Intern 121

Chapter 121

He was just sitting there, calm and composed, as if nothing had happened. He reached for his water glass and took a slow sip, his expression unreadable, almost bored.

As if he hadn't just threatened two grown men with a single look.

Maya shrugged it off and reached for another prawn. Not worth overthinking. She was finally enjoying her food-and oddly, Damien's quiet presence beside her didn't feel as intimidating as it used to.

As everyone lingered over dessert, Trina clapped her hands lightly to get everyone's attention. "Alright, team-today's yours. Enjoy the island, take in the sun, reset your brains. Just don't do anything stupid, okay?"

Her gaze shifted directly to Harper. "Okay, Harper?"

Harper blinked, feigning innocence. "Me?"

Trina raised a brow. "Yes. You. Behave."

A ripple of quiet laughter passed through the table.

Trina continued, already shifting back into business mode. “Alright, enjoy the rest of the day. Tomorrow, the talent we contracted for the campaign arrives, and we kick off the shoot. Be ready and downstairs by 8 a.m. sharp. We meet in the lobby. Got it?”

A chorus of nods and mumbled confirmations followed.

Harper’s eyes lit up, a mischievous grin spreading across her face. “Oohhh, I’m excited! Who’s the talent? You’ve been keeping such a tight lip about it. Is he famous? Hot?”

Trina smiled, a hint of amusement in her eyes. “Can’t spill all the secrets now, can I? Just know he’s exactly what this campaign needs.”

Harper bounced on the balls of her feet. “Well, now I really can’t wait!”

She nudged Maya playfully and grinned. “Hey, you hear that? Today’s ours to enjoy-no work, no stress. Perfect day for red bikinis, island hopping, sunbathing, vodka, and maybe even a little jet ski action!”

She spun toward Damien with wide eyes and a teasing smile. “Hey, boss! What do you say? Can we do jet skis?”

Damien’s eyes flicked up to Harper, but his attention drifted-just slightly-toward the woman

sitting beside him.

Red bikinis.

He didn’t even try to fight the image.

Maya, In the sun. Laughing. Skin bare and golden. That shy little smile tugging at her lips.

Vodka? Does she even drink? If she does-how well does she handle it? Giggly? Quiet? Bold?

He didn’t know.

And he wanted to.

Then-jet skis.

He could drive. She’d have to hold onto him. Arms wrapped tight around his waist, pressed against his back. Her laughter in his ear, wind in her hair.

Yeah… he could live with that.

He glanced out toward the water, expression unreadable, the sun glinting off the waves like temptation itself.

He blinked once, pulled himself back to the moment.

“Sure,” he said at last, voice low and smooth-calm on the surface, chaos just beneath.

He shifted in his seat, cool as ever-though the faint spark in his eyes didn’t go unnoticed.

Chapter 122

The sun hung high and warm in the sky, casting a soft shimmer across the island. One by one, the team began drifting back to their rooms, full and content, their laughter still lingering in the ocean breeze.

Maya and Harper strolled side by side along the cobbled path leading toward the lobby, still laughing about the seafood, the wine, and how Harper nearly got herself banned from the table after her dramatic shrimp performance.

Just as Harper veered toward the elevator, a voice called out behind them.

“Ms. Lin!”

Harper turned.

James approached-ever the polished professional-though there was something unusually amused in his eyes.

“Apologies for the interruption. I’d like to inform you of a room change.”

Harper blinked. “A… what now?”

“You’ve been upgraded to the room beside Ms. Maya’s,” James said smoothly. “The front desk has already arranged to have your things moved. It was a personal request from Mr. Blackwood.”

Harper’s eyes widened, then lit up.

“Oh my god. Are you serious?”

James nodded.

“Yes. Effective immediately.”

Harper threw a dramatic hand over her chest, then turned to spot the two men chatting just a few steps behind them.

“Mr. Blackwood, my favorite boss in the entire universe! That is so generous of you. I mean, I don’t want to accept it-too luxurious, too VIP-but if you insist… well, who am I to say no, right? Eeeekk!”

Then she grabbed Maya’s arm and bounced.

“Maya! Did you hear that? I just got an upgrade!”

Maya blinked, torn between laughing and hiding behind her hair.

