

The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 1: The Only Spot

Maya Thompson had been running on caffeine and hope for years. It was 5:30 in the morning, and the café where she worked was still dark when she unlocked the front door. The quiet hum of the machines, the aroma of roasted beans, and the familiar click of her name tag against her apron—these were the things that kept her grounded. By the time the sun broke through the city skyline, she'd already served a dozen tired professionals on their way to offices she could only dream of entering. But today was different. Today, for the first time in what felt like forever, she had something to look forward to. Her professor had pulled her aside after class the night before. Maya had expected a warning—maybe about her grades slipping, or her frequent absences. But instead, he'd smiled, handing her a printed letter with the university's official seal. We are pleased to inform you... You've been selected for this year's exclusive internship opportunity with Blackwood Enterprises... She couldn't breathe at first. She'd blinked at the words, certain it was a mistake. Blackwood Enterprises. The most powerful company in the city. Some said in the country. A global empire built on dominance, discipline, and a reputation for absolute excellence. Every year, Blackwood Enterprises selected one top-performing university to receive a single internship spot. Just one. And this year, they'd chosen her school. Out of hundreds of applicants—many with more impressive résumés, fancier last names, or family connections—Maya Thompson got it. Her professor had smiled when she'd stared in disbelief. "Sometimes, hard work beats pedigree," he'd said. "You earned this." She had gone home shaking, tears welling up before the apartment door had even closed behind her. Jamie, her younger brother, had been waiting for her on the couch, pale but smiling, his hospital ID wristband still on from the day's check-up. When she told him the news, he grinned the widest he had in months. "See?" he said. "You're magic, May." No. She wasn't magic. She was desperate. And this... this was a miracle. — Maya checked herself in the mirror twice before leaving the next morning. Her blouse was secondhand but pressed. Her black slacks were one of two pairs she rotated for formal classes. She wore her only decent shoes and tucked her hair into a neat bun. She had no car, so she took the subway, her chest tight the entire ride. Everyone she passed seemed wealthier, more polished, more like they belonged at a place like Blackwood. But she had earned this. She whispered the words to herself as the elevator rose toward the sky, taking her to a world she'd never touched. The moment the doors opened into the Blackwood Enterprises lobby, Maya felt like she had walked into another universe. The reception area on the first floor was sleek and soulless, a cavern of glass, chrome, and silent judgment. People in tailored suits glided across the polished floors like ghosts with million-dollar agendas. Maya approached the main desk slowly. The receptionist didn't look up right away. "Yes?" the woman asked coolly, finally acknowledging her. "I—um—I'm Maya Thompson. I'm here to report for the internship program," she said, her voice quieter than she'd meant. The receptionist's gaze swept over her outfit like it had personally offended her. "One moment." She picked up the phone, murmured something quickly, then set it back in place. "You'll be reporting directly to the executive floor. Someone will meet you outside the CEO's office." Maya blinked. "The... CEO's office?" The

woman's sharp smile didn't reach her eyes. "Mr. Blackwood's executive team prefers to meet with interns personally. You're expected." Maya nodded stiffly and turned toward the next bank of elevators, the private ones this time. Each step felt heavier than the last. The elevator dinged open into a space that looked nothing like the rest of the building. The upper floors were silent and cold, the walls a mixture of smoked glass and matte black finishes. Everything here whispered wealth and power. The carpet was so thick her shoes didn't make a sound. Her breath caught as she took in the sprawling hallway lined with frosted doors and minimal gold-lettered signage. At the very end, she saw a pair of large glass doors etched with: D. Blackwood – CEO Her pulse kicked into overdrive. She wasn't meeting him. Not yet. Just the secretary. Still, the knowledge of who sat behind that door—Damien Blackwood himself—was enough to make her knees weaken. Everyone had heard of him. 35. Billionaire. Untouchable. Damien was the man who didn't need to raise his voice to make someone crumble. He'd turned a once-small logistics firm into a multinational beast through sheer vision and ruthless execution. He was rarely seen, never interviewed, and only photographed when absolutely necessary. The tabloids didn't know what to make of him, and even his competitors feared him. The man was a ghost wrapped in steel. And she was about to be on his floor. A woman with a sharp bob haircut and stilettos that could kill stepped out from behind the reception desk. "Maya Thompson?" she asked, clipboard in hand. "Yes, ma'am," Maya replied quickly. "Follow me." The assistant didn't wait, and Maya scrambled to keep up. They passed through a small corridor before entering a pristine private lounge just outside the CEO's office. Low, leather couches. A coffee bar that looked untouched. A view of the entire city skyline. Maya stood awkwardly near the wall. "You'll be oriented today by one of Mr. Blackwood's executive aides," the woman said, handing her a thick confidentiality packet. "For now, read this. He doesn't tolerate leaks, and you'll be expected to abide by internal silence policies immediately. Sign all of it." The woman turned and left. Maya sat slowly, fingers trembling as she reached for the pen in her bag. Her gaze drifted to the office door. Behind that door was Damien Blackwood. The man who owned all this. The man she would soon work for. She swallowed hard. The internship was supposed to be the start of something good. A blessing. A lifeline. But sitting there, her signature halfway scrawled on the dotted line, Maya felt something twist in her chest. Hope... or warning. She didn't know which.

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Chapter 2: The Ghost in the Glass Tower

987 Words

Maya showed up fifteen minutes early the next day, because late wasn't even an option in a place like this. She hadn't slept. Her mind kept replaying the elevator ride, the heavy silence outside Damien Blackwood's office, and the assistant's icy warning: "Sign everything. He doesn't tolerate leaks." It felt less like an internship and more like stepping into a lion's den—with a blindfold on. Now, walking into the private lounge again, Maya smoothed her blouse and tried to breathe. There was no coffee shop hum here, no casual chatter. Just tension. Glass. Steel. Control. "Thompson?" a sharp voice called. Maya looked up. A woman—blonde, tall, sleek as marble—stepped out from a nearby door, holding a digital tablet. Her heels clicked like gunfire on the floor. "I'm Elle. Mr. Blackwood's senior executive assistant," she said. "You'll be working under me." "Yes, ma'am," Maya said immediately. Elle arched a brow. "No need for 'ma'am.' Just do your job right." Maya nodded, feeling like she was already failing. They moved down a long corridor lined with black-tinted glass. On the far right, she caught a glimpse of a closed door guarded by two silent men in suits. No signs. No labels. But she knew what—who—was behind that door. The air shifted there. Like the building itself knew who was sitting just beyond the glass. They didn't stop. Instead, Elle led her into a smaller office on the next wing—sleek desk, minimalist décor, a corner with a round table stacked with marketing folders. "You'll start here," Elle said briskly. "You'll help file, sort, review, and—if you prove you're more than decorative—assist in prepping internal reports." Maya's face warmed. Decorative? "I'll do whatever's needed," she replied carefully. Elle studied her with a flicker of something unreadable. Not quite hostility. Not quite approval either. "We'll see," she said. "Blackwood Enterprises doesn't hand out gold stars for effort." The morning flew by in a blur of names, passwords, documents, and near-constant corrections. Maya's hands were trembling by the time she finally got into the rhythm of the database system. Elle never raised her voice, but her critiques were sharp. "Don't highlight in red, that's only for flagged deals." "Always file CEO-level memos in the locked drive first." "No coffee runs. This isn't a sitcom." Maya bit her tongue and nodded, absorbing every detail like a sponge. But what rattled her the most was how present Damien Blackwood felt, even without showing his face. Everyone referred to him with a hush, like he could appear at any moment. "Mr. Blackwood doesn't like delays." "Make sure the reports are uploaded by three—Mr. Blackwood checks them personally." "Don't block that hallway. That's Mr. Blackwood's route." His name wasn't spoken with admiration. It was reverence. Caution. Power made flesh. She saw glimpses of him, or thought she did—reflections in the glass, flashes of black suits and broad shoulders down distant hallways. Always surrounded. Always guarded. Never still. But she never saw his face. Not yet. At lunch, Maya sat alone on the rooftop terrace employees rarely used. She could see the city stretched endlessly below her—millions of lives moving forward, just like hers was trying to. She unwrapped a sad-looking sandwich from her bag and took a small bite. Her phone buzzed. A text from the hospital. Jamie's levels stable today. Docs say we're holding steady. She smiled in relief, exhaling for what felt like the first time in hours. That one text reminded her why she was here. This wasn't about chasing some

