Intern 118

Chapter 118

Then came a sharp jab to his ribs-Ashcroft, elbowing him with classic say something, bro

energy.

Finally, he spoke.

“Hello, Maya.”

Her name sounded different in his voice. Low. Careful. As though he was tasting it, not just saying it.

She swallowed, willing her voice not to shake.

“Hi.”

Just that. Hi.

But her throat was dry, and her pulse wasn’t even pretending she was fine.

Damien’s eyes didn’t leave hers. “You look beautiful.”

Maya blinked.

Not pretty. Not nice. Beautiful.

A flicker of panic threatened to rise in her chest, but she pushed it down. Do not retreat, Harpe r’s voice echoed in her mind.

So she met his gaze-head high, chin steady-and said, “Thank you. You clean up pretty well yourself.”

A slight twitch of amusement curved the corner of his lips.

“I had help,” he said, eyes briefly cutting toward Ashcroft.

Ashcroft beamed. “Can’t have him looking like your uncle, sis!”

Harper looped her arm through Ashcroft’s and gave Maya a knowing glance.

“Well, since the universe decided to synchronize our doors like a rom-com, we might as well head down together.”

Ashcroft turned dramatically. “Shall we lead the way, my dazzling plus-one?”

Harper sighed. “Try not to trip over your ego.”

Chanter bl. Confidence in Progress 2

With that, the two of them strode toward the elevator ahead of them-Harper’s sandals clicking in confident rhythm, Ashcroft tossing a casual comment over his shoulder.

Maya and Damien followed, a few steps behind.

And suddenly, it was just them.

The corridor stretched ahead, silent but for the soft echo of footsteps and the distant hush of the sea outside.

Neither of them spoke.

Then-

“I didn’t expect to see you in white,” Damien said quietly.

Maya glanced down at her dress, the fabric brushing against her legs with every step.

“Too much?”

“No,” he said quickly. “Not at all. It suits you. Makes you look…”

His voice trailed off, and he shook his head slightly.

She raised an eyebrow. “Makes me look what?”

He stopped walking. Just for a second.

His eyes met hers-dark, slow-burning.

“Like someone who’s about to ruin me.”

Heat.

It flushed her skin like wildfire.

She opened her mouth, then promptly forgot how to speak.

But Harper's laughter floated down the hallway just then, breaking the spell.

Damien stepped forward again, keeping pace beside her.

He didn't apologize.

And Maya didn't want him to.

Inside the elevator, the atmosphere shifted again.

Maya stood at Damien's side, his presence close-but not touching. Not quite. Behind them, Harper and Ashcroft leaned against the mirrored wall like agents of chaos, practically humming with unspent energy.

It was too quiet.

Which meant Harper, naturally, couldn't let it last.

"So, Mr. Blackwood," she said brightly, "the team's been buzzing about you. Nobody expected you'd actually show up here-with Mr. Ashcroft, no less. Everyone's excited but also a little nervous. You know how it goes… the boss is here, so when the cat is not away, the mice cannot play."

Damien's mouth twitched.

"Well, Ms. Lin," he replied smoothly, "I wasn't planning to. But then I heard something about man hunting… a certain manifestation of a tall, dark, and delicious stranger."

Maya's eyes widened slightly.

Harper, unbothered and unfiltered, gave an unapologetic grin.

"Ohhh, that," she said breezily. "Well… that was then. I don't have to now. Besides, my manifestation came true. You're tall, not that dark-but definitely delicious."

She tilted her head toward Maya, winking.

“Right, Maya?”

Maya choked on nothing.

Damien turned to look at her-just enough for the air between them to turn electric.

Ashcroft whistled low. “Holy cow. That’s smooth!”

Harper beamed. “Thank you. I try.”

Maya stared straight ahead, cheeks warm, praying for the elevator to speed up-and slow down-at the same time.

Then Damien leaned just a little closer. Close enough that his arm brushed hers.

“You agree?” he murmured, voice low-just for her. “Delicious?”

Her pulse stuttered.

But she didn’t look away.

“I plead the fifth.”

Ashcroft clapped once. “Oh, we are so going to lunch with fireworks.”

The elevator dinged.

Doors opened.

And for once, Maya didn’t hesitate.

She stepped out with Damien right beside her, chin lifted, the whisper of Harper’s voice still fresh in her head-

When you come face to face with your man… you let him see you.

The island air greeted her like a quiet whisper-warm, clean, tinged with salt and something that felt like possibility.

So this is what it feels like not to retreat.

Her pulse still danced in her throat, but the fear didn't win. Not this time.

Being brave… wasn't as terrifying as she thought it would be.

She let the sunlight catch in her hair, inhaled deeply, and let herself feel the moment.

It wasn't just lunch.

It was a beginning.

And for the first time in a long time, she was choosing it.

Hello everyone! Maya finally takes a big step – literally and emotionally towards embracing who she really is and what she deserves. It's a reminder that growth isn't always loud or flashy; sometimes it's the small, steady steps that matter most.

Let me know what you think of Maya's "Maya 2.0" transformation. Are you rooting for her as much

as I am?

Stay tuned – things are about to heat up!