Intern 421

Chapter 421

He didn't interrupt. Didn't argue. He simply listened, shoulders tense, eyes fixed on hers like he was afraid to miss a single word.

"I love you," she continued, the admission soft but unflinching. "That's exactly why it hurt so much. Because when you decide things for me-when you protect me by shutting me out-it makes me feel small. Like I have to fit inside the space you allow, instead of standing beside you."

His jaw tightened, but he nodded once, slow. Absorbing it.

"I don't want to disappear in your life," Maya said. "I don't want to be preserved or managed. I want to be chosen-and I want to choose back. Even when it's messy. Even when it scares us."

Silence followed, thick but alive. The garden outside rustled softly, leaves brushing against one another like a quiet reminder that growth was never silent.

Damien's breath shook as he exhaled. "I don't know how to unlearn everything I've relied on," he admitted. "Control kept people safe. It kept me safe."

"I know," she said gently. "I'm not asking you to be perfect, or to forget who you are. And I'm definitely not asking you to change for me. I'm just asking… that you try-with me. Not only around

me, but with me."

His eyes lifted then, something fragile and resolute crossing his face at the same time.

"I'm learning," he said quietly, voice low but earnest. "I swear I am. Let me prove it to you."

She studied him for a long moment. Beyond the glass, the garden stirred as a breeze moved

through the leaves, shadows shifting softly across the floor.

Maya nodded. "So am I," she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper.

After a beat, she added, almost to herself, "This is new for me too…. standing my ground with someone I love. Saying no, even when it's easier to stay silent. I… I want this to work. I want us to

work." Her gaze lifted, eyes glistening, searching his, trembling just slightly.

A corner of his mouth lifted-not a full smile, not relief-but something softer. Something that carried respect… and understanding.

“I don’t want quiet from you” Damien said, his voice low, rough around the edges, as if it had to fight its way out. “I want honesty. All of it. Even when it hurts. Especially then.”

She responded with a slow nod, her heartbeat easing just slightly.

They stayed like that, foreheads resting together, the space between them no longer a wound-but

a promise.

Not that everything was fixed. Not that nothing would hurt again. Only that this time, neither of

them was hiding.

Damien pulled back just enough to lift her hands, enclosing them in his own. He pressed a soft kiss to her knuckles, lingering a moment, before letting his gaze meet hers again.

“I’m so sorry, love,” he whispered, his voice low, trembling with earnestness. “Please… can you forgive me?”

Maya exhaled slowly, her gaze softening. She nodded, letting the weight of the moment settle. “I

forgive you,” she said quietly.

Relief shattered through him. He pulled her into a tight embrace, holding her as if letting go even for a second might make her vanish.

“I love you… so much, Maya. Please…. be patient with me, okay? Don’t give up on me. Please.”

His voice broke, rough and unfamiliar, as a few tears slipped down his face-a sight so rare it almost didn’t feel real. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d cried-probably when he was eight, a boy long ago swallowed by the man he’d become.

Maya felt the trembling of his shoulders against hers. Then, warm and unmistakable, she noticed the wetness on her shoulder.

She pulled him closer, holding him tight, and whispered softly, “I love you too, Damien. I promise… I’m not going anywhere.”

He held her tighter, really tight, burying his face into the side of her neck. “I missed you so much,” he murmured, his voice trembling. “The silence… it was killing me.”

His words wavered, raw and unsteady. “Don’t shut me out like that again, okay? You scared me. I was so terrified I’d lost you-and it takes a lot to scare me. If I do something wrong… tell me. Please.”

Maya pressed herself against him, arms tightening around his back as if to anchor him to her. Her hands ran along the curve of his shoulders, holding him steady.

“I won’t,” she whispered, her voice trembling just enough to carry the weight of her promise. “I promise.”

Damien exhaled slowly. “Thank you, love.”

The space between them shifted-less tension now, replaced by understanding, a fragile truce carved from honesty and trust.

He lifted his gaze to hers, eyes dark, intense, and unguarded. For a heartbeat, the world shrank to

just the two of them.

Then, without a word, he leaned in. Their lips met in a kiss that was raw, urgent, and trembling with

emotion.