corporate dream. She wasn't here to get a foot in the door of luxury. She was here for him. Her brother. The only family she had left. If working under people like Elle... in buildings like this... around ghosts like Damien Blackwood... could get her even one inch closer to a stable future — She'd take it. She'd take all of it. When she returned from lunch, there was a new tension in the air. People were whispering. Moving faster. Maya ducked into her assigned office, but Elle was already at her desk, tapping out emails furiously. "Something wrong?" Maya asked softly. Elle didn't look up. "Mr. Blackwood's returning to the tower today. Earlier than expected." Maya's mouth went dry. He'd been away? On business? She hadn't known. Elle stood suddenly and smoothed the front of her dress. "Do not speak to him. Do not look directly at him unless spoken to. And whatever you do, don't block the elevator corridor when he passes through." Maya blinked. "I—I wasn't planning to—" "I'm serious," Elle snapped, suddenly deadpan. "He notices everything." The next thirty minutes were chaos. The lounge was cleared. The hallway near the executive suite was roped off. Staff bustled like nervous birds. Maya stayed rooted behind her desk, eyes glued to her monitor—but her heart thudded loud in her chest. Some part of her knew... she'd feel it when he arrived. And she did. A sudden stillness. The way voices dropped. The faint thrum of elevator doors opening somewhere behind her. Footsteps. Heavy. Measured. Confident. She didn't dare turn her head. But she saw Elle straighten, clipboard in hand. Saw the reflection of a tall, broad-shouldered figure flanked by two others pass by the tinted glass. She only caught the edge of a jawline. A cufflink flashing under the light. Then he was gone. Damien Blackwood. Real. Walking these halls. Breathing the same air. And Maya—just the intern—was officially in his world now.

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The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 3: A Flicker in the Periphery

942 Words

Damien Blackwood didn't notice interns. He didn't need to. Most interns weren't even worth a glance—those rare few who managed to land the coveted spot at Blackwood Enterprises came through grueling university vetting, a token gesture from the company to maintain ties with elite academic institutions. Only one university was selected each

year. Only one student given the opportunity. It was part PR, part power move. Let the schools brag. Let the students dream. It kept the illusion of outreach alive—while reminding everyone just how unreachable Blackwood truly was. They never lasted. They cracked under pressure, or folded the second they realized working for Blackwood wasn't a fantasy. He didn't tolerate weakness. He didn't tolerate clutter. He didn't tolerate noise. So he was confused—annoyed, even—when he noticed her. It happened by accident. He'd just returned from a two-week summit in Tokyo—exhausting, infuriating, profitable—and was storming through the 42nd floor toward his private suite when a flicker of motion caught the corner of his eye. He didn't know why he turned his head. But he did. She was seated inside one of the auxiliary offices—what used to be a storage suite, if he remembered correctly. The glass was slightly fogged from the morning humidity, but he could see her clearly. A girl. Young. Slender. Head bent over a tablet, one foot nervously tapping beneath her desk. Her blouse wasn't designer. Her hair wasn't professionally styled. And the shoes—he caught them just as she shifted—were scuffed at the toe. Worn out, like they'd walked too many miles for too many years. She didn't see him. But he saw her. And something about the image burned into his mind like a static shock. Inside his office, Damien shrugged off his coat and dropped it on the couch. Ellie didn't miss a beat, continuing her rundown as she trailed in behind him. "The Zurich supplier issue could delay shipments by two weeks, but I've already escalated it to Calen's team. Legal wants to revisit the indemnity clause on the Haven project. Oh—and the new intern arrived two days ago." He was halfway through unbuttoning his cuffs when that last part made him pause—barely, but just enough. "Her name's Maya Thompson," Ellie added, scanning her tablet. "Twenty-five. On a full academic scholarship at Eastborough. Lives off-campus, no car, no known social media presence under her name. Coffee shop job in the mornings, night classes in business admin. Nothing flashy. No red flags. Just... quiet. Focused. I put her in one of the smaller rooms to keep her out of the way." He didn't look up. Didn't say anything. Just moved around to the other side of his desk and sank into his chair like a man walking into battle. The laptop in front of him blinked to life. Numbers. Contracts. A dozen meetings lined up like dominoes waiting to fall. But he didn't see any of it. Not really. His fingers hovered over the keys, but his mind—unwillingly, frustratingly—replayed the image of the girl in the glass room. Quiet. Focused. Scuffed shoes. His face remained cold. Blank. Detached. But something inside him shifted. A twitch. A ripple. Nothing visible, nothing he'd ever acknowledge. He didn't know why she caught his eye. Didn't care to understand it. And yet, somehow, the name Maya Thompson now lived somewhere in the back of his head. Uninvited. Unwanted. Undeniably there. That night, Damien sat alone in his office long after the building had quieted. The skyline burned orange and gold through the floor-to-ceiling windows behind him, but he didn't see it. Her file sat open beside his untouched dinner. Eastborough. Late scholarship. No disciplinary marks. GPA in the top percentile. Barista by necessity, not ambition. Caregiver to a younger brother. Orphaned at eighteen. No ties. No scandals. No social reach. Just grit. Raw, unpolished grit. She didn't walk like someone chasing attention. She walked like someone who no longer had the luxury of pretending. Her eyes held exhaustion—but not defeat. That innocence in her expression? It wasn't soft. It was hard-won. The kind you fight to keep when life keeps trying to take it from you. He didn't know why it interested him. Scratch that. It bothered him that it interested him. He'd seen beautiful women. Slept with them. Dismissed them. But her? She was... untouched by this world. Not fragile. Just unreachable. And now? He couldn't stop seeing her. Ellie stood across from

him, giving the end-of-day updates with her usual clipped efficiency. “Board wants Q2 projections finalized by Friday. I told them to wait. PR flagged another influencer scandal—something to do with Nexus Tech’s ex-ambassador and—” “What do you think of the intern?” Damien asked suddenly. Ellie blinked. “Thompson?” “Yes.” She hesitated. “She’s... quiet. Obedient. Doesn’t get in the way.” “That’s all?” “She’s not here to make a splash. Probably just wants the credit to graduate.” He nodded once. Thought for a moment. Then, calmly: “Move her to the west wing.” Ellie straightened. “That’s close to the inner teams. PR, strategy—” “I know where it is.” She hesitated again, then softened her tone. “Understood.” Damien turned back to his screen. The girl with the scuffed shoes had just stepped closer to his world. He didn’t know why. But he was watching now. And Damien Blackwood never watched without reason.

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The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 4: The Shift

1359 Words

Maya had barely slept. By the time she finished her night class and got Jamie settled after his medications, it was nearly 2:00 a.m. She dozed off for what felt like minutes before the alarm blared at 4:15. Two hours. That’s all her body got—and somehow, it felt like enough. It had to be. She stood in the bathroom mirror, brushing concealer under her eyes like it could erase exhaustion. The overhead light flickered once, humming the way old bulbs do when they’re close to burning out. Just like her. She pulled her hair into a low bun, pinned it tightly, and stared at herself for a moment. Her blouse was clean but fading at the seams. The slacks were still holding on. The same scuffed shoes. It didn’t matter. She straightened her shoulders and whispered, “Get through today.” Jamie was still asleep on the couch when she left. She placed a kiss on his forehead, tucked the blanket higher, and scribbled a note by his meds in case she got home late again. Subway. Walk. Elevator. The now-familiar routine brought her back into the steel and silence of Blackwood Enterprises. It wasn’t even 7:30 a.m., and still, the place felt alive. Not buzzing with people—but alert. Like the building itself was awake before anyone else. The security guard on the 42nd floor gave her a curt nod as she passed. She didn’t expect smiles here. When she reached her assigned office, Elle wasn’t at her desk. The silence was both a