“Your boyfriend is so generous,” Harper leaned closer, dropping her voice to a mock conspiratorial hush.

“Hey… do you think you can ask him to send some of those bougie grapes to my room too? You know the ones in your room? Or… I’ll just steal them from yours. Same thing.”

Maya covered her face, cheeks already flushed-maybe from the sun, maybe not.

“Shh! Harper! One day your big mouth is going to get us both in trouble. And why me? You go ask him! Besides… he’s not my boyfriend.”

Harper leaned in, whispering loudly enough for everyone to still hear,

“Not officially, yet-but it’s obvious to anyone with eyes. That man’s already yours,

Behind them, a low chuckle broke the moment.

Ashcroft.

“Can confirm,” he said, stepping up beside them with a smug grin.

“His eyes haven’t left you all day.”

Maya spun around, wide-eyed.

And right beside Ashcroft stood Damien.

Silent. Still.

babe.”

But his sharp, unreadable gaze was locked straight on her-like he could see through the heat rising on her cheeks, past the front she tried to maintain.

Harper clapped a hand over her mouth, gasping playfully.

“Oh my god-you were standing right there?!”

Damien’s voice came low and even.

“I was.”

Maya’s stomach did a slow somersault.

He looked away a beat later, cool and composed as ever.

“Good to know I’m predictable,” he murmured, then turned toward the elevator as if the conversation hadn’t just peeled him wide open.

Ashcroft leaned in again, whispering to Harper with a wink,

“Told you. Already hers.”

After the long, sun-drenched lunch, they agreed it was time to freshen up and change, planning to regroup in the lobby in about an hour. The promise of cool showers and a moment’s respite settled over them like a soft, welcome breeze.

Half an hour later, the two men were already in the lobby waiting.

Damien stood near the concierge, speaking in low tones to James and the resort manager- calm, composed, every inch the man in control. A few steps away, Ashcroft leaned against a column, scrolling through his phone like the cover model of a tropical getaway issue.

Ashcroft looked effortlessly beach-ready in a short-sleeved floral shirt, the first three buttons undone to reveal a sculpted, sun-kissed chest. Paired with teal swim shorts and designer sunglasses perched on his face, he looked like he’d walked straight out of a luxury travel ad.

Chapter 123

And then there was Damien.

He wore a navy blue polo shirt, buttons casually open halfway to expose a teasing glimpse of his chest, the sleeves rolled just enough to show off those strong forearms. His swim shorts were navy and white stripes-clean, sharp, classic. Sunglasses hung in one hand. His jaw tightened for a heartbeat, a subtle clench that only the sharpest eyes would catch. Then his expression went unreadable again, and his hair was swept back in one effortless motion, like it had no choice but to obey.

Not long after, the elevator dinged-and all eyes turned.

The doors slid open, and out walked two women.

Harper led the way, vibrant and unapologetically bold. Her mustard-yellow bikini popped against her golden skin, perfectly matched with a breezy linen button-down and loose shorts that screamed chic, but here to party. Her hair was swept into a high bun, oversized sunglasses perched on her nose, and she carried her beach tote like it was a designer bag headed for a runway.

But it was Maya who stole the air from the room.

Even the resort manager paused. A few staff subtly glanced up. And the men in the lobby- both hers and not-forgot their tasks.

She wore a scarlet two-piece bikini that clung like sin and sunlight. The color made her pale porcelain skin glow-not sun-kissed, but starlit. Over it, she'd thrown on an open white linen shirt that floated behind her with every step, paired with high-waisted jean shorts that hugged just enough. On her feet, simple white slide sandals-soft-strapped, cushioned, practical… and effortlessly pretty.

Simple. Effortless. Deadly.

Ashcroft let out a low whistle under his breath, sunglasses sliding down the bridge of his nose as he tilted his head for a better view.

"Well, damn," he muttered, nudging Damien with his elbow.

“If this is the warm-up, I can’t wait for the main event.”

Damien didn’t answer.

Didn’t blink. Didn’t breathe.

His gaze was locked-hooked-on her.

The scarlet. The skin. The undone buttons. The way her linen shirt floated open with the breeze. She wasn’t even trying, and somehow that made it worse.

Or better.

She was fire dressed like moonlight, and it gutted him.

Then-he noticed it.