At first, it was soft, testing, a gentle press as if both were afraid to shatter the fragile moment. But almost immediately, it deepened-his lips seeking hers with a desperate need, hers responding

with the same hunger.

Her hands threaded into his hair, pulling him closer, while his hands curved around her waist,

drawing her body flush against his. Each inhale was ragged, each exhale a confession. She could

feel the tremor in his chest, hear the sharp intake of his breath, taste the salt of tears he hadn't yet wiped away.

They broke apart for only a second-just enough to gasp, to cling tighter-and then came back

together, urgency growing, hearts hammering in sync. The kiss was no longer just a release of desire-it was a release of fear, of longing, of everything unspoken, everything withheld.

When they finally pulled back, foreheads pressed together, breaths mingling, the world had shrunk

to the warmth of their shared heartbeat. Her fingers lingered in his hair, his hands in hers, and the silence that followed wasn't empty-it was heavy, intimate, impossibly full.

He rested his forehead against hers, voice low and ragged. "I've missed you… every second we

weren't like this."

She smiled softly, breath shaky, and whispered, "Me too…"

Damien captured her lips again, hunger in every movement. His hands roamed her sides, lips trailing down her neck. Maya tilted her head, letting him, a soft moan slipping past her lips.

Slowly, his lips traced upward again, brushing against her earlobe. His voice was a husky whisper, teasing and full of longing.

"Do you really have to sleep with Jaime tonight?"

Chapter 422

Maya's breath caught as his words settled between them, low and intimate, heavy with everything

he wasn't saying.

For a moment, she didn’t answer.

The air around them felt charged now-thicker, warmer-like the fragile calm they’d rebuilt was giving way to something far more dangerous.

Damien’s hands remained at her sides, firm and grounding, his presence surrounding her completely. The world outside the room felt distant, irrelevant.

She swallowed, fingers tightening briefly against his chest, grounding herself even as her body

melted closer to his.

“Yes,” she said softly at last, her voice unsteady but honest. “I do.”

Her gaze flickered between his eyes. “Not because I don’t want to be with you…” she admitted

softly, voice trembling. “I just… I want to spend a little more time with him before his operation.”

Damien didn’t step back.

Instead, he drew closer, heat radiating off him, tension coiled in every muscle. His jaw tightened, a

low, guttural sound escaping-neither frustration nor surrender, just raw need.

Maya's breath stuttered.

He captured her lips again, groaning as the kiss deepened, urgent and consuming.

Heat surged between them, raw and unrelenting, and a soft, breathy moan escaped Maya, trembling against his mouth.

She gently pulled back, her hand resting over his chest as she gave him a soft push. Her gaze

lifted, locking with his-eyes misty, flushed, mirroring the hunger in Damien's.

"But…" she murmured, her voice husky, almost breathless. "That doesn't mean I have to leave right

now."

Damien’s eyes darkened at her words.

Right now.

The space between them shrank to nothing. His hand slid from her side to her lower back, resting there-possessive but restrained, a quiet reminder of how easily he could pull her closer.

Her pulse fluttered beneath his gaze-the hitch in his breath, the tension in his jaw. Restraint and

desire warred, and she felt it all.

“Maya..” he murmured, her name rough and husky on his tongue.

She drew in a slow, steadying breath, trying to calm herself-but her body betrayed her, heat pooling low and insistent, awareness sharpening under the thin fabric of her shirt.

“Damien…” she whispered, voice trembling.

His thumb traced her lower lip, warm and possessive, capturing her full attention. “Shh…” His voice

was low, husky-commanding without force. “Today… I realized something.”

Maya tilted her head slightly, eyes soft but searching, her voice barely above a whisper. “And… what would that be?”

His gaze pierced hers, dark and unrelenting, every heartbeat echoing in the charged silence between them. “I’ve realized…” His voice trembled, thick with need, raw and ragged. “That I’d rather lose everything… everything… than lose you.”

He swallowed hard, his chest rising as if each word cost him something. “I realized I can’t live without you. Not a day. Not a breath. Not a single moment.”

Heat radiated between them as he hovered close, eyes burning with a need that threatened to consume them both.

His mouth brushed hers, slow and unhurried, his breath warm against her lips.