relief and unnerving. Maya set her bag down, logged into the system, and started sorting the flagged documents from the night before. She moved quickly, precisely. Efficiency was survival. Half an hour later, Elle appeared without warning, heels clicking like thunder across the marble. "You're being moved," she said, tossing a folder onto Maya's desk without so much as a good morning. Maya blinked. "I—I'm sorry?" Elle didn't sit. She didn't smile either. "Mr. Blackwood wants you relocated to the west wing." "The... west wing?" "The one closer to the executive strategy and PR units." Maya's heart skipped. "But—why?" Elle's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "It's not your place to ask." Maya looked down quickly. "I understand." "Take your things. Now. Someone will escort you." She gathered her tablet, the documents she'd been reviewing, and shoved her pen into the front pocket of her bag. Her palms were sweaty, and she felt that familiar weight in her stomach—the one that used to settle there during tests she wasn't ready for or doctor appointments she couldn't afford. A man in a dark suit appeared by the door. Silent. Efficient. Not a word spoken between him and Elle. He gestured. She followed. They didn't go far—just a few turns through a sleek maze of glass partitions and shadowed hallways. But the change was immediate. The energy shifted. The west wing was quieter, but not in a peaceful way. In a loaded way. The kind of quiet that meant decisions were being made behind closed doors. Lives changed with a sentence. Stocks rose and fell depending on what happened in these rooms. Her new desk was outside a frosted glass office labeled Strategic Development – Internal Comms. A different assistant—older, sharper—barely glanced up as Maya arrived. "You'll coordinate directly with the comms team when assigned," she said dryly. "Otherwise, sort and prep internal reports. Deadlines are posted weekly. Don't miss them." Maya sat slowly, placing her bag on the floor. Her new chair was more ergonomic, her monitor larger, and the view—God, the view—stretched across the skyline with unapologetic arrogance. For a moment, she just sat still. What had changed? Had she done something wrong? Or... something right? Her fingers trembled slightly as she opened her inbox. There was a single new message: From: e.woods@blackwoodent.com Subject: Relocation Notice Per Mr. Blackwood's directive, your station has been moved. Continue performing your duties as assigned. Any further questions may be directed to HR. – E.W. Mr. Blackwood. He'd noticed her? She hadn't even seen his face. Just the reflection in the glass. The flash of a cufflink. The impossible presence that seemed to follow him like gravity. How could someone like that remember her at all? But still—he had. Somehow. Her thoughts were spinning when a cheery voice suddenly cut through the tension. "Hi! Oh my God—you must be the intern, right?!" Maya jumped slightly, her hand hovering over her keyboard. A woman appeared beside her desk with a wide smile, oversized glasses, and a shock of wavy hair dyed a soft plum color that should've clashed with the strict dress code—but somehow didn't. She wore heels with little yellow suns on them. Real ones. With faces. "I'm Harper. Harper Lin. PR generalist and certified office snack hoarder." She extended her hand dramatically. "And you, my dear, look like you just walked into a villain's lair." Maya blinked, then smiled hesitantly. "I'm Maya. Maya Thompson." "Cute name! You look like a Maya. I knew the moment I saw your outfit you weren't one of them." Maya tilted her head. "Them?" "The corporate drones who forgot how to smile. Don't worry, they're mostly harmless. Just... avoid the guy from mergers. He hasn't blinked since '09." Maya let out a quiet laugh, and it surprised even her. "Okay... I'll keep that in mind." Harper leaned against the edge of the desk like they'd been friends for months. "So. Welcome to the chaos. You're lucky—our wing's the least soul-crushing. Strategic comms is stiff, but the PR folks are halfway

human. Plus, we have the best snack drawer on this floor. And I have the passcode.” “Thank you. Honestly, I was kind of bracing for, I don’t know... ice?” “Oh, there’s ice,” Harper said, grinning. “But you get used to the cold. Or bring a flamethrower. Either way, you’re in now. That means you’ve earned the right to survive. Barely.” Before Maya could respond, the door behind her opened again. “Thompson,” a clipped voice called. Maya turned to find Trina, one of the PR managers she’d briefly met during orientation. “You’re tagging along for this morning’s internal pitch review. Bring your notes. Don’t speak unless spoken to.” “Yes, ma’am,” Maya replied. Harper gave her a wink and whispered, “Don’t trip. That’s how they weed out the weak.” Maya grinned despite herself. Then followed Trina through the long hallway and into a sleek glass conference room. Five minutes passed. Then ten. People trickled in—power suits, expensive watches, silence. Then— He entered. Damien Blackwood didn’t just walk. He commanded space. He wore black, of course. His eyes were unreadable, his expression carved in something colder than stone. Tall. Broad-shouldered. Clean lines, no warmth. Maya didn’t look directly at him. She didn’t have to. He passed close enough that she could smell the faintest trace of something sharp—clean, expensive, dangerous. His hand brushed the table as he sat. A flick of his wrist. His voice when he spoke was low and smooth and utterly without hesitation. Everything in the room bowed toward him. Even time. And still—somehow—Maya felt the burn of his gaze settle on her for just a second too long. Not by accident. Not in passing. She didn’t move. Didn’t breathe. She just sat there, pretending not to notice. But her pulse betrayed her. And deep down, she knew— This shift? This move? It wasn’t random. It wasn’t protocol. Damien Blackwood had noticed her. And now? She wasn’t just part of the building. She was on his radar. And she didn’t know yet if that was a blessing... or a curse.

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Chapter 5: On the Edge of Control

927 Words

Damien Blackwood never looked twice. Until now. The conference room was already humming with tension when Damien entered. He didn’t need to look to know the lineup—department heads, senior comms staff, strategy leads. All waiting. All curated. All afraid

to breathe too loud before he sat. He moved with deliberate precision. Black tailored suit. White shirt. No tie. Calculated. Everything he did—every cufflink, every silence, every damn step—was calculated. The pitch meeting wasn't about the pitch. It was about control. About reminding them who was in charge. Who built this empire from the ground up. Who could tear it down if he wanted to. He passed the long glass table, eyes scanning without moving. Observing without appearing to. Calculating risk, performance, allegiance. Then—he saw her. Not directly. Just... enough. Maya Thompson. She sat near the end of the table, partially obscured by Trina's shoulder. Her posture stiff, hands folded tightly over a leather-bound notebook. She wasn't dressed differently from yesterday, not significantly—but here, in this room, with the sun streaming in behind her and the city sprawling like a battlefield below? She didn't look like an intern. She looked like a variable. Damien took his seat at the head of the table. He didn't speak. Not yet. Let the silence settle. Let them sweat. Trina cleared her throat first. "Today's pitch focuses on our updated internal comms strategy for Q3, including revised language packages for the client-facing teams and streamlined messaging across global markets." Her voice faded into the background. Not because she was unimportant—Trina was razor-sharp—but because Maya shifted. She was taking notes. Small, precise strokes of her pen. Quick glances between slides and speakers. Attention like a weapon. No fidgeting. No side glances. Just pure, controlled focus. Damien should've ignored it. Should've turned his attention to the deck or the projections or the strategy breakdowns. But his eyes kept drifting back. Not obviously. Not enough for anyone to notice. Except maybe her. Because she was trying too hard not to look at him. And that? That told him everything. She had noticed him. She knew he'd noticed her. He leaned back slightly, fingers steepled beneath his chin as the slides changed. No expression. No tells. But in his mind, the questions turned over like dark cards. What was she doing here? Why did she matter? Why hadn't she broken yet? He'd seen the type before. Interns with grit. Desperation. Humble enough to work. Hard enough to last. But they always showed their hand eventually. Arrogance. Ambition. Entitlement. He didn't see it in her. Not yet. Just this coiled quiet. This strange, burning awareness that made no sense—and refused to go away. "Mr. Blackwood?" Trina's voice interrupted his thoughts. He blinked once, slow and deliberate, and lifted his gaze to hers. "Yes." "Any notes on the phase-two messaging structure?" He didn't look at the screen. "It's bloated. Cut it by thirty percent. Push the emotional cues higher. Avoid passive constructions—reclaim narrative control." Trina nodded quickly. "Understood." He saw Maya's pen pause, then scribble faster. Interesting. The rest of the meeting passed in fragments. Voices. Slides. Data. But Damien was elsewhere. Tracking her reactions. Her restraint. Watching the way she flinched slightly when Harper whispered something to her. Harper. Of course it would be Harper. She was the only one on this floor with a soul—and a tendency to adopt new strays. His jaw tensed the moment he saw Maya smile at her. It wasn't irritation. Not exactly. But it was something close. Something dangerous. When the meeting adjourned, chairs scraped lightly across the floor as people stood and began filtering out in silence. Some nodded at him. Others didn't dare. He didn't move. He waited. Maya was nearly the last to stand. Her notebook clutched to her chest, her hair falling slightly loose from its bun. That same blouse. Those same damn shoes. Still not looking at him. But she felt him. He could tell. The air tightened between them when she passed. Not close enough to touch. Just close enough to sense. For the briefest moment, he allowed himself to turn his head. Their eyes met. Not long. Not bold. But long enough. She looked away first. Good. But not fast enough. Damien finally stood, smoothing a hand