The resort manager. The bellhop behind the desk. A server passing by with a tray of cocktails.

They were all looking.

At her. At his.

Damien’s eyes narrowed, jaw tensing as a sharp flick of his gaze sliced through the air-quiet, deadly, unmistakable.

They saw it.

Every one of them.

And just like that, the spell broke. Eyes dropped. Movements resumed. The server picked up his pace. The bellhop turned away. Even the manager gave a polite cough and looked back down at the clipboard in his hands.

Ashcroft smirked.

“Territorial, aren’t we?”

Damien didn’t answer. He didn’t need to.

Because he was.

Maya didn’t see the way the staff looked at her.

Didn’t see the flicker of warning in Damien’s eyes or the way the resort manager subtly adjusted his posture like he’d just been caught trespassing.

She glanced up-and her breath caught.

Damien was watching her.

So was Ashcroft, smirking from behind his sunglasses. James stood nearby, still mid-conversation, but even he had paused to glance her way. And the man beside the

concierge? He practically bolted as soon as Damien’s eyes sliced in his direction.

Maya hadn’t noticed at first-too focused on fussing with the hem of her shorts for what felt like the hundredth time.

Her heart thudded beneath it, sharp and uncertain.

Why did I let Harper talk me into this?

They’d gone back and forth upstairs like two toddlers in a tug-of-war.

“There’s nothing wrong with the red one,” Harper had argued, arms crossed, expression fierce.

“You’re young, hot, and on an island. Stop dressing like a librarian on shore leave.”

“It’s bright. And clingy. And red!” Maya had shot back, holding up the bikini like it was a dangerous weapon.

“It screams look at me, and that is not the energy I’m going for!”

Chapter 124

“It screams I’m alive, babe. You’re twenty-five, not seventy. Own it.”

In the end, Maya had only gotten Harper to back off by insisting on keeping her jean shorts- and unbuttoning the white linen polo for some kind of balance. Originally, Harper wanted her to wear just the long white shirt over the bikini.

“It’s breezy. It’s chic. Let the world breathe,” she’d said dramatically.

But the shirt was so thin, Maya felt practically naked the moment sunlight hit it. It may as well have been made of mist.

So now, standing in the lobby with all eyes subtly (or not-so-subtly) drifting toward her, she felt a hot flush creep up her neck.

This is why I didn't want to wear this.

She tugged at the edge of her open polo, fingers brushing the waist of her jean shorts. They were a small comfort-something grounded, something hers.

Beside her, Harper glowed like a sun goddess who hadn't doubted her outfit for a second.

Maya, on the other hand, was hyperaware of everything-the way her top floated open with every step, the heat on her cheeks, the feel of Damien's gaze pressing in like a slow burn she couldn't ignore.

Harper's fearless boldness always made her wonder how anyone could carry that kind of energy so effortlessly. It was both a shield and a gift, something Maya wished she could borrow for just a moment.

"Okay, you are definitely being stared at," Harper whispered beside her, a wicked grin spreading across her face.

"And not just by Mr. Tall, Dark and Mine-Mine-Mine over there."

Maya's brows knit together. "What are you-"

“Oh come on,” Harper cut in, looping her arm through Maya’s and dragging her forward.

“Let’s go say hi to our very beach-ready bosses. Don’t trip-we’re walking in slow motion now.

“What-what are you talking about-?”

“Slow. Motion. Baywatch moment. Just go with it.”

The two of them crossed the lobby, sunlight pooling in behind them like some kind of golden spotlight. Harper looked positively glowing in mustard yellow, but Maya… Maya was unintentionally stealing the entire show.

As they neared, Ashcroft gave an appreciative nod and let out a low, theatrical hum.

“Ladies. You’ve officially raised the island temperature.”

Harper struck a pose, flipping her beach tote dramatically.

“We aim to please. You like the outfit? It’s ‘Tropical Chic on a Budget.’ Catch it on the runway never.”

Damien’s gaze never left Maya. He still hadn’t said a word.

But when she stopped in front of him-closer now-her eyes met his for the first time since stepping out of the elevator.

And something passed between them.

Unspoken.

Electric.

“Boss?” James prompted gently, nudging his arm.

Damien blinked.

Too slow.

Too obvious.

