

Chapter 117

As Julie's concerned gaze shifted towards Karla's noticeably bulging abdomen, she instinctively attempted to pull up Karla's clothing slightly to examine the area. However, Duncan, acting on instinct, swiftly caught Julie's hand before she could proceed. In a subtle gesture, he flicked an imaginary speck of dirt from her hair, attempting to divert her attention away from Karla's condition.

Duncan, realizing the need to provide an explanation, spoke up, his voice calm yet slightly strained. "Karla and I spent the night somewhere last night," he said, his words carefully chosen. "She didn't sleep all night, which is why she's looking pale." Duncan hoped that this partial truth would suffice as an explanation for Karla's appearance.

Confusion and disbelief filled Julie's expression as she processed Duncan's statement. "What? Why didn't she sleep?" she asked, her voice tinged with astonishment. Her mind was unable to grasp the reason behind Karla's sleepless night.

Caught off guard by Julie's direct question, Duncan found himself momentarily speechless, searching for a response that would both satisfy Julie's curiosity and protect Karla from revealing the truth. His mind raced as he contemplated the best course of action.

Julie pressed on. "Talk to me, Karla."

Under pressure, Duncan blurted out a response without thinking it through. "We...we did it all night." His words surprised both Julie and himself.

Exchanging a quick glance with Rose, Julie directed her question to Duncan, seeking clarification. Her voice carried a tone of curiosity and

mild confusion.

"Duncan, what do you mean?" she asked, her eyebrows raised in anticipation.

Duncan, visibly flustered, struggled to find the right words and went temporarily speechless. He appeared to be caught off guard by the question.

Amidst the momentary silence, Karla, sensing Duncan's hesitation, stepped in to provide some explanation. She hadn't expected him to say that. She waved her hand dismissively and nudged Duncan, urging him to speak up.

"N-no," Karla interjected, attempting to dispel any misconceptions. "He didn't mean what you're thinking, Julie."

Julie, intrigued by Karla's reaction, playfully wiggled her eyebrows in a comical manner. She seized the opportunity to tease Duncan further, suppressing her laughter as Rose looked away, grinning knowingly.

"What do you mean by what I was thinking?" Julie asked teasingly, her voice laced with amusement.

Feeling the pressure of the situation, Duncan finally mustered the courage to respond.

"I mean...we were busy sorting things all night," he stammered, his voice betraying a hint of nervousness.

Clearing her throat, Julie persisted, determined to uncover the truth. Her curiosity piqued, and she continued to probe.

"Are you indirectly trying to say that something perhaps happened

between you guys yesterday, something that you dealt with throughout the night?" Julie inquired, her voice laced with a mix of playfulness and intrigue.

Karla, unable to think of what to say more, shook her head but acknowledged, "Kind of..."

Julie, seizing the opportunity to tease Karla further, leaned in closer and whispered, her hand partially covering her mouth in a mischievous manner.

"Oh, Karla, does your leg hurt due to what transpired between you guys all night?" she asked, her tone suggestive and filled with innuendo.

Recognizing the direction in which Julie was steering the conversation, Rose decided it was appropriate to intervene. Sensing the potential discomfort and embarrassment this line of questioning could cause Karla and Duncan, Rose stepped in to redirect the conversation or diffuse the tension.

Rose decided to address Julie's teasing and redirect the conversation to a more comfortable topic. She didn't want to see Karla become further annoyed or embarrassed.

"Miss Julie, I'm sure you've got it all wrong," Rose interjected firmly, her tone carrying a hint of reprimand.

Karla, clearly uncomfortable with the direction the conversation had taken, expressed her embarrassment. She urged Julie to stop her playful thinking, hoping to put an end to the uncomfortable situation.

Realizing the need to diffuse the tension, Julie quickly changed her approach. She raised her hand in a gesture of acceptance, acknowledging Karla's discomfort.

"Okay, welcome," Julie responded, signaling that she would respect Karla's boundaries. With a nod, she encouraged Duncan to continue speaking.

Duncan, still holding onto Karla's arm, led her to a nearby couch, providing a moment of respite from the awkwardness. Observing the slight change in Karla's gait as she walked, Rose couldn't help but sense that something was amiss.

Feeling the need to break away from the situation momentarily, Julie excused herself.

"Um, give me a minute, guys. I'll get my phone from my room," Julie said hurriedly, her desire to escape the tension evident. With that, she left the room in a rush, hoping to create a brief pause in the conversation.

"Geez, she can't stay without her phone by her side for a minute," Karla muttered under her breath, expressing her slight annoyance.

Rose, who overheard the comment, couldn't help but smile at Karla's quip. She understood Julie's attachment to her phone and the need to constantly have it within reach.