down the front of his jacket. His assistant—Ellie—appeared beside him like clockwork. “Afternoon meetings shifted to 2:30. Press draft on the merger is ready for review. HR flagged an ethics audit request from the Taiwan office. And Thompson was moved this morning. No complaints filed. She’s... adapting.” He didn’t respond. He didn’t have to. Ellie was smart enough not to fill silence that wasn’t hers. Damien moved toward his office, each step sharp, precise, final. Behind the frosted doors, the world waited. Markets. Wars. Acquisitions. But his mind drifted one last time. To the intern with nothing. To the girl with too much silence in her eyes. To the variable he hadn’t accounted for. He didn’t know what she was yet. A threat? A distraction? A test? But Damien Blackwood had built an empire by seeing beneath the surface—and he knew one thing for certain: Maya Thompson wasn’t like the others. And he didn’t believe in coincidence. Only intention. And whatever force had placed her in his path? It wasn’t finished yet. Not by a long shot.

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Chapter 6: Three Lives, One Chance

1757 Words

Maya didn’t move for a while after the pitch meeting ended. People trickled out of the glass conference room in composed silence, papers rustling, heels clicking, chairs scraping softly against polished floors. Damien Blackwood didn’t look back—not that she expected him to. But the weight of his gaze lingered like a burn on her skin, impossible to ignore. She waited until most of the crowd had dispersed before standing. Her knees felt stiff, like they’d locked from sitting too long in tension. The nerves, the secondhand power, the almost unbearable stillness of being seen—even if for just a second—had exhausted her more than the lack of sleep ever could. Harper was waiting just outside, sipping from a comically oversized water bottle shaped like a milk carton. “You survived,” she said with a smirk. “No visible wounds. I’m impressed.” Maya tried to smile, but her voice came out thin. “Barely.” Harper fell into step beside her as they walked back toward their desks. “You looked like a deer on the edge of cardiac arrest in there.” “That obvious?” “Sweetheart, if I’d had a stress ball, I’d have chucked it at you halfway through Blackwood’s second sentence.” Maya gave a soft laugh—more breath than sound—and

dropped her bag beside her chair as she sat. Her fingers hovered over her keyboard, but she didn't type anything. Harper leaned over the edge of Maya's cubicle, her plum hair flopping a little to the side. "Hey. You okay?" Maya nodded, though it felt like a lie. "Yeah. Just a lot." "You did fine. Honestly, most interns pee themselves before the coffee even brews. You sat through a whole pitch without crying or vomiting. That's gold-star behavior around here." Maya cracked a smile. "Thanks. I think." Harper gave her a friendly nudge. "Seriously. You didn't speak, which is good. You didn't faint, which is better. And you didn't try to flirt with the boss, which is best." Maya's cheeks warmed. "Why would anyone—" "You'd be surprised. Blackwood could freeze a continent, and yet half the building would risk hypothermia to get his attention." Maya shook her head, glancing down at her notes. "Not me." Harper tilted her head, studying her. "You say that like you mean it." "I do." Harper tilted her head, studying her. "So... real talk. What's your life like outside of this place?" Maya blinked, caught off guard. "Um. It's... a little packed." "Figured. You've got the look of someone running on caffeine and existential dread." "I work as a barista," Maya admitted, half-laughing. "Four days a week. Full shifts. Then classes in the evenings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays." "And Blackwood on top of all that?" Harper's eyes widened. "It's temporary," Maya said quickly. "Just for the duration of the internship. Besides, my schedule here is only three times a week starting next week. This full-week setup is just for orientation and onboarding." Harper blinked. "Wait—so you're working full time, doing school, and this internship?" Harper leaned back like she'd just watched a superhero transformation. "Damn. I complain when I have back-to-back meetings. You're out here stacking lives." Maya smiled, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "It's not as glamorous as it sounds." "No, but it's badass," Harper said with a wink. "And you didn't even flinch during that meeting earlier. I've seen junior execs crumble just sitting across from the boss." "Trust me," Maya muttered. "I was flinching on the inside." "You know they don't pay interns much, right?" Harper asked gently, her voice softer now, eyebrows raised with something that looked more like concern than curiosity. Harper didn't say anything at first. She just watched her, the playfulness fading from her expression. "I only ask because... the hours you're pulling? The stress? Most people can't even handle one of those jobs, let alone three. And I know the kind of burn that comes from pushing past your limits for too long." Maya blinked, swallowing the lump that had started to form in her throat. "It's just..." Harper's voice dropped even lower. "You shouldn't have to fight this hard just to stay afloat." "I know," Maya said, trying to keep her voice steady. "But it's still... a huge opportunity. They only pick one student each year. Even if the stipend isn't a lot, the benefits, the network, the experience—it could change everything." Harper studied her a moment longer, the teasing light dimming in her eyes. Something unreadable flickered across her face—like recognition, or maybe respect. Then she nodded slowly. "You're tough." "I have to be." Harper leaned back in her chair, a low whistle escaping her lips. "That's insane. You're stacking three lives and still look like a functioning human." Maya smiled faintly, but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "Functioning is... generous." Harper tilted her head, her voice gentler now. "Damn, Maya. You ever sleep?" "Sometimes," she said lightly, though her chest tightened with the truth behind the joke. "I make it work. I have to." Harper's expression shifted again—softer now, more careful, like she suddenly realized she was looking at someone stitched together with pure grit and no safety net. "You're doing all of this for someone, huh?" Maya nodded, the answer already rising in her throat. "My little brother. Jamie. He's... everything. I just need to get us to the other side of this." Harper

