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Chapter 106

Maya let out a weak laugh through the tears welling in her eyes.

“I mean it,” Harper said. “I’ve seen the way he looks at you. That man isn’t playing games. And if anyone tries to make you feel small again-whether it’s Barbie dolls in PR or billionaire CEOS-I’ll burn them to the ground.”

Maya swallowed, overwhelmed by the weight of those words. By the friendship. The loyalty.

Then Harper softened again. “You don’t have to be perfect. You just have to be you. That’s the girl he noticed, and probably by now.. also fell for.”

A silence stretched between them, broken only by the hum of the waves.

Then Maya whispered, barely audible, “Thank you.”

Harper slung an arm around her shoulder. “You’re welcome. Now-bachelorette party on this yacht or what?”

Maya groaned and let her head fall against Harper’s shoulder. “You’re impossible.”

While Maya and Harper disappeared into the breeze, laughter trailing behind them, back in the master suite-the storm was only just beginning.

Damien stood by the window, hands in his pockets, jaw tight. The tension hadn't left his shoulders, not even after the door closed.

Ashcroft lingered by the bar, watching him with an unreadable expression.

"Daya, huh?" he finally said, pouring himself a drink. "You're officially part of a ship name now. That's permanent. Like tattoos. Or blood oaths."

Damien didn't respond. His gaze remained fixed on the sea.

Ashcroft took a sip, then added, "So… is it official?"

Still no response.

But silence from Damien wasn't apathy-it was weight. Pressure. Meaning.

Ashcroft's voice dropped. "Look, I joke. But I know what this is. You don't let anyone get that close unless it's already past the point of no return."

Finally, Damien turned.

His voice was low. Quiet. Dangerous in its honesty. “She makes me want things I thought I’d buried. Feel things I’ve never let myself feel.”

Ashcroft’s jaw flexed.

“Then we have to move fast,” he said, voice like steel.

“Because if anyone comes for her-random asshole doctor, jealous Barbies, or ghosts

dragging chains from your past-I don’t care if it’s on the books or off… they don’t walk away.”

There was no humor in his tone now.

Only a promise.

Damien turned to him, something unguarded flickering in his eyes.

“I don’t think I’d survive it, Nick.”

A breath. A truth.

“If something happens to her… I won’t come back from it.”

Ashcroft didn’t hesitate. He stepped forward and clapped a hand on Damien’s shoulder-firm, grounding, unshakable.

“Nothing’s going to happen to her,” he said, holding his gaze.

“We won’t let it. I’ll fight beside you until the end.”

Damien didn’t say anything.

Didn’t need to.

Ashcroft smirked, lightening the tension by a thread. “Also… if this turns into a wedding, I’m bringing a flamethrower to keep the PR department at bay.”

Damien exhaled a breath that might’ve been a laugh. Barely.

Ashcroft raised his glass. “To Daya.”

Damien stared for a beat-then knocked back the whiskey in one clean, silent swallow.