He cleared his throat, forcing his gaze toward James with a sharp nod, as if remembering where he was.

“Right. Let’s get started.”

But his voice had dropped half an octave-and every syllable still lingered on her skin. Benea th the cool facade, a storm quietly raged.

Chapter 125

Beneath the surface calm, tension hummed quietly as the group readied for their next move.

James, ever the professional, cleared his throat. “Afternoon activities are set, sir. Jet skis are on standby, and the boat is ready for island hopping at your convenience.”

Ashcroft clapped once. “Fantastic. I’m voting jet skis first. Let’s ride some waves, maybe cause a little scandal, hmm?”

“Of course you are,” Harper replied, already slipping her sunglasses down and tossing Maya a grin. “You hear that? We’re going full movie montage today. Beach, breeze, drama.”

Damien’s eyes flicked to Maya. His jaw worked once before he finally spoke-voice low, smooth, tightly reined in.

“You good to ride?”

Maya blinked, caught off guard. “Me?”

He gave the faintest nod, expression unreadable. “Unless you’d rather stay in the cabana.”

She tilted her head slightly, her heart already picking up pace. “No, no… I’ll join. I want to experience it.”

His mouth curved-just a hint, almost imperceptible. But Maya saw it. Felt it.

“I’ll go slow,” he said, voice even softer now. “Gentle… I promise.”

Her breath caught.

It was the way he said it-the low timbre of his voice, the heat simmering in his eyes. Like he wasn’t just talking about jet skis… like he meant something else entirely.

Maya flushed, a soft “Mm, okay,” slipping from her lips before she could even think of anything better to say.

Behind her, Harper leaned toward Ashcroft with a hand half-shielding her mouth. “This is why I live for vacation romance.”

Ashcroft whispered back, “It’s not vacation romance when the man’s ready to murder everyone who looks at her.”

Maya glanced between them. “What are you two whispering about?”

Harper grinned like a cat with cream. “Nothing you can’t feel burning holes in your back.”

Before Maya could respond, Damien stepped aside, ever composed, and gestured subtly toward the winding path behind him. “Let’s go.”

She hesitated just half a beat-then moved. Past him. Her shoulder brushing his arm as she passed. Her skin tingled.

Ashcroft fell into step beside Damien. “You sure you’re good to jet ski, Romeo? You look a little… unsteady.”

Damien didn’t even glance at him. “I’m fine. I’ll manage.”

“Of course you will.” Ashcroft’s smirk widened. “You wouldn’t survive being the one holding on.”

The path curved and opened into a picture-perfect beach view-turquoise water glittering, white sand pristine, and three sleek jet skis lined up near the shore like they were waiting for a magazine shoot.

Maya's eyes widened slightly. Only three?

James stood off to the side, hands behind his back, clearly proud of his strategic setup.

Three jet skis. Four of them.

Which meant someone was riding tandem.

Maya barely had time to process that before Harper nudged her side with a sharp gasp. When she turned, her friend was already mouthing oh my god-both hands dramatically pressed to her cheeks like they were in the middle of a K-drama.

Then Harper bounced forward like they were heading into a music video.

"I know how to ride!" she called over her shoulder. "So I got dibs on one! And I'm riding solo- sorry, BFF! You'll have to ride with your man." She winked. "Unless, of course, you'd rather ride with Good Sir over here…" She gestured flamboyantly at Ashcroft.

Ashcroft held up both hands in mock surrender. "Nope. Sorry, sis. I like speed. That's not a risk I'm willing to take. D's your safest bet." He smirked. "He'll take care of you."

The two of them strolled off, already laughing, grabbing life jackets and talking over each.

other.

Maya remained frozen in place.

Beside her, Damien stood quiet, unreadable-until he turned to her, jaw tight, sunglasses hanging from his fingers.

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“…Shall we?” he asked, voice low and strangely careful.

Maya hesitated, nerves bubbling in her chest.

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But then she nodded. Once.

And followed.

Her heart was pounding, her pulse fluttering beneath her skin-like a bird trapped, desperate to break free. Every step toward the dock felt heavier, charged. Like “slow and gentle” hadn’t just been a promise.

It had been a warning.

Damien guided her toward the dock where three jet skis waited, engines rumbling softly against the gentle tide.