blinked slowly, then exhaled like the words had winded her a little. “s**t,” she said softly. “That’s a lot, Maya.” Maya said nothing. She just looked down, fingers tracing the edge of her desk, as if grounding herself to keep from unraveling. After a moment, Harper straightened. Her grin returned—smaller this time, but sincere. “All right, gladiator. If you ever need to hide in the supply closet and scream, I’ll bring snacks. Something crunchy and emotionally satisfying.” “Tempting,” Maya said, chuckling despite the ache in her throat. “Thanks, Harper.” “Anytime. Oh—and word of advice?” Maya looked up, catching the sudden shift in Harper’s tone. “Keep your head down, but your ears open,” Harper said, her voice dropping just enough to feel like a secret. “This place has layers. With everything already going on in your life, trust me—workplace drama is the last thing you need.” She glanced around, then leaned in a little closer. “Just do what you’re told, keep your focus, and you’ll be fine.” Then she smirked. “Now me? I couldn’t care less what people think. When I started, they told me the same thing—blend in, be quiet, don’t ruffle feathers. But that’s just not who I am. I’m expressive. I’m colorful. I talk too loud and laugh too much. And guess what? I’m still here.” Maya’s lips twitched, a reluctant smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. Harper continued, her voice full of unapologetic pride. “I do my job. I do it well. So they can’t say a damn thing. I may not be perfect, but I’m not about to shrink myself just to make other people comfortable. You get me?” Maya nodded slowly, a strange sense of relief blooming in her chest. “Everyone’s a little careful around the boss,” Harper added with a shrug. “Okay—maybe not scared, but definitely... cautious. Me? I still do me. And hey—” She raised her hands like it was proof. “Still here. Still breathing. Still fabulous.” Maya’s pulse jumped—not from fear, but from the realization that maybe, just maybe, she didn’t have to lose herself to survive this place. Harper tapped the edge of the cubicle once, then wandered off toward her own desk, humming something upbeat that clashed wildly with the tension still twisting in Maya’s stomach. Alone again, Maya stared at her monitor. It was just her third day. But already, the world around her felt like it had shifted on its axis. Nothing felt stable—not the desk, not the routine, not even her breath. Six months. That’s how long the internship would run. Six months to make it count. Six months of fighting exhaustion, smiling through uncertainty, and proving—somehow—that she deserved to be here. Because if she could just get through it, maybe things would finally change. A real opportunity. A new path. One that didn’t involve sleepless nights and constant panic over bills and Jamie’s prescriptions. One where she wouldn’t have to count coins at the register or pray the manager didn’t shorten her break again. One where she could finally breathe. She exhaled slowly and forced herself to focus, even as her thoughts tangled in quiet panic. She was tired. Tired of stretching pennies and playing survival like a game she never signed up for. Tired of worrying about Jamie’s meds, the overdue utility bills, the manager at the coffee shop who kept cutting her break short. Tired of waking up every day afraid she’d never be enough. But she couldn’t afford to break down. Not now. Not when she’d finally gotten one thing right. She exhaled shakily, rubbing her hands together to ground herself. This internship was more than just a line on her resume. It was hope. A crack of light in the mess she’d been trudging through for years. If she did this right—if she endured the long hours, the cold stares, the impossible standards—maybe, just maybe, she could rewrite everything. For Jamie. For herself. Because there had to be more than just barely getting by. So she pushed the spiral of thoughts aside, blinked back the blur building behind her eyes, and opened the file she was supposed to review for the internal memo draft. She refused to believe that survival was the best they could ever do.

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Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 7: Unedited and Unseen

1321 Words

Damien stared at the ceiling for another moment, then pushed away from the desk and crossed the room to the built-in cabinet tucked against the far wall. He poured himself a glass of whiskey — not out of need, but for the quiet ritual of it. The steady motion, the clink of glass, the burn waiting at the back of his throat — something about it helped anchor him. Focus, he told himself. The numbers on the Lawson account demanded his attention. The investor memo was due by week's end. But none of it held. Not with her face rising, uninvited, behind his eyes. She'd looked out of place in that boardroom—too soft for a space carved out in sharp lines and sharper ambition. He'd clocked her in the corner, barely breathing. Eyes wide. Hands still. Almost like prey. Probably out late last night, he'd thought at first. Hungover maybe. Some interns partied their way in, then floundered through their responsibilities. A pretty face and high GPA didn't always mean substance. But something about her didn't sit cleanly with that assumption. No glitter. No practiced charm. No scent of desperation disguised as confidence. There was just... fatigue. Real fatigue. And something else beneath it—restraint. Not fear, exactly. Just a kind of tension that spoke of someone used to bracing for impact. Maybe she'd worked a late shift somewhere. Coffee shop, wasn't it? He vaguely recalled seeing that on the file. So she wasn't just a student. She was working. Probably studying too. Was she tired from school? From life? He frowned, irritated with himself. This wasn't his business. Interns came and went. Some lasted. Most didn't. He didn't have time to get curious about a girl who clearly didn't belong here. And yet, here he was. Thinking about her. She had held herself together in that meeting better than most junior execs. Didn't speak. Didn't shrink either. It gnawed at him. He took a slow sip of his whiskey, the burn grounding him, the silence in his office too still. Something wasn't adding up—and he didn't like unresolved variables. Especially not when they stared at him with those dark, exhausted eyes. Damien set the glass down with a soft clink and pressed the button on his desk. "Elle," he said as the intercom lit up. "I need you." "On my way," came her smooth, composed reply. Moments later, Elle entered, tablet in hand, her presence as calm and crisp as always. "Yes, sir?" "I saw an unfamiliar face during the meeting this morning," he said without

looking up. “Sitting beside Harper.” Elle paused briefly, then gave a small nod of recognition. “Ah. That would be Maya Thompson. The new intern. She was transferred to the West Wing today per your order. Assigned under Trina’s supervision.” “Hmm.” He leaned back slightly, tapping his finger once against the armrest. “Reach out to Trina. I want the intern’s raw notes from the pitch. Unedited, unpolished.” Elle’s brow twitched, barely noticeable — but she recovered without missing a beat. “Of course,” she said, fingers already dancing across the screen of her tablet. “I’ll have them sent up immediately.” A beat. “Anything else, sir?” Damien hesitated, eyes fixed on the skyline beyond the glass. But it wasn’t the city that filled his thoughts—it was the quiet way Maya had sat through the meeting. Neither shrinking nor seeking attention. Just there. Watching. Absorbing. Holding something close he couldn’t quite name. “No,” he said at last. “That’ll be all.” She turned and left without another word. Damien returned to his chair, but he didn’t sit. Instead, he stood there a moment longer, staring down at the tablet with the untouched reports. His mind was no longer on the Lawson account. Maya Thompson. He ran the name through his memory again. There’d been nothing striking on the resume, nothing that stood out beyond the usual desperation and ambition. But watching her, really watching her—had told him there was more. The posture, the way she sat through that entire meeting with her jaw tight and shoulders tense, the way she avoided everyone’s eyes but didn’t shrink. She didn’t want to be noticed. That much was clear. And yet here he was. Noticing. Again. He turned on his screen and brought up the internal directory. He hesitated only briefly before typing her name into the search bar. There she was. Student intern. Local university. Final year. No special endorsements. A modest GPA, clean record, high recommendations from professors. But nothing that screamed “Blackwood material.” Still, she was here. His eyes scanned the screen, pausing at the emergency contact section. One name. Jamie Thompson. Brother. No parents listed. He frowned slightly, then closed the file before he could spiral down a rabbit hole he had no business entering. This wasn’t personal. He was simply ensuring everyone who stepped into his boardroom was worth the seat they occupied. Still... He wanted to know what she had written. What she had seen. Elle returned fifteen minutes later, holding a slim folder. “Trina sent this over,” she said. “Apparently the intern writes detailed notes. Very detailed.” Damien took the folder and opened it slowly. The handwriting was neat, unpretentious. Bullet points organized by relevance, underlines used sparingly. Asterisks in the margins marked thoughts she clearly didn’t want to forget—sharp, observational, and unfiltered. She hadn’t transcribed. She’d translated. He skimmed the first page, expecting the usual intern fluff—copied phrases from the screen, surface-level comments, maybe a few rushed takeaways. But what he found was something else entirely. She’d been paying attention. Not just to the content—but to the people. She’d noted how one executive kept fidgeting when asked about the budget forecast. She’d flagged the subtle dip in another’s voice when discussing deliverables. Even more curious, she’d quietly remarked on his silence during the third quarter of the pitch. “Marked shift in the boss’s energy during the financial slide. Still, observant. Silence intentional — analytical more than passive.” Damien’s brow lifted. That wasn’t a student scrambling to meet expectations. That was someone reading the room. Closely. Intuitively. Dangerously so. Not just what was happening—but what wasn’t. What people weren’t saying. The weight of silence. The discomfort in pauses. She hadn’t been trying to impress. She’d simply... seen. She saw more than she was supposed to. And she understood what it meant. Now she had his full attention. His brow rose slightly. Most interns are taught to regurgitate.

