Intern 110

Chapter 110

James cleared his throat as they approached-now just a few feet away.

“Ms. Maya!”

His voice cut through the hum of conversation, startling her slightly. A few heads turned, attention briefly shifting to their corner of the lobby.

James offered a reassuring smile, his tone light but practiced. “Saw the men in black, huh? Nothing to worry about-they’re Mr. Ashcroft’s security team. Just standard protocol.”

Ashcroft stepped forward smoothly, sunglasses glinting. “Yeah, you know… gotta protect the goods.” He gave Maya a wink. “Just in case there are any crazy ladies out here who want to kidnap me.”

Harper gasped, playing right along. “True! That actually makes sense. You’re the infamous Nicholas Ashcroft, after all-sole heir to the Ashcroft estate, family fortune, secret vaults of gold, probably a private island or three-”

“I do have four, actually,” Ashcroft cut in, grinning.

“See?” Harper threw up her hands like it proved her entire argument. “You’re basically the male version of an heiress. A heire-hunk. You probably have a cologne line in Europe and a scandalous ex who tried to marry your cousin.”

Ashcroft laughed. “No scandalous ex-I don’t do crazy. And just one cousin. He deserved it.”

The group chuckled. Even Trina cracked a smile.

And just like that, the air lightened.

Maya’s fingers, which had unconsciously curled against her side, began to relax.

So maybe this was just another billionaire thing. Extra bodyguards. Extra mystery. Right?

Damien hadn’t moved much-still half in shadow near the edge of the lobby, one hand in his pocket, the other tapping absently at his phone. But Maya could feel it-that slow burn beneath the surface.

He wasn’t laughing.

Not even smiling.

But his eyes were on her. Always, it seemed… on her.

Soon, the lobby filled with movement again as the resort staff began handing out keys-sleek wooden cards wrapped in embroidered cloth envelopes. One by one, people peeled off from the group, dragging luggage toward private elevators or being guided by cheerful attendants to the villa wings.

“Room 302, ma’am.”

“Garden suite, sir, this way.”

Harper had just received hers and was in the middle of showing off the monogrammed key envelope when the resort manager approached Maya with a practiced smile.

“Ms. Thompson,” he said, holding out a separate envelope with both hands. “Your room key.”

Maya blinked in surprise. “Oh! Thank you.” She accepted it, thinking it must be a duplicate of Harper’s. Maybe someone had accidentally handed them only one earlier.

But when she flipped it over, her brow furrowed.

This wasn’t Harper’s room number.

This was a whole other floor.

“Wait, sir-” she turned to the manager, her voice polite but confused. “There must be a mistake. This isn’t the room I was assigned. I’m supposed to be sharing with my friend.”

The manager, still calm and professional, shook his head gently. “No mistake, ma’am. Your room is correct. You’ve been assigned to the penthouse level.”

Penthouse?

Maya’s heart stuttered. “… I thought I was rooming with Harper?”

But before he could answer, Harper-already catching on-gasped with exaggerated horror. ” Ohh no, no, no! Don’t pin that on me now!”

“What?” Maya blinked.

“I totally forgot to tell you,” Harper said, backpedaling while already edging toward the elevator. “I specifically requested my own room. Personal boundaries. Essential oils. Weird sleep playlist. You get it, right? Right. Okay, I’ll go settle in, love you, see you later!”

“Harper-!”

Too late.

She was already hustling toward the elevator, her pink suitcase bumping behind her in a guilty escape.

The manager cleared his throat. “If you’ll allow me, Ms. Thompson, I’ll escort you to your suite.”

Maya stood frozen for a second, staring down at the number on the card again.

Penthouse.

What the hell is going on?

The rest of the lobby had already emptied. No one was watching now-except maybe one.

She could feel it. That presence again. That weight.

She looked up-and sure enough, across the open-air foyer, Damien was still standing there. Half-shadowed beneath one of the arched beams.

Not moving. Not speaking.

Just watching her with that unreadable expression that always felt like it could swallow her

whole.

Just as Maya was about to follow the manager, a familiar voice called out.

“Ms. Maya!”

She turned to see Lee hurrying toward her.

“I already brought your luggage upstairs,” he said with a grin. “It’s waiting right outside your door.”

Maya blinked, still flustered. “Uh… okay. Thank you, Lee.”

She managed a small smile, but her fingers tightened slightly around the key card. Everything felt like it was moving faster than her brain could catch up.

Before she could fully process the situation, Ashcroft appeared, flanked by James and Damien.

“Hey, sis!” Ashcroft called, as casually as if he hadn’t just sent her world spiraling thirty minutes ago. “Heading to your room? Just in time-we are too. Let’s go together!”

Maya opened her mouth to politely protest, but no words came. Only a quiet, “Oh.”

James led the way to the private elevator, Ashcroft strolling casually beside him. Damien said nothing-but as Maya hesitated for half a beat, his hand pressed lightly to the small of

her back.

Just enough to guide her forward.

The moment his palm touched her, a jolt of electricity ran up her spine-hot, immediate, impossible to ignore.

She swallowed hard, eyes fixed ahead, but her skin still burned where he touched her.

And then the doors slid shut behind them.

Four people. One small elevator.

Silence. Awkward, suffocating silence.

Maya could hear the soft hum of the elevator… but all she could feel was the heat of Damien's hand still lingering on her spine.

She didn't dare look up.

Not when her skin was still burning, not when her heart couldn't decide if it wanted to run-or lean in closer.