"I'll get you some water, Miss," Rose offered, wanting to provide a small gesture of comfort amidst the unfolding situation.

"Thanks, Rose," Karla replied, appreciative of the kind gesture.

Meanwhile, Duncan observed Rose as she made her way to the kitchen. Intrigued, he decided to follow her, hoping for a moment to privately address his concerns.

Upon entering the kitchen, Duncan called out to Rose in a soft voice,

seeking her attention.

"Yes, Duncan?" Rose responded, her eyes fixed on him as he averted his gaze. Sensing his reluctance, she gently prodded, "You want to tell me something?"

Duncan hesitated for a moment before gathering his thoughts and speaking up.

"Actually, you noticed something...?" he began, his voice filled with uncertainty.

"Yeah," Rose confirmed, her voice lowered to a whisper. "About Karla. My young Miss doesn't look well."

Duncan nodded, acknowledging Rose's observation.

Rose, deeply concerned for Karla's well-being, added to the conversation, her voice filled with worry. "I noticed her walking strangely too," Rose confirmed, her tone laced with concern. "Please, tell me if she's okay. I know whatever you told Julie about your whereabouts and what happened to Karla was a lie."

Duncan, realizing he couldn't keep up the pretense any longer, nodded solemnly, acknowledging Rose's statement.

"The truth is..." Duncan began, his voice filled with a mix of sadness and apprehension. "Karla got shot."

Rose's hand instinctively flew to her mouth, a gasp escaping her parted lips. As she tilted her head and gazed at Karla through the large kitchen window, her eyes widened in shock.

"How did she get shot?" Rose asked, her voice filled with a mix of

disbelief and concern.

Duncan took a deep breath before responding, his voice steady but tinged with sadness.

"Actually, the bullet grazed her abdomen, but it was stitched up," he explained, his words carrying the weight of the ordeal Karla had endured.

"Oh, God," Rose murmured, her expression reflecting a mix of pity and sympathy. The gravity of the situation began to sink in as she realized the pain and danger Karla had faced. "She doesn't look like someone who almost lost her life," Rose sighed, her voice filled with a mix of admiration and concern. Despite the recent ordeal, Karla's demeanor seemed surprisingly composed.

Duncan nodded in agreement, his understanding of Karla's character evident in his response.

"Yeah, I'm sure you know her better. She has a tendency to hide her pain," Duncan remarked, acknowledging Karla's stoicism in the face of adversity.

Rose, in agreement with Duncan's observation, nodded in understanding. She knew that Karla had a strong will and often tried to shoulder her burdens alone.

"Can you do me a favor, Ma'am Rose?" Duncan requested, his tone earnest.

"Surely, I will," Rose replied without hesitation, ready to offer her assistance.

Glancing over his shoulder at Karla, who remained engrossed in the television screen in the living room, Duncan began to explain the favor

he sought.

"Karla shouldn't find out too soon that I revealed this to you," he cautioned, emphasizing the need for discretion. "She will require help with dressing her wound up to five times a week."

There was a brief pause as the weight of the situation settled upon them.

Duncan continued to share his concerns, his voice filled with a mixture of worry and understanding.

"I'm sure she's not going to go to the hospital for the dressings, even after telling me she would," Duncan explained, his tone tinged with a hint of frustration. "Given the circumstances surrounding her injury, she would prefer to dress the wound herself. I can't go into further details, but I just request that you help her during this time."

Rose listened attentively, understanding the complexity of the situation. She reassured Duncan, her voice filled with determination and compassion.

"Of course, I will," Rose responded, her tone reassuring. "Don't worry, Duncan. I'll take care of her and provide the necessary assistance."

A smile formed on Duncan's lips as he appreciated Rose's willingness to help. He gave her an appreciative nod, grateful for her understanding and support. As their conversation drew to a close, Duncan accepted the tray from Rose, which held a glass of water.

Duncan walked purposefully towards the kitchen door, his steps deliberate and determined. As he reached the entrance, he stopped. He turned around, facing the person behind him, and spoke with a sense of urgency in his voice.

"Please," Duncan implored, his tone filled with concern. "Her cousin, Julie, shouldn't know about her wound, okay?"

Rose nodded understandingly. "I understand," She replied, her voice calm and reassuring. "She won't find out. I'll keep it a secret."

Duncan took those words as a promise, a reassurance that his request would be honored. With a quick nod of gratitude, he turned away from the kitchen door and proceeded to the living room.

Approaching Karla, Duncan extended his hand, holding the glass of water carefully. "Have this," he said softly, his concern evident in his eyes and voice.

Karla accepted the glass, her fingers wrapping around it as she took a small sip of the water before dropping the glass on the table. "What's Rose doing?"