To copy. To play it safe. She'd written like someone who didn't realize the value of what she was seeing—or worse, someone who didn't care if anyone else did. He read the notes again. Then a third time. There was no ego in them. No performance. Just raw, intelligent observation. Dangerously perceptive. He closed the folder slowly, fingers tapping once against the cover before placing it deliberately at the edge of his desk. "She sees too much," he murmured. "Sir?" Elle asked. He didn't look up. "Keep an eye on her." Elle blinked. "Maya?" "Yes. Discreetly. I want to know how she operates." Elle's brow lifted just slightly. "And what exactly are we looking for?" He paused. "...I'm not sure yet." She gave a nod. "Understood." Then she turned and slipped out, heels silent against the floor. And like that, she disappeared again. Damien stood still in the quiet that followed, staring down at the closed folder on his desk. It should've ended there. But it didn't. He had a feeling this was only the beginning.

Cedella

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The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 8: The Wrong Desk

1745 Words

Maya woke up groggy, but grateful. Four hours of sleep wasn't a luxury, just a step above survival — but it was still double what she'd gotten the night before. An extra hour made a difference. Her bones still ached, and her eyes burned from the weight of the week, but she felt just alert enough to function. It was Friday—her last full day before her official three-days-a-week internship schedule began. She just had to survive one more day of juggling the four lives she was barely managing to keep afloat: barista, student, sister, and intern. Her schedule had been impossibly packed all week, stretching her to the brink. Grueling didn't even begin to cover it. Thankfully, her coffee shop manager had been kind enough to approve a one-week unpaid leave. No income, but at least no extra shifts. If she could just make it through today, she'd be there for Jamie's doctor appointment tomorrow. That was the deal she'd made with herself. Just one more day. As she buttoned her blouse and tied her hair back into a low ponytail, her mind circled back to the day before—the impromptu pitch meeting, the cold stares from strangers in sleek suits, and the way Harper had smiled at her like they'd been friends for years. That part hadn't been bad. But what still sat heavy on her chest was Trina's request. No, correction—Trina's

command. Maya, hand me the notes from the meeting. The ones you wrote. Yes, now. The original version, please. No need to edit. No explanation. No chance to polish. No time to second-guess. She'd turned over her raw, unfiltered scrawl like it was nothing. But it hadn't been nothing. Those notes were... hers. Her thoughts. Her observations. She hadn't written them to be read, especially not by someone higher up. Maya exhaled slowly as she stepped out into the soft morning light. At least today would be easier. No meetings. No surprises. Just keep her head down, finish strong, and get through Jamie's doctor's appointment tomorrow. That's all she had to do. When the elevator doors opened to the PR floor, Maya immediately sensed... something off. The air wasn't buzzing the way it normally did with morning chatter and keyboard clicks. Instead, there was a strange hush. People glanced up from their desks, then looked away quickly. A few whispered something to each other as she passed. Maya felt the hairs rise on her arms. She walked faster. At her desk, Harper was already there—grinning like she knew a secret. “Finally!” Harper beamed. “Good morning, superstar.” Maya blinked. “Uh... hi?” Harper's eyes sparkled with too much excitement. “You look so calm for someone who just got flowers.” “What?” Harper stepped aside with theatrical flair. And that's when Maya saw them. A bouquet. Lush, understated, elegant. Crisp white lilies, delicate baby's breath, and deep blue hyacinths arranged in a tall glass vase with a simple cream card tucked inside. Maya froze. “Oh—those aren't mine. They must be yours.” Harper gasped. “Mine? Girl, I wish! But nope. They were already here when I arrived. Right on your desk.” Maya blinked at the arrangement, heart thudding. “There's no way... someone must've made a mistake. Maybe it's for someone else?” Harper leaned in conspiratorially. “I checked. Guard said the delivery log says ‘Maya Thompson, PR Division, West Wing.’ That's you, sweetheart.” Maya looked around, cheeks warming under the curious glances from across the department. “I don't understand... who would send me—?” Harper gave her a playful nudge. “Someone's got a thing for mysterious interns. You've been here five minutes and already have a secret admirer.” “I don't have an admirer,” Maya whispered sharply. “This is a mistake. Maybe it's a client appreciation thing or some office welcome thing—” Harper raised a brow. “For interns? Who also happen to be brand new transfers and weren't even scheduled for that meeting? Yeah, sounds super likely.” Maya ignored the teasing and reached for the envelope tucked into the bouquet. Her fingers trembled slightly as she slid the cream-colored card free. No name. Just one sentence. Maya, I hope you have a beautiful day—as beautiful as you. The handwriting was clean. Sharp. Masculine. Her stomach flipped. “I don't like this,” she muttered. Harper's grin widened. “Because it's flattering?” “Because it's weird,” Maya said, her voice low. “I don't even know who sent it.” “It's romantic,” Harper corrected with a dramatic sigh. “Also, just a heads-up—Trina sent a last-minute memo this morning. Didn't you see it?” “I must've missed it,” Maya muttered, still staring at the card. “Basically,” Harper went on, “we're getting a visit from one of Blackwood's major overseas clients. The big boss type. Trina said we're to be on our best behavior — clear desks, proper dress code, all that.” Maya's head whipped up. “Today?” “Yep. Apparently, it's some long-standing partnership or whatever, and this guy only visits once a year.” Harper leaned in with a mischievous grin. “Though I doubt Trina meant ‘best behavior’ includes mysterious flower deliveries.” “I told you, it's not mine!” But Maya didn't get a chance to keep arguing. Because the room went silent. Again. Only this time, it wasn't whispers that followed. It was reverent, shocked stillness. Because Damien Blackwood had just walked in. And he wasn't alone. James Horton, his senior personal assistant, followed closely behind. James wasn't just

staff—he was Damien’s shadow. Trusted, discreet, unshakably loyal. While Elle managed operations inside the company, James handled everything beyond it—travel, security, negotiations across continents. He was present for every high-stakes meeting, every critical decision. It was rumored he was one of only two people who knew the passcode to Damien Blackwood’s penthouse. And now he was here. Flanking them was an older gentleman—likely the overseas client everyone had been warned about. And Elle trailed just a step behind, tablet in hand, her eyes already sweeping the department, likely mapping the most efficient route for the impromptu tour. No one moved. No one breathed. They weren’t supposed to see Damien Blackwood unless summoned. The CEO walking into the PR wing himself was like spotting a solar eclipse in winter. Harper whispered, “Okay, no one said the boss himself would be doing the tour.” Maya could barely hear her. Her blood was thundering in her ears. Damien Blackwood didn’t look around aimlessly. Every movement of his was purposeful. Controlled. Measured. So when his gaze swept across the room and landed squarely on her desk—on the bouquet—there was no mistaking it. He stopped. Just briefly. His expression didn’t change. Not a frown, not a twitch. Too neutral. But Maya saw it. The flicker of tension in his jaw. The way his eyes moved from the bouquet to the card still trembling in her hand. Damien’s jaw ticked. Subtle. Controlled. Then his gaze slid—almost lazily—to her. She stood frozen, card in hand, her breath caught in her throat. He looked at her. Just for a second. Just long enough to see everything. The flowers. The cream envelope. Her stunned face. And then—nothing. His eyes moved on like she wasn’t even there. But something had already shifted. Like a switch flipped beneath the surface. He said nothing. Offered no reaction. Yet the temperature in the room seemed to drop five degrees. Without a word, he continued walking alongside the client, with James at his side and Elle trailing just behind them. But the moment didn’t pass unnoticed. Harper turned to her, eyes wide. “Did you see that?” Maya tried to play dumb. “See what?” “The way he looked at you. Or the flowers. Or both.” Maya swallowed hard, heart thudding. “Maybe he hates flowers on desks. Maybe it’s against some decorum policy or something.” “Or,” Harper leaned in, voice dropping to a dramatic whisper, “he thinks someone’s breaking the no-fraternization rule.” “What rule?” Harper blinked. “You do know Damien Blackwood doesn’t tolerate office relationships, right? No flirting. No gossip. He’s strict about it. And now, out of nowhere, a new intern’s desk is graced with a mystery bouquet on the same day a high-profile client’s in the building?” Maya’s stomach dropped. “I’m going to get fired,” she whispered. Harper’s eyebrows shot up. “What? No, come on. You don’t even know who it’s from!” “Exactly. Which makes it worse!” Maya hissed. Harper tried to ease the moment, bumping her shoulder playfully. “Okay, but if it helps, he didn’t look mad.” Maya blinked. “You just said he looked mad.” “No,” Harper said with a teasing grin, “I said he looked. Which, for Damien Blackwood, is already a miracle.” Maya stared. Harper wiggled her brows. “Maybe he’s not mad. Maybe he’s... jealous.” “Harper,” Maya warned. “Okay, okay, fine,” she laughed. “But seriously—if anyone says anything, just tell the truth. You didn’t send them, you don’t know who did, and you’re not fraternizing. You’ll be fine. Sure, Blackwood’s got rules, but he’s not a tyrant. They’re strict here, not unfair.” Maya offered a tight nod, but her heart hadn’t stopped racing. This was not how she pictured the last day of her first internship week. Not flowers. Not stares. Not Damien Blackwood noticing her—again. And definitely not being the center of a rumor storm about workplace romance. Harper was right. She didn’t need drama. She needed stability. Romance? Mystery admirers? No time for that. Not when her life was already stretched to the

breaking point. Between work, school, her internship, and Jamie... Maya looked down at the card in her hand again. Clean masculine handwriting. No name. She didn't like it. But more than that—she didn't like that he had seen it. And that some part of her had noticed his reaction. That was dangerous. Too dangerous.

