

Chapter 55

Peterson remained standing at the spot where Duncan had left him, his mind consumed by the cryptic words and unsettling demeanor of Duncan. Lost in thought, he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps. He turned to see Marcus, who had witnessed his conversation with Duncan a while ago, now standing before him.

"So, you're still here, Peterson?" Marcus sneered, his tone laced with a mix of mockery and aggression. "Leave now, or I will manhandle you in my own way, and I assure you, it would be far worse than the slap my sister gave you."

Peterson's frown deepened as he pointed an accusatory finger at Marcus. "Mind your words, Marcus. You don't know me. I will be back to get my money from her."

Marcus simply shrugged, a nonchalant expression on his face. "Whatever," he replied dismissively, his indifference evident. With that, Peterson turned and walked towards his car, determined to pursue his own agenda despite the warning and confrontation. Marcus watched him go, a mix of disdain and curiosity flickering in his eyes, wondering what Peterson's next move would be, but as his mind shifted to Duncan, he frowned.

Meanwhile, Duncan's heart raced as he sped down the road towards Karla's house. He had given it a lot of thought earlier and finally decided that he needed to confront her in person. She had been avoiding his calls, and not returning his messages, and it was driving him crazy. He needed closure, he needed to know why she was giving him attitude. Though it wasn't up to 12 hours since last night, he felt like he hadn't seen her for a year.

As he approached Karla's house, Duncan's mind was filled with a mix of anxiety and determination. He knew he was driving above the speed limit, but his urgency overshadowed any concern for the rules of the road. He just had to get there as quickly as possible.

Finally, he arrived at Karla's house and parked his car hastily. He took a deep breath, trying to calm his racing heart, and made his way to the front door. With a sense of anticipation and a touch of nervousness, he knocked on the door, hoping that Karla would be there.

To his surprise, it was Rose who opened the door. Duncan greeted her politely, "Good morning, ma."

Rose's eyes widened in shock, and she glanced behind Duncan as if expecting someone else to be with him. Confusion filled her face as she responded, "Oh, Frazier, good morning."

Duncan's heart sank. He had hoped to see Karla and have a chance to talk things through with her. The fact that Rose seemed surprised to see him made him wonder if something had happened between them that he was unaware of.

"I want to talk to Karla," Duncan said, his voice filled with determination yet tinged with apprehension.

Rose's expression turned somber, and she shook her head slowly. "But she's not home. I thought you brought her home and that's why I was looking behind you to see her."

"Wait, she didn't return home last night?"

"No. She met you, right?"

"Um, yeah but," Duncan paused as he scratched the back of his head. "We departed in a strange way."

Duncan's confusion deepened as Rose revealed that Karla had not returned home the previous night. His mind raced with worry and questions about Karla's whereabouts. He couldn't help but feel a mix of guilt and concern, realizing that their last encounter might have played a role in her sudden departure.

"Oh. Actually, I got her message that she was going to her family's house. So I thought she returned with you."

"No. And she didn't pick up my calls."

"Hm, maybe she is upset and..."

Interrupting her unintentionally, Duncan asked Rose, "Um, where's her family house?"

Rose sighed softly, her eyes filled with concern. "Karla's family house is in the countryside, about two hours drive from here. The Burton's mansion is in Asheville, to be precise."

Duncan's mind raced as he processed the information. He realized that he needed to find a way to reach Karla and resolve their unresolved issues. "Do you have the address or directions to her family house?" he asked, hoping that Rose could provide some guidance.

She nodded and excused herself. She went in and returned with a note containing the house address then handed it to him.

Duncan's mind was filled with a mix of emotions as he absorbed Rose's words and staring at the address in the note, sparked a glimmer of hope

within him, knowing where she might be. However, as Rose mentioned settling the issue between them, Duncan's nervous laughter betrayed his hesitation.

He quickly clarified, "Oh no. I don't think I'll go over there to settle things. It might be best for both of us to have some time apart and reflect on whatever happened." His voice wavered with uncertainty, and he was unsure of how to navigate the complex emotions surrounding their situation. "Don't let her know that I came over when she returns," he added.