Harper didn’t hesitate. With a practiced flick, she slipped off her button-down and shimmied out of her shorts, revealing the full curve-hugging glory of that bikini. She looked effortlessly confident, sun-kissed, and ready for her magazine cover moment. Then she tossed on a life jacket and tied her hair tighter like a woman on a mission.

Ashcroft strolled up beside her, all lazy charm and ease, then shrugged off his short-sleeved

floral shirt in one smooth motion-like he’d done it a thousand times in front of an audience.

Holy hell.

Even Maya’s mouth parted slightly.

His torso was a work of art-defined pecs, a six-pack that glistened under the sun, and a full sleeve tattoo on his right arm, intricate and dark, curling from his shoulder down to his wrist. His skin gleamed bronze and taut, muscles flexing with every breath like he'd just stepped out of a photoshoot.

Harper let out a dramatic gasp. "Holy hell! Sexy Billionaire just entered the group!" She gave him a playful once-over. "If you weren't the boss's best friend-and practically my future honorary cousin-I'd be drooling right now."

Ashcroft flashed a shameless grin. "Three workouts a week, sweetheart. Gotta maintain the

"1

merchandise." He tossed her a wink. "So go ahead, Ms. Lin-drool all you want. I live to serve.

Harper fanned herself, then burst out laughing.

Then Damien moved.

He said nothing-just unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off.

And the air shifted.

Maya's breath caught.

Damien didn't just look good-he looked unreal.

His chest was broad and solid, his muscles cut so clean and precise it was like someone had sculpted him. His abs weren't just defined-they were an eight-pack, ridged and hard, glistening with a faint sheen of sweat and salt.

The V-line. God.

It disappeared into his low-slung swim shorts and Maya had to snap her gaze upward before her thoughts got completely hijacked.

No tattoos. No distractions.

Just pure, disciplined strength-all power and restraint and raw male heat.

Harper gaped beside her. "Okay, correction. Boss is the one who's gonna make me faint. Maya, how are you still standing?!"

Maya tried to act normal, but her throat was dry, her pulse thundering in her ears.

She covered it with a nervous laugh. “I-uh-have no comment.”

Damien’s eyes flicked to her then, hearing that. And the slow, unmistakable curve of a smirk touched his lips.

He knew.

He glanced at her briefly, a flicker of something unspoken passing between them before his mask slid back into place.

And now Maya was officially not okay.

Ashcroft threw his hands up. “Unbelievable. I was having a moment here!”

Then he glanced at Damien-who was now effortlessly shirtless and looking like something carved out of marble-and groaned louder. “What the actual fuck, man? How?! Aren’t you supposed to be buried in boardrooms, signing mergers, watching the stock market or some shit?”

Damien gave a slow blink, then that maddening, barely-there smirk curved his lips. “I multitask.”

Ashcroft turned to Harper. “Three workouts a week, and for what? This guy shows up with

eight abs, no tattoos, and that evil V-line and suddenly I'm chopped liver."

"Correction," Harper said with a smirk, "delicious chopped liver. But yeah… boss-man just dropped a visual bomb on all of us."

Then she turned to Maya and wiggled her brows. "Speaking of bombs-your turn, babe. Come on, undress. Equal opportunity thirst trap."

Maya blinked. "Wait-what?"

Harper gestured to Maya's loose white shirt and shorts. "Off. Now. That red bikini isn't gonna show itself."

Maya blinked, cheeks burning hotter as Harper's words pulled her back to reality. Her fingers hesitated again at the hem of the shirt, a flutter of nerves rising in her chest. Her heart was already pounding-but not from nerves about the water. It was the heat of his eyes on her. She didn't even have to look to know Damien was watching. And it wasn't casual.

It was quiet hunger.

Taking a deep breath, she slowly peeled off her shirt, then slid her shorts down her legs. The sun hit her skin and so did the silence-thick, charged.

Maya's skin glowed porcelain-smooth against the fiery red fabric that hugged every curve of her body. The bikini top framed her delicate collarbones and the gentle swell of her breasts, while the high-cut bottoms accentuated the graceful line of her hips and the slender length of her legs.