“You’re the only woman who’s ever mattered enough to break me,” he murmured, his hand sliding

down her spine, fingers settling at the curve of her lower back. “And I don’t break for anyone…”

His teeth grazed her lower lip before he kissed along her jaw, down the curve of her throat, feeling her pulse race beneath his mouth.

“But you…” he whispered against her skin. “You’re the one thing I’ve ever wanted badly enough to

lose control for.”

His grip tightened just slightly at her waist, drawing her flush against him so she could feel exactly

how much control he was losing.

She felt him-solid, heated, unmistakable-pressed against her, every inch of him restrained by

sheer will.

“I don’t give myself halfway,” he continued, lips brushing her ear, voice dropping lower. “When I choose someone… I choose completely.”

His thumb slid beneath her chin, lifting her face back to his as his other hand moved slowly along her side, fingertips grazing skin beneath the thin fabric.

Chapter 423

“I want you,” he murmured, his hand rising to cradle her face, tilting it so she couldn’t look away.” Every inch. Every part of you. Just you… all of you.”

Maya’s breath hitched, eyes glistening as warmth unfurled low in her stomach. Her hands pressed against his chest, steadying herself against the solid warmth of him.

Her lips parted, her voice trembling under the weight of it all. “Then take me,” she whispered, trembling but certain. “I’m yours, Damien. All of me”

His mouth crashed back to hers-hungry now, claiming no hesitation left, only heat and

possession.

His hand slid beneath her shirt, lifting it inch by inch. He broke the kiss just long enough to pull it over her head, letting it fall behind her.

For a moment, he just looked at her.

The black lace of her bra came into view, delicate against her flawless, porcelain-white skin. The contrast made her seem almost ethereal, yet impossibly, achingly real. His gaze darkened, hunger and admiration mingling as he traced the curve of her body with his eyes.

“Beautiful…” he whispered, his voice thick with desire.

Color bloomed across Maya’s cheeks under the weight of his gaze. For a second, she simply stood there, breath unsteady, eyes lowered as if the intensity of him was almost too much.

Then, slowly-shy but certain-she lifted her hand to his chest.

Her fingers trembled slightly against the firm line of muscle beneath his shirt. He didn't move.

Didn't speak. He just watched her, dark eyes fixed on her face, on the delicate way her lashes fluttered as she gathered her courage.

One button.

Then another.

She worked them open carefully, one by one, her touch hesitant at first, then steadier as the fabric

parted beneath her fingers. Each inch of revealed skin seemed to draw the air tighter between

them.

His jaw tightened, a slow breath leaving him as she pushed the shirt open, exposing the hard planes of his chest. He let it slide from his shoulders, never breaking eye contact.

Maya finally looked up.

Wat

Their gazes locked-hers warm and slightly flushed, his burning with restrained hunger.

Without a word, she pushed the shirt fully from him, letting it fall away.

Now he stood before her bare from the waist up, the heat between them thick and undeniable.

He leaned down, capturing her lips again in a slow, heated kiss, letting his hand wander over the

newly revealed skin, memorizing the softness, the warmth, the tremble of her body beneath him. Every gasp, every shiver she let slip against him fueled the hunger coiling in his chest.

His hand drifted lower, tracing the soft, smooth skin between her breasts. A low, ragged moan

slipped from her lips, warm heat pooling deep within her. He shifted slightly, fingers finding the

clasp of her bra, and slowly, he unhooked it.

The black lace fell away, leaving her fully exposed, vulnerable, and achingly real beneath his gaze.

His eyes darkened, taking her in-the gentle curve of her breasts, the pale, flawless skin flushed

with desire, the taut, rose-colored n*****s already hardening under his attention.

Damien leaned lower, lips brushing along the sensitive column of her neck, trailing teasing kisses

across her warm, bare skin. Maya's fingers threaded into his hair, clutching at him, her breath catching in shuddering gasps.

He cupped her breasts, thumb circling the taut, pink n*****s, lips and tongue brushing, licking, and

sucking in a slow, deliberate rhythm.

Shivers ran down her spine, soft moans slipping free as her body arched instinctively into his

touch. His other hand kneaded her opposite breast, memorizing the weight and softness, coaxing

trembles from her with every careful stroke.

