Intern 119

Chapter 119

The resort staff had arranged an elegant al fresco dining experience right on the soft sand. A long, low pop-up tent stretched overhead, offering shade from the afternoon sun. Lanterns hung from the canvas, swaying gently in the ocean breeze.

The team was already gathered, laughing easily. James and Lee stood at the far end, blending into the laid-back flow.

James was the first to notice their arrival. He and Lee walked over to greet them, and soon, the rest of the team followed-warm smiles, polite nods, a smooth rhythm of familiarity and professionalism.

Damien offered a subtle nod in return, his presence commanding without effort. He took his seat at the head of the long table-the rightful owner of the estate-exuding quiet authority that needed no introduction.

To Damien's left sat Ashcroft, his easy confidence filling the space beside him. Next to Ashcroft were James, then Lee, followed by Aimee from Finance, and Sienna-Trina's PR core team member in charge of communications.

On Damien's right, seated closest to him, was Maya. Beside her sat Harper, then Trina, followed by Mary from HR, and finally Jessa-the quiet, observant designer from the PR

team.

Maya slid into her seat, hyper-aware of Damien beside her. The ocean stretched endlessly beyond, but the moment felt small. Contained. Like a dance where every move mattered.

Not long after, the staff began placing the food. Soon, the table overflowed with seafood, grilled meats, and vibrant fruits-an indulgent feast in paradise.

Harper let out a soft gasp as the dishes kept coming, her eyes wide with genuine delight. “Oh my god, this looks like a seafood lover’s dream. I don’t even know where to start!”

She leaned toward Maya, nudging her playfully with her elbow. “Do you love seafood? What’s your favorite?”

Maya smiled, the atmosphere easing the nervous energy coiled in her chest. “I do. Honestly? All of it. Clams, shrimp, scallops-give me a good seafood boil and I’m in heaven.”

Before Harper could respond, Ashcroft leaned forward from Damien’s left, eyes gleaming with mischief. “Such a match,” he said smoothly. “Damien’s the opposite. Total meat lover. Allergic to shellfish-except for crabs and prawns. Right, D?”

Before Damien could even open his mouth, James cleared his throat and chimed in with perfect timing. “Mr. Blackwood hasn’t eaten crabs or prawns in a long time. He finds peeling them… troublesome.”

Damien turned slowly to shoot James a sharp look. “No, I don’t.” He glanced at Maya, sounding far too defensive for such a mild topic. “He’s lying. I don’t find it troublesome.”

James blinked, his brows lifting ever so slightly. I'm lying? he thought, bemused. I was trying to help.

Maya barely had a second to process that before she felt a sharp pinch on her thigh under the table. She jumped and turned to Harper, who was giving her a wide-eyed look.

Do something, her eyes practically shouted. Woman, come on!

Heat crept up Maya's neck, but she turned toward Damien, her voice soft but steady. "If you want to eat them… I could peel some for you. Are you sure you're okay with crabs or prawns? No reactions or anything like that?"

Damien went still. Caught off guard.

A subtle blush crept up his neck, disappearing beneath his collar. His hands-so often steady, capable, commanding-suddenly felt cold. Speechless, he stared at her for a beat too long, as if trying to decipher what this gesture meant.

He was used to women in heels and cold perfume-flirting over champagne, never lifting a finger for anyone else.

Maya peeled shrimp like it was nothing-like caring was second nature.

And for reasons he couldn't quite name, it completely disarmed him.

"…. yeah," he murmured. "No, I mean-I'm not allergic… I can eat them."

Maya smiled-quietly, earnestly-and reached for a prawn. "Okay then. Let me."

He paused, shifting in his seat as one hand moved to the back of his neck. Why did it feel warm all of a sudden? He wasn't used to this-being nervous. He never felt nervous.