The color seemed to ignite a subtle radiance from within her, making her look almost ethereal-like a flame wrapped in silk. Every inch of her was both vulnerable and fiercely beautiful, a perfect blend of softness and strength that left no doubt she was ready to step fully into the spotlight.

Harper gave a quiet "mmhmm!" of approval and tossed her a life jacket. "You're welcome, Boss!"

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The island's heat settled heavily over them, thick and sweet like the promise of something

electric in the air.

Damien's breath hitched-deep and uneven-as his eyes roamed over Maya's flawless body, clad in that fiery red bikini that left little to the imagination. The way the fabric hugged her curves, the gentle swell of her breasts, the tautness of her stomach, the smooth expanse of her hips-it ignited something primal inside him.

His pulse hammered in his ears, heat pooling low and fierce, tightening his muscles, making his jaw tense as a surge of desire coiled in his gut. If they were alone, right now, he wanted to pull her into the shadowed quiet, press his lips to the curve of her neck, taste the warmth of her skin beneath his fingertips, and leave marks-his marks-that would claim her

completely.

He imagined trailing his hands slowly down her side, feeling the soft tremble under his touch, the rapid flutter of her breath matching his own. The thought of losing himself in her, of making her his in a way that went beyond words, sent a shiver straight through his body.

Ashcroft gave Damien a quick nudge with his elbow, smirking like he was sharing a secret.” Whoa there, Big D. Save some of that fire-this isn’t a private show. Keep it classy… for now.”

Damien’s eyes shifted away, his expression settling back into that cool, unreadable mask. But the heat simmering beneath never faded-it only hinted at the storm waiting just beneath the surface. He’s trying to hold back… for reasons he won’t say.

Maya’s chest fluttered, her pulse hammering against her ribs as she caught the barest glimpse of that hunger behind his control. The way his muscles tensed, the sharp line of his jaw-it was like he was holding himself back… just for her.

Her skin flushed hotter, a delicious mix of fear and desire curling low in her belly. What is he really feeling? She wanted to reach out, to break through that calm facade and see everything he tried so hard to hide.

And even with Ashcroft’s teasing interruption, Maya felt a quiet flutter stir deep inside her-a mix of nervous excitement and curiosity. The storm Damien hinted at felt distant but undeniable, like a gentle warning rather than a roar.

She wasn’t sure she was ready to face it fully yet, but for the first time, the idea didn’t scare her as much as it intrigued her. Maybe, just maybe, she could step a little closer to that fire-a t her own pace.

The sun had finally broken through the veil of clouds, casting shimmering gold across the

sea like liquid fire. The ocean sparkled under it-inviting, daring, alive.

Harper let out a gleeful whoop as she adjusted her life vest.

“The sun won’t be up forever, people! Let’s go before it changes its mind!” She climbed onto her jet ski like she owned the ocean, flipped her ponytail, and tossed a wink at Maya. “Catch me if you can!”

Ashcroft was right behind her, already peeling away from the dock.

“You heard the woman! Time to make some waves!”

Their engines roared, and in a spray of white foam, they were off-leaving Maya blinking in

their wake.

She turned just as Damien stepped closer, the heat of his presence curling around her like a

second sun.

“Here,” he murmured, voice low and smooth, “put your foot there… now swing your leg over.”

She climbed onto the jet ski carefully, trying not to make a fool of herself. But once she was seated behind him, her brow furrowed.

“You’re not wearing a life jacket?”

Damien turned his head slightly, his eyes catching hers. “I’m a good swimmer.”

A beat. Then he added with a slow, roguish smirk, “But thanks for worrying about me.”

He winked.

And her brain flatlined.

Because yes-he was bare-chested. The sun caught the sharp angles of his shoulder blades, the sleek line of muscle down his spine, the subtle glisten of sea spray on skin. Every inch of him looked like a sin sculpted for daylight. Tanned. Defined. Real.

Chapter 128

Maya blinked. Swallowed. Looked away.

Focus. Just hold on. Pretend you're not internally combusting.

"You're going to need to hold on tight," Damien said, voice dipping a notch lower.

Hesitating only slightly, Maya slid her arms around his waist. Her fingers grazed his bare skin, and her breath hitched.

Oh, my God.

He was so warm-so solid. Heat radiated off him in waves, and her palms instinctively flattened against the carved ridges of his abdomen. It wasn't just muscle-it was control, power, restraint. And yet somehow… comfort.