Cedella

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The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 9: The Rules We Break

1428 Words

Damien Blackwood wasn't in a good mood. Not that anyone would've dared to say it to his face. Not even James, who had spent nearly a decade interpreting Damien's silences like a language only he could read. But even James kept unusually quiet on the way back to the executive wing. They'd barely stepped into the private elevator before Damien pressed the emergency halt button. James didn't flinch. Elle, however, looked up from her tablet. "Sir?" "Leave us." It wasn't a request. Elle nodded and quickly exited, no questions asked. She knew better. The elevator doors slid shut with a soft hiss, enclosing Damien Blackwood and James Horton in silence. James stood slightly behind his employer, hands clasped neatly in front of him, face impassive. Damien said nothing for a long moment, his eyes fixed on the brushed metal panel in front of them, as if the glowing floor numbers were personally offending him. Then, in a voice that was flat and cool as stone, Damien said, "I want you to find out who's challenging the company rules." He said it like a command. Like it didn't already taste bitter in his mouth. James didn't need to ask which rule. He knew exactly what this was about. Damien's expression didn't change. "Someone's either ignoring it—or thinks they're exempt." James nodded once. "I'll look into it." No questions. No clarification. No visible reaction. But behind the stillness of his gaze, James was already piecing things together. He had seen the pause. The flicker. The tick in Damien's jaw when they'd walked into the PR department. He'd seen his boss's eyes lock on the flowers—too elegant, too deliberate—sitting on that intern's desk. And he'd seen the way Damien's expression didn't change at all. Which, for Damien Blackwood, meant something had changed. James knew better than to ask. That was never how their dynamic worked. Damien would never admit—least of all to himself—that something had struck a nerve. That a simple bouquet on an intern's desk could stir

something jagged beneath the surface. But James knew. Something had. Damien didn't repeat himself. He didn't need to. As the elevator continued its smooth descent to the executive floor, Damien remained stoic—one hand tucked into the pocket of his tailored slacks, the other resting at his side. But James noticed it. That slight twitch in his thumb. The tension in his jawline. There was no room for romance in Damien Blackwood's world. No time. No tolerance. The rules weren't just for show—they were law. No gossip, no relationships, no distractions. Blackwood Enterprises was a fortress of focus and control. So why, James wondered, did one intern with a simple bouquet seem to shatter that control? Damien gave no reply. But James already knew. This wasn't about policy. It was personal. Meanwhile — Back in the PR Department The office had returned to its usual hum of noise, but she couldn't shake the way whispers followed her. Eyes slid her way when they thought she wasn't looking. She tried to disappear into her work, to anchor herself in reports, drafts, tasks—but the tension clung to her like static. People had definitely noticed. Maya sat at her desk, her fingers twitching slightly as she fought to keep her nerves under control. The flowers were still there. The delicate white lilies and blue hyacinths stood tall in a pristine glass vase beside her laptop, the small card still tucked neatly in the bouquet. She hadn't dared open it. Just looking at it made her stomach twist. Harper had finally calmed down but kept sneaking glances toward the executive hallway. "Do you think they'll say anything?" Maya whispered. "About the flowers?" Harper shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. You didn't do anything wrong. But just in case, just tell them the truth." She didn't get a chance to dwell too long, though. Minutes later, Trina appeared. "Morning, ladies," Trina said crisply. Her eyes flicked to the flowers, narrowed slightly, but she said nothing. "Maya, I'd like a word. My office." Maya's stomach dropped. Harper mouthed: Stay calm. Maya stood stiffly in front of Trina's glass-walled office, fingers curled nervously around the edge of her notebook. Her stomach still felt unsettled from earlier. The flowers. The looks. The hush that had fallen over the office like some unspoken cloud of suspicion. She knocked lightly. "Come in," Trina called. Maya stepped inside. Trina didn't look up at first, typing furiously on her laptop. Her office was as pristine as the rest of her appearance—every binder color-coded, every surface immaculate. It smelled faintly of vanilla and ambition. "You wanted to see me?" Maya asked softly. "Yes," Trina said, finally lifting her head. "Sit." Maya did. "I reviewed your notes from the pitch meeting," she said curtly. "Unrefined, but sharp. You caught nuances others missed. You have potential, Thompson. Keep that up, and you might actually survive here." "Thank you, ma'am. I'll do my best," Maya said quickly. Trina closed the laptop. "But potential isn't worth anything if you can't stay focused. And focused means avoiding distractions." Maya's heart skipped. Trina stood, walking to the edge of her desk and resting one palm on it. Her tone turned clinical, but her gaze was cutting. "Word of advice? Office romance is not tolerated. So if I were you, I'd tell your boyfriend to keep the flowers private next time." Maya's head snapped up. "What? I—I don't have a boyfriend." Trina raised a brow, unimpressed. "I swear," Maya added. "I've only been here four days. Two in this department. I wouldn't... I wouldn't do anything to jeopardize this." Something in her voice cracked slightly at the end, and she hated that it did. But it was true. She had worked too hard, sacrificed too much to land this internship. If a bouquet could ruin everything— Trina narrowed her eyes for a beat, then stood, signaling the conversation was over. "Good," she said briskly. Trina stared at her for a long moment, assessing. "Then make sure that's what people see," she said at last. "Because perception here is just as dangerous as intention. You're new. You're being

watched. Don't give them something to talk about." Maya swallowed. "Yes, ma'am." Trina tapped the desk lightly. "You can go." Maya stood quickly, notebook still clutched in her arms like a shield. "Thank you." Maya's ears burned as she nodded and slipped out of the office. She didn't understand what was happening. Or who had sent the flowers. Maybe it was a mistake. A mix-up. Or worse — someone playing a cruel joke. But she didn't have time to think about it. She had work to finish. And Jamie's appointment tomorrow. And rent due next week. And tuition bills she still didn't know how she'd pay. This internship was her chance. Her way out. She wouldn't lose it. Not over something as stupid as a bouquet of lilies. — Back on the executive floor, Damien sat behind his massive desk, the city skyline behind him washed in cold morning light. His fingers hovered over his laptop keyboard, not moving. The image was burned into his mind. White lilies. Blue hyacinths. That card. Something inside him had... tightened. Not in anger. Not even jealousy, not exactly. It was irritation. Disruption. It made his skin crawl in a way he couldn't explain. He didn't like surprises. He didn't like feeling off-balance. And whatever that had been— whoever had sent that—it had touched something raw in him. Something that had nothing to do with policy. He pushed his chair back abruptly and stood, pacing once behind his desk. This was why he didn't tolerate mess. Distractions. Emotional clutter. It was beneath him. Beneath his empire. And yet... His gaze drifted toward his laptop again. James would handle it. Of course he would. Still, Damien sat back down and opened the internal dashboard. He told himself it was for monitoring. Performance. Efficiency. Just to see if productivity in the PR department was where it needed to be. Just business. Just business, he told himself again. But even he didn't believe it this time.

