "Aren't you too mature to be acting so childishly?"

Chris's eyes narrowed as he scrutinized her expression, finding no visible signs of her distress. He relaxed his grip and let his hands fall to his sides, masking his frustration. After a brief pause, he said in a composed voice, "If you're uncomfortable with Sandra around me, I can look for another secretary."

Considering a change now?

Why hadn't he thought of it sooner?

A flicker of sarcasm crossed Kimberly's eyes. She suspected Chris was merely making empty promises, much like Declan had. Initially, Declan vowed to keep away from Valerie, but once he married her, he dropped the act and showed his true colors.

"When did you discover her feelings for you?" Kimberly inquired, curious.

Chris looked at her, thrown off by her question. After a moment of reflection, he answered with a furrowed brow, "Three years ago."

He had recognized the signs early on when he positioned Bryce within the Walsh Group and Sandra assumed the assistant role.

Chris was unaware of when Sandra had developed feelings for him and hadn't given it much thought.

It wasn't significant to him. Sandra's emotions were irrelevant in his eyes.

Had Sandra not confronted Kimberly in his presence today, Chris would have continued to disregard her feelings.

"Three years is not particularly long or short. But knowing her feelings for you, you kept her close, leading her on, toying with her emotions, and now you claim to have no interest in her."

Kimberly's look turned cold as she fixed her eyes on Chris. His statements echoed her previous life's experiences, where she had been manipulated and ultimately discarded by Declan after their three-year relationship.

She laughed bitterly, feeling a pang of pity for Sandra. "Mr. Howard, isn't that quite unfair of you?"

Chris's eyebrows knitted together, his fists tightening at his sides.

He felt the need to clarify that he had vowed to Bryce that he would look after Sandra.

In his perspective, Sandra was an efficient assistant and a reliable colleague. Considering his bond with Bryce, maintaining proximity to Sandra to ensure her well-being seemed like the best approach.

Yet Kimberly was accusing him of manipulating Sandra's emotions? Of being unfair?!

"What would you have me do, Ms. Holden?"

Kimberly's expression darkened, realizing that Chris's failure to refute her claims essentially confirmed them. She couldn't hide her disillusionment.

"That's for you to figure out, not me."

"Who says it isn't?" Chris drew her chair closer, leaning forward to lock gazes with her. "Your opinions and feelings mean a great deal to me."