Her cheek brushed his back, and she could feel it. His heartbeat. Fast. Steady. And not

unaffected.

Damien tensed just enough to notice-but didn't pull away. Her arms fit around him too perfectly. Too naturally. Her breasts pressed lightly into his back, cushioned by the life vest, but the heat between them was unmistakable.

Shit.

He clenched the handlebars tighter. Every inch of her against him was temptation. The scent of sunscreen, salt, and her wrapped around him like a second skin. One tug, and he'd be lost.

If they were alone, he wouldn't hesitate.

Her skin on mine, her legs straddling me, her mouth just over my shoulder-I'd turn around and kiss her until she forgot the damn ocean existed.

"Ready?" he asked, throat dry.

Maya's voice wavered.

"Yeah."

But in her head, it screamed: This is a terrible idea… But God, she liked it.

Being this close to him-feeling the heat radiating off his skin, the subtle flex of muscle when he moved-it did something to her. A slow, aching hum unfurled in her belly, coiling low with every second that passed.

Choli M. Hear Between the Waves 2

It wasn't just attraction – The pull. The longing. The curiosity she didn't dare name.

The engine roared to life beneath them. Water sprayed up in glittering arcs as they surged forward into the waves. The wind sliced across her face, sharp and sweet. She gripped Damien tighter, her thighs hugging his hips, and the vibration of the ride traveled through her body like a live wire.

Fast. Free. Dangerous.

And beneath it all… him.

Damien cut through the water like he owned it, his body shifting with each turn. Every move dragged her closer, every wave sent her pressed flush against him. And every second, he burned hotter.

Her skin. Her breath. Her goddamn thighs.

It was torture. And it was everything he didn't know he needed.

Ashcroft's voice rang out over the roar of the waves, loud and unapologetically amused.

"Yo, lovebirds! Try not to turn that jet ski into your honeymoon suite!"

Maya blushed furiously, her whole body warming beneath Ashcroft's taunt.

Damien didn't flinch. His smirk deepened, eyes still on the water-but now there was a dark, sharp glint in them, territorial and intense.

Honeymoon suite? Oh, he'd love that.

Without missing a beat, he called back over his shoulder, voice rich with challenge.

"Careful, Ashcroft-jealousy doesn't suit you." He shot back with a sly grin,

"Maybe it's time to get the elders to start pushing that arranged marriage for you."

Ashcroft fired back immediately, gripping the handlebars tighter.

“Hell no! I’m way too charming to be married off just yet.”

The group of four enjoyed the sun and water, their laughter mixing with the steady roar of the waves. The spray of saltwater on their skin, the rush of the wind, and the endless blue horizon stretched out before them-a perfect escape from everything else.

Maya gradually started to relax, the initial nervous flutter in her chest giving way to pure exhilaration. The thrill of the speed, the feel of Damien’s steady presence, and the freedom of the open sea combined into a heady mix she hadn’t expected.

Her hands gripped his waist a little less tightly now, her breath syncing with the rhythm of the waves. Being this close to him-really close-stirred something deep inside her: a pull she didn’t want to resist, a curiosity laced with desire she was only beginning to understand.

For a moment, all the noise and worry fell away. It was just them, the sea, and the heat between the waves.

Chapter 129

By the time they pulled back up to shore, Maya’s pulse was still racing-and not from the jet

ski.

Damien killed the engine with a smooth flick, then twisted slightly to look at her.

“You alright?”

She nodded, trying not to stare at the way his back flexed as he moved.

“1-yeah. That was…”

“Fun?” His voice was low, teasing.

Sinful, she almost said. Instead, she gave a breathless little laugh. “Yeah. Fun.”

He dismounted easily, water sluicing off his legs as he waded to the shore, then turned back

and offered his hand.

Maya hesitated a moment before taking it. His fingers curled around hers, strong and warm, sending a fresh jolt of heat through her chest.

“You’re trembling,” he murmured, helping her off the jet ski.

“I’m not-” Her protest was cut off as she stepped into the shallow water and nearly lost her balance.

“Ah-!”

Damien caught her instantly, arms around her waist as she stumbled forward-straight into his bare chest.

