Intern 117

Chapter 117

The sun poured in through gauzy white curtains as Maya stood at the mirror, adjusting the strap of her linen dress.

Her fingers trembled-just a little-as she smoothed the fabric down her side. Not because the dress didn't fit right. It did. Almost too well.

It was this lunch she wasn't sure she was ready for.

Her heart still held the echo of Harper's words, soft and sure: "You deserve love that makes your heart soar."

Maya swallowed and looked at her reflection. Same eyes. Same girl. But something inside had shifted.

I'm ready to try, she reminded herself.

"You look like a goddess," Harper said from behind her, popping a grape into her mouth as she leaned against the sofa. "A slightly terrified goddess-but still."

Maya turned. "You sure it's not too much?"

Harper gave her a look-half stern, half warm. “Maya. This trip is about new beginnings. Think about it-we’re here for an ocular visit, prepping for the grand opening of the resort. New business, new place, new paradise. We came to unleash creativity and make sure everything is flawless for the big reveal.”

She stepped closer, voice soft but full of conviction.

“So imagine this-you are the resort. Untouched, full of potential, quietly breathtaking. And now? You’re getting ready for your grand opening. This is your moment to be seen. Let this place be your reset. Your rebirth.”

Then, with a playful smirk, she added, “So no more dressing for invisibility, okay? You’re the main character now.”

Maya laughed nervously, but Harper wasn’t finished.

“No seriously-” Harper walked over, straightened a strap on Maya’s shoulder, and locked eyes with her. “When we walk out that door, you’re Maya 2.0. Bolder. Braver. Open and ready for love.”

Maya raised a brow. “Maya 2.0?”

“Yes. And when you come face-to-face with your man-and he is your man, okay?-you do not back down. You do not hide. You do not retreat into your cozy little oyster shell.”

She pointed a finger in mock warning. “This is not the time to be humble. You make eye contact. You own the moment. You let him see you.”

Maya blinked. “And if I freeze?”

Harper grinned. “Then I’ll throw myself dramatically across the table so everyone looks at me instead.”

Maya laughed-soft and nervous, but genuine.

Harper stepped back, gave her a sweeping once-over, and nodded with approval. “You’re ready.”

Maya drew in a breath, squared her shoulders, and nodded. “I’m ready.”

The moment Harper opened the door, the one next to hers clicked open at the exact same

time.

Damien Blackwood stepped out-tall and composed in a dark linen shirt, sleeves rolled just enough to reveal the veins that traced his forearms. His face was clean-shaven now, thanks to Ashcroft’s advice that he needed to look younger. After all, he was ten years older than Maya, and if he was going to pull off the “boyfriend” role… uncle vibes were not an option.

His eyes landed on Maya right away, calm and steady.

And then-froze.

Ashcroft appeared beside him with a grin. “Well, well. Look at this perfect timing.”

His gaze bounced between the two women. “Hey, ladies! Headed for lunch?”

Then his attention flicked to Harper, as if only just realizing she was there.

With mock surprise and a hand over his heart, he beamed. “My favorite PR superstar, Harper

Lin. You’re here too? The universe does want me to have a good day.”

Harper smirked. “Only if you behave.”

“I never behave.”

But Maya didn’t hear the rest of it.

Because Damien still hadn’t looked away.

The way he was staring at her now-slow, quiet, eyes dragging down her figure and back up again-it burned.

No words. Just heat.

And something unspoken pulsing in the space between them.