Rose nodded understandingly, respecting his decision. "I won't mention your visit to Karla when she returns. It's up to you to decide when and how to address this."

Thanking Rose once again for her understanding, Duncan left Karla's house, his mind in disarray. As he got into his car and started driving, a mix of frustration and a desire to escape from the situation overwhelmed him. At a moment of impulsiveness, he decided to head towards the Walton business estate.

"I am not going there, she can stay angry with me forever. I don't care anyways," he grumbled to himself as he stepped on the accelerator, driving faster and faster as if trying to leave behind the unresolved issues and his own emotional turmoil. Thoughts of Karla lingered in his mind, but at that moment, he convinced himself that staying away was the best course of action.

BURTON MANSION

The dining room of the Burton mansion exuded elegance and grandeur. The long table, adorned with a pristine white tablecloth and exquisite floral arrangements, stretched out before them. The soft morning light

filtered in through the large windows, casting a warm glow on the room's opulent furnishings.

Seated at the head of the table was Samuel Burton, Karla's father, a distinguished figure with a warm smile on his face. He watched with affection as Ciara gracefully poured tea into his cup, her movements delicate and refined. She took her seat next to him, her eyes reflecting a hint of worry.

Ciara's concern was evident as she leaned towards Mark and whispered, "Are you sure Karla will join us for breakfast? I can't help but feel a bit anxious."

Samuel, ever the reassuring presence, placed a gentle hand on Ciara's on the table and offered her a comforting smile. "My dear, my daughter visited just before the weekend. I'm confident she'll want to dine with us and share this morning together."

Ciara's smile returned, and she nodded, finding solace in Samuel's words. The anticipation in the air heightened as they awaited Karla's presence.

Just then, the dining room door creaked open, and Karla walked in. Her hair was tied up in a loose bun, strands framing her face in a casual elegance. She wore the same clothes from yesterday but still looked as good as ever.

As she entered the room, the atmosphere seemed to brighten, and Ciara and her father's eyes lit up with joy. Samuel's smile widened when he spotted Karla entering the dining room. He greeted her warmly, "Good morning, dear."

Karla's initial instinct was to reciprocate his smile, but a wave of mixed

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emotions washed over her as she noticed Samuel's hand resting on Ciara's. The long-standing resentment she held toward him resurfaced, tainting her desire to respond with warmth. Instead, she maintained a composed demeanor and simply replied, "Good morning, Mr. Burton." She then took a seat to his right, her expression guarded.

Noticing the lack of warmth in Karla's response, Ciara attempted to bridge the gap and create a welcoming atmosphere. She spoke up, saying, "Good morning, Karla," with a tone filled with genuine affection.

However, Karla remained silent, her thoughts and emotions swirling within her. "Karla, dear, Ciara just greeted you but..."

Before Samuel could inquire further about Karla's distant behavior, Ciara shook her head subtly, signaling him to refrain from questioning her.

Respecting Ciara's gesture, Samuel held back his curiosity and decided to let the matter rest for the time being. He knew that pushing Karla might only exacerbate the tension between them. Instead, he focused on maintaining a pleasant ambiance during the breakfast, hoping that the shared meal would provide an opportunity for healing and reconciliation.

Karla's eyes narrowed as she observed Ciara's influence over her father. The control Ciara seemed to exert over Samuel only fueled Karla's long-held resentment towards her. The sight stirred up a deep-seated hatred within Karla, intensifying her negative feelings.

Samuel, oblivious to the underlying tension, spoke with genuine warmth, "I'm happy you came before the weekend, dear."

Ciara, attempting to bridge the gap and express her understanding, chimed in, "I guess you considered your father's longing to see you."

Karla couldn't help but roll her eyes at Ciara's comment, feeling a surge

of anger rising within her. The implication that she had made a deliberate effort to fulfill her father's longing only served to amplify her resentment. In a moment of defiance, she retorted, "For your information, Ciara, you're wrong. I came here last night by mistake."