Her hands landed against his skin. Hot. Wet. Solid.

They both froze.

The waves lapped at their ankles, gentle and rhythmic, but the air between them had gone completely still.

Her hair was dripping. Her cheeks were flushed. She was pressed flush against him, and for a single suspended second, neither of them moved.

Then-

“LOOK OUT!”

A wave crashed against them, hard and sudden. Maya yelped as she lost her footing, toppling forward and taking Damien with her.

They hit the wet sand in a tangled heap-her straddling his waist, hands splayed on his chest, her soaked bikini clinging to every curve.

Damien groaned softly, blinking up at her as water dripped from her hair onto his face.

“Are you trying to kill me?”

Her eyes widened.

“Oh my God-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to-‘

But his hands were already at her hips, steadying her. Holding her.

“You have no idea what you’re doing to me right now,” he muttered under his breath.

An unexpected thrill surged through her, warm and wild, tightening her grip on the moment.

She was fully aware of how indecent this looked. Her knees on either side of him. The heat of his body between her thighs. Her soaked bikini top barely hiding her already-heated skin. Her life jacket had loosened in the fall. She could feel the tremor in his hands.

This was not how this was supposed to go.

But she couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. Couldn't stop staring at the hunger in his eyes.

"MAYA!" Harper's voice called from a distance. "Are you guys making out or drowning?!"

They both blinked.

Maya scrambled off him with a mortified gasp, grabbing at her loosened vest.

"I-We-Nothing happened!"

Damien let out a low, amused breath and sat up, wiping the water from his face. His eyes met hers, and though he said nothing, the look said everything.

If we were alone, I wouldn't have let you up so fast.

Harper came jogging over, grinning like the devil. “You okay?”

Maya nodded too quickly.

“Yeah. Just… slipped.”

Ashcroft arrived a few steps behind, raising a brow at the sight of Damien still shirtless-

sand clinging to his skin, hair dripping, eyes dark with something unspoken-as Maya flushed every possible shade of pink.

“Slipped, huh?” he drawled.

Harper didn’t miss a beat.

“Slipped… and straddled.”

“Shut up,” Maya hissed, mortified.

Damien stood and brushed the sand from his hands. Calm. Cool. Collected-except for the way his gaze lingered on her one last time before he turned toward the towels.

It wasn’t over. Not by a long shot.

And Maya felt it-in every part of her still-throbbing body.

Chapter 130

The others had moved farther up the shore, Harper tugging Ashcroft toward the beach bar for fresh fruit skewers and rum smoothies. Maya lingered near the edge of the towels, still catching her breath-legs unsteady for reasons that had little to do with the waves.

Damien stood a few feet away, brushing sand off his arms, the sun casting a golden sheen across his wet skin. His board shorts clung low on his hips, droplets sliding down his back in slow, unhurried trails.

He turned, holding out a towel. “Here.”

Maya hesitated before taking it. “Thanks…”

Her fingers grazed his, and her skin tingled at the contact-too aware. Of everything. Of him. Of the way her body still hummed from earlier. She could feel the phantom imprint of his hands on her waist, the way he steadied her… held her… wanted her.

She turned away quickly, wrapping the towel tighter around herself-covering more than just her skin. “You’re not even cold.”

Damien’s voice was closer than she expected. “I run hot.”

No kidding.

She glanced up. He was staring at her again. Not in that fierce, burning way from before-but quieter now. Focused. Like she was something rare and breakable and worth keeping. The pull between them tightened-fine as silk, impossible to sever.

“You’re not scared of anything, are you?” she murmured, eyes fixed on the horizon. “You drove like you’ve done this a thousand times-fast, in control. Like the waves couldn’t touch you.”

She paused, then looked up at him, voice softer now-more raw.

“You didn’t even wear a life jacket.” Her fingers tightened around the towel. “Aren’t you afraid something might go wrong?”

Damien shrugged one shoulder, a slow smirk tugging at his lips. “I’m a strong swimmer,” he said, voice calm but edged with something softer. He leaned in just slightly, lowering his tone. “Besides… if anything happened to you, I’d be in the water before you even called my name.”

His eyes flickered with amusement, then darkened with something deeper. He took a slow breath, the corner of his mouth tilting into a confident smirk.