Duncan sighed softly, his focus now on addressing her question. "She's in the kitchen, preparing something for you to eat," he replied, his voice carrying a mix of reassurance and hope.

"You asked her to cook for me, I know it. I'm not hungry," Karla protested, her voice tinged with a hint of frustration.

Duncan's expression softened as he gently responded, "I know you might not feel hungry right now, but you need to eat so you don't feel weak all the time."

Karla sighed, her tone filled with a mix of independence and resignation. "Duncan, I can take care of myself," she insisted, her voice laced with determination.

A playful smile played on Duncan's lips as he reached out and lightly pulled down Karla's outstretched finger, causing her to gasp in surprise. He winked at her, his eyes filled with affectionate mischief. "You? You're shameless." Karla's frown deepened as she averted her gaze, seemingly flustered by Duncan's playful gesture.

"Why?" He retorted softly, his voice tinged with a mix of annoyance and affection. "Because I winked at you?" Duncan's smile persisted as he watched Karla's reaction, savoring the playful banter between them. He leaned back on the couch, his body sinking into the cushions as he patiently waited for Karla to process his earlier words. The room was filled with a tense silence as she finally found the courage to speak up.

"Duncan, why did you say that?" Karla asked, her voice tinged with a mix of confusion and concern.

Duncan furrowed his brow, a slight look of puzzlement crossing his face. "What?" he responded, his tone indicating that he wasn't immediately sure what Karla was referring to.

Karla glanced around the room, her eyes darting cautiously, making sure that her cousin Julie wasn't within earshot. Satisfied that they were alone for the moment, she looked back at Duncan, her voice hushed and guarded. "Duncan, why did you say we did it all night?" she questioned, her words careful and deliberate.

A flicker of realization passed over Duncan's face as he understood what Karla was referring to. He sighed softly, his eyes filled with regret. "Karla, I never thought about that until it slipped out," he admitted, his voice laced with a touch of remorse. "You know I didn't mean what I said. It was just a thoughtless remark in the heat of the moment."

Karla's expression softened, but a trace of hurt lingered in her eyes. "Was something that severe the only lie you could come up with?" she inquired, her voice laced with a mix of curiosity and disappointment.

Duncan nodded, a sense of vulnerability evident in his demeanor. "Yeah," he confessed, his voice tinged with a hint of regret. "At that moment, I was caught off guard, and I knew your cousin is a tough investigator. I panicked, and it was the first thing that came to mind."

Karla considered his words, her gaze locked on Duncan's face as she tried to gauge his sincerity. After a moment of contemplation, she nodded slowly, accepting his explanation. "Really?" she asked, seeking confirmation.

Duncan met her gaze, his eyes filled with genuine honesty. "Yeah," he replied, a hint of reassurance in his voice.

"If you had called her and told her I wouldn't be coming last night, then I wouldn't have said that."

Karla shrugged, a hint of resignation in her voice. "Don't blame me. Julie would have interrogated me just as much if I had called her," she explained. "Anyway, thanks for coming up with something to save me a bit at that moment."

Duncan's gaze met Karla's, gratitude evident in his eyes. "No, thank you," he said sincerely. "Thank you for understanding and for not revealing the truth."

Karla smiled faintly, a sense of loyalty and determination in her expression. "It's okay," she assured him. "Your identity needs to be kept a secret so you can navigate the complexities of the Lennart family effectively. I won't sabotage your plan. Your secret is safe with me. Okay?"

"

Duncan's tension eased as he realized he had someone he could trust in this delicate situation. His eyes met hers, and he smiled warmly. "Thank you," he replied, his voice filled with genuine appreciation.

"And you're welcome." Karla's smile widened, her eyes reflecting the deep bond between them. "Thanks for staying with me all night," she added, her voice filled with warmth and sincerity.

Duncan nodded, his gratitude evident in his gaze. "It was the least I could do," he replied, his voice tinged with a touch of sadness. "But now, I need to go. Take care of yourself, Karla."

As he began to rise from the couch, ready to leave, something held him back. He paused, his gaze fixed on Karla, a mix of emotions swirling within him.

Karla noticed his hesitation and met his gaze curiously. "Is there anything else you want to say?" she asked gently, her voice filled with understanding.

Duncan remained silent, his eyes locked with hers, his mind flooded with memories of the previous day, the moment when Karla had been shot. The weight of the situation lingered in the air.

"Duncan, if you want to scold me more, I..." Karla started, her voice trailing off, sensing the unspoken thoughts in his eyes.

But before she could finish, Duncan rushed towards her, closing the distance between them in an instant. He leaned down and enveloped her in a tight, protective embrace, his arms encircling her with a mixture of relief, affection, and concern.