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Cedella's storytelling style is immersive and addictive—perfect for fans of heated romances and heart-pounding twists.

The Billionaire's Intern (Maya Thompson)

Chapter 10: Cracks Beneath the Surface

1651 Words

The hum of lunchtime chatter drifted through the PR department, but Maya Thompson didn't hear any of it. She was seated at her desk, motionless, eyes unfocused, hands clasped too tightly in her lap. "Hey," Harper's gentle voice pulled her back. "Lunch? I found a spot nearby with killer dumplings." Maya forced a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "Thanks... but I think I'll just stay in." "You sure?" Harper asked, brows

furrowed. “Yeah,” she said quickly. “Just need a breather.” Harper nodded, lingering for a second before stepping away. As soon as Maya was alone, she stood and quietly made her way to the staircase at the far end of the hallway—her escape route. Ten flights up. Two heavy doors. And then— Silence. The rooftop was her sanctuary. She’d discovered it on her first day during orientation. A hidden terrace above the chaos, shielded by thick glass panels and greenery. No one came here. Maya leaned against the metal railing, blinking at the skyline. But it was blurry. Her eyes burned, and she finally let herself fall apart. She tried to hold it in. She did. But everything was catching up with her. The sleepless nights, Jamie’s prescriptions piling up, the clinic visit tomorrow she wasn’t sure she could afford. The tip jar at the coffee shop was practically empty last weekend, and now she’d missed an entire week’s worth of pay to commit to this internship—this dream, this risk. And now this. Whoever had sent those damn flowers—whether it was a cruel joke or some ridiculous misunderstanding—had put a target on her back. Trina’s words echoed: Office romance is not tolerated. Perception is dangerous. She wasn’t doing anything wrong. But in a place like this, perception could be fatal. “I can’t lose this,” she whispered. “Please don’t let me lose this.” The tears came harder. She sank to the cold floor, curling in on herself like something brittle about to break. And finally—alone—the sobs tore free. She wiped her eyes. Smoothed her hair. Composed herself the best she could. Then she stood. And went back downstairs. Meanwhile — Executive Wing The sleek corridors of the executive wing were a world apart from the noise and energy of the lower floors. Silence reigned here—sharp, polished, intentional. James Horton moved with quiet efficiency, a slim folder tucked under one arm as his polished shoes echoed against marble. The investigation was complete. As always, swift and precise. He didn’t need long. The bouquet had been delivered via Lilium & Lace, a high-end floral boutique. The sender: Paul Sanders. One of the PR generalists who worked just three rows down from Maya Thompson. James raised a brow slightly as he reviewed Paul’s profile. Clean record. Employed for four years. Well-liked. No major red flags. Just... a man who had apparently taken an interest in the wrong intern. James walked into Damien’s office. “He sent them,” James said simply, placing the report on the edge of Damien’s desk. Damien didn’t look up immediately. He was still staring at the screen—reviewing department analytics, productivity graphs, PR metrics that didn’t actually matter at this moment. “Name?” “Paul Sanders.” Damien’s eyes finally moved. James continued. “PR generalist. Four years in. Quiet file. No violations—until now.” There was a pause. Then, Damien’s tone turned sharp. “I want him gone.” James waited. “Fired?” “No. Transferred.” Damien’s voice was ice. “Overseas. Make it immediate. Frame it as strategic collaboration between branches. Internal talent initiative. I want him in the Seoul office by Monday.” James inclined his head. “Understood.” “And,” Damien added coldly, “let HR know it’s a disciplinary preemptive reassignment. Policy breach. Code of conduct. Make it clean.” James nodded. “I’ll handle it.” And he did. Back in PR When Maya returned, nothing had changed. The stares were still there. The whispers. The side-eyes she pretended not to see. She walked to her desk like a ghost and stared at the bouquet still sitting there, soft petals bright under the fluorescent lights. Her chest tightened. And then, without a word, she reached for the vase. Harper looked up from across the room, startled. “Hey—” She took two quick steps from her desk—but Trina’s gaze snapped toward her and gave a subtle shake of her head. Not now. It wasn’t cruel. It was a manager’s instinct—a quiet command to give someone space when they were on the edge. Harper froze, her heart aching. She nodded once, reluctantly, and sat back down. Across the department, Paul Sanders looked up. He’d

been watching her from the other side of the room—not intentionally at first, but he couldn’t look away now. He had seen her walk in with that haunted look on her face. And now, watching her grip the vase like it burned her, something in him twisted. He rose halfway from his chair, torn. Part of him wanted to stop her. To say something. Anything. He’d only meant to make her smile. He’d noticed her quiet presence all week. The way she scribbled notes when no one else paid attention. The way she looked out the window during breaks, like she was somewhere else entirely. There was something about her—gentle, but strong in a way he couldn’t describe. Alone, but never small. He hadn’t even signed the card with his name. He hadn’t thought it would explode like this. And now, watching her march toward the recycle bin with that bouquet clenched in her hands, his chest ached with regret. He had made it worse. And he didn’t know how to fix it. Maya didn’t notice any of it. Her pace didn’t falter. She moved on instinct—past desks, past whispers—straight to the corner where the large recycling bin stood like a finish line. She dumped the vase without ceremony. The glass hit the bottom with a muted crack, the water sloshed, petals folding in on themselves like the remnants of something already ruined. She stood there, breath uneven. Then her shoulders hunched forward — and the tears returned. Maya turned away from the bin and hurried toward the far corner near the elevator—quiet, tucked away from the main floor. She collapsed to the ground beside the tall window, her back against the cold wall, pressing a trembling fist against her lips to stifle the sobs. She didn’t care if anyone saw anymore. She was too tired. Too overwhelmed. Her body slid down the wall in surrender, knees drawn close as the tears spilled freely. She tried to hold them back, to stay composed, but everything had finally caught up with her—the exhaustion, the fear, the weight of it all. She just wanted to disappear. That’s when the elevator chimed. The doors slid open—and James Horton stepped out, a signed folder in hand, on his way to deliver the HR document to Trina personally. He paused when he saw her. A crumpled figure by the window, red-eyed and shaking. “Ms Thompson?” he said, approaching carefully. “Maya?” She flinched and looked up. “I... I’m sorry,” she said quickly, standing abruptly and wiping her cheeks. “I’m fine. I’m okay. I’m—” “You don’t look okay,” James said, voice neutral but quiet. “I didn’t mean to—” Her words stumbled. “It’s just been a long week. I’m sorry, sir.” She tried to straighten her blouse, her pride clashing with the tears. “I’ll be fine. I didn’t mean to make a scene.” James looked at her, and for a moment, the stern assistant seemed to soften. “You didn’t make a scene.” Maya managed a weak smile. “Thank you.” James gave a single nod. “Take care of yourself, Ms. Thompson.” And then he walked away. Across the room, Paul watched it all unfold—watched her crumble, and knew he had no right to walk over now. Not when his gesture—meant to be kind—had humiliated her. Not when she looked like the world had just caved in. He sank back into his chair, jaw tight with regret. He’d wanted to make her smile. Instead, he made her cry. Back in the Executive Office Damien was standing by the window when James returned. “The file’s signed,” James reported, placing it on the desk. “Trina has it.” Damien gave a terse nod. James paused at the door. “Oh,” he said casually, though the weight behind his words was anything but. “I also saw Ms. Thompson.” That name—spoken aloud—was like a pin dropped in a silent room. Damien didn’t turn. But his voice was colder. Sharper. “What about her?” James’s gaze flicked to the skyline before answering. “She was... upset. Alone. Near the recycle bin. Looked like she’d just thrown out the flowers. She was crying.” A beat of silence stretched between them. Damien didn’t ask for more. Didn’t react. But James noticed the subtle shift—the way Damien’s hand, resting at his side, slowly curled into a fist. Not rage.

Something quieter. More dangerous. James waited, as always, for the command. But none came. Only silence. And the city—cold, glittering—stretching out like a cage. But all he could see was her face. “Keep an eye on her.” Just that. No explanation. And James, as always, understood exactly what it meant.

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