Karla's words were laced with bitterness, and she directed them at Ciara intentionally, seeking to inflict pain. However, as she glanced at her father's face, she noticed a flicker of hurt and disappointment. It was a moment of regret for Karla, realizing that she had unintentionally wounded her father with her harsh words. She hadn't meant to hurt him, but her desire to strike back at Ciara had clouded her judgment.

The room fell into an uncomfortable silence, the weight of unresolved emotions hanging in the air. Karla's outburst had only added fuel to the fire, deepening the divide between them. It was a stark reminder of the complex dynamics within the family and the need for open and honest communication to heal the wounds that had festered for far too long.

A moment later, Karla, engrossed in munching on her toast, was interrupted by Ciara's chuckle. Startled, she flicked a stare at her, her expression a mix of annoyance and curiosity. Ciara's laughter continued, joined by Samuel, as they found Karla's eating habits amusing.

"You still look adorable when you eat despite being angry," Ciara commented between giggles, nudging Samuel playfully. Both of them found Karla's irritated expression endearing.

"You're right. My daughter is forever adorable. I told you she'll enjoy the toast you made," Samuel added.

Karla, slightly taken aback by the unexpected comment, paused mid-bite. "What?" Karla hissed and spat out the particles of the toast and took a sip from her glass of water to wash away the taste, pretending to find it

unpleasant. "The toast ruined my taste. Ew," she hissed, her voice laced with mild disgust.

Her sudden reaction caught Ciara and Samuel off guard. Samuel, unable to stop himself, reacted.

"What's wrong with you, Karla? Why are you behaving like this?" Samuel groaned, his frustration evident in his voice. "You disregarded me and Ciara, who's your mother..."

"She's not my mother!" Karla snapped, her voice filled with bitterness. "She's only your wife and nothing to me."

Samuel's eyes widened in surprise and hurt, his voice tinged with disappointment. "What's wrong with you? Why are you so unappreciative?"

Karla's anger intensified, her tone sharp. "Really? I understand. You both always want to ruin my mood every time I come here!" With that, she abruptly rose from her seat, pushing it to the floor, and stormed off towards the stairs, her emotions consuming her.

"Samuel, you could have controlled your emotions," Ciara chided, her expression filled with concern and a touch of disapproval, as she watched Karla retreat. She frowned, feeling the strain in the relationship between Samuel and his daughter.

Samuel sighed heavily, his shoulders slumping. "I know, Ciara. I just... I don't understand why she's still so angry. It hurts to see her like this."

Ciara's frown softened, and she reached out to grasp Samuel's hand in a comforting gesture. "We need to find a way to communicate with her, to understand what's really going on inside her. It's not easy, but we can't give up on her."

Samuel nodded, a mixture of determination and sadness in his eyes. "You're right." He agreed.

A minute later, Karla came downstairs with her handbag in hand. As she descended, her footsteps echoed through the tiled floor. Upon catching a glimpse of Karla, Ciara's eyes widened, and she swiftly left the dining room, beckoning Samuel to follow her. Determined to stop Karla from leaving, Ciara called out to her with desperation in her voice.

"Don't go, Karla, please," Ciara requested, her voice filled with pleading. Samuel, standing beside Ciara, added his remorseful plea, hoping to persuade Karla to stay.

"I'm sorry, dear," Samuel said, his tone conveying genuine regret. However, Karla, feeling the weight of the apologies that had been offered countless times before, was not easily swayed.

"No!" Karla exclaimed, her frustration evident. "You keep apologizing all the time, but you never meant it." Her voice wavered with a mix of anger and disappointment. Determined to leave, she continued toward the door, her resolve unshaken. "I'm out of here."

As Karla reached the door, her hand trembling with a mix of emotions, she swung it open angrily, fueling her desire to escape the tense atmosphere. However, her anger quickly dissipated as her gaze fell upon Duncan, standing by her car. The sight of him left her speechless, her lips parting in astonishment.

A wave of surprise washed over Karla, momentarily halting her planned departure. She couldn't stop herself from mumbling. "He's...here?"