Each gasp, each subtle arch of her hips fed the fire coiling between them, leaving her utterly lost in

him.

The heat between them thickened, almost suffocating in its intensity, but neither pulled back.

Every kiss, every brush of fingers, every whisper of contact was a silent, burning promise-an

ownership neither of them questioned, only surrendered to.

With careful pressure, he guided her down onto the bed, his body following, each movement slow and full of heat, consuming them both in a wave of desire.

As her back met the bed, his lips glided down her stomach, tracing the softness of her skin with teasing, torturous slowness. He left a trail of heat with every brush of his mouth, every whispered exhale against her sensitive flesh.

His fingers traced the hem of her pants, undoing the button and sliding down the zipper. Inch by inch, he pulled them down with deliberate slowness, dragging her closer to the edge of the bed,

until she was left clad only in the delicate black lace beneath.

He hovered above her, letting his fingers trace the edge, teasing the sensitive skin beneath before gliding over the heated folds, circling her core. Her back arched, a shuddering gasp escaping her lips as every nerve came alive under his touch.

Every movement was reverent yet insistent-his fingers gliding, tracing her core as if it were the only thing in existence. Each touch drew soft whimpers, every glide coaxed a shiver or an arch of her hips. Her body leaned into him, guiding him, fanning the fire between them.

Time stretched, each second magnified. The tension crackled, thick and almost tangible, as his hands teased and circled, never rushing, always claiming. Every shiver, every breathless moan she let slip was a declaration of surrender, of need, of the heat she felt for him.

Her back arched instinctively, hips pressing up, lips parting in a sharp, breathless moan. “Damien…”

Her voice, husky and pleading, sent a thrill coursing through him. He leaned down, breath hot against her ear, low and dripping with desire. “You’re so wet… every inch of you is driving me

insane,” he murmured.

Her hips lifted instinctively, pressing into him as her fingers threaded into his hair, tugging him closer. Every gasp, every shiver fueled him further. He brushed his lips along her jaw, whispering her name, slow and possessive. “That’s it… love… feel it… all of it.”

The warmth of her skin beneath his fingers made him groan, deep and low, and she gasped, a shudder running through her that she couldn't hold back.

"God… you feel incredible," he whispered, voice husky, rough, lips grazing the sensitive skin near her ear. "So perfect… so… unbearably perfect.."

Then he leaned down, pressing a slow, searing kiss to her lips, letting the tension linger, letting

every moment stretch deliciously, intoxicatingly, between them.

His hand never paused, tracing teasing patterns over her slick, heated core-slow enough to savor every tremble, deliberate enough to drive her wild, savoring each response.

Her fingers dug into his shoulders as her body arched, pressing closer, driven by pure need.

Ragged moans and breathy cries escaped her, lips parting, eyes closed, lost entirely in him and the ache he provoked.

His eyes burned into hers, raw and unrelenting. In a low, husky voice, he murmured, "You're forever mine, Maya."

Chapter 424

Her moan trembled free-soft, ragged, and utterly helpless. Maya's hands clutched at his shoulders, her fingernails digging into the hard muscle as if letting go simply weren't an option.

“Ah… yes… Damien… mmm… please…”

He smiled against her throat, a low, wicked curve of his lips. Refusing to hurry, he continued his

deliberate, teasing exploration. Each stroke and grazing touch drew her closer to a precipice, leaving her aching with a hollow, pulsing want.

Maya’s fingers tangled in his dark hair again, tugging him closer with a desperate strength. ”

Damien… I…” she gasped, her voice splintering. She was breathless, the words lost to the

thrumming heat between them.

He captured her lips once more, his tongue tracing hers in a slow, consuming kiss-tasting her,

claiming her, devouring the very air she breathed. His hand drifted to the silk of her underwear,

sliding the fabric aside to expose her bare, slick heat to the cool air of the room. Every inch of her

shivered under the sudden contact, her body silently begging for the friction only he could provide.

Now skin-to-skin, Damien moved with torturous precision. He circled, teased, and lingered,

refusing to rush the moment. Every motion was a brand, marking her as his in the silence of the

room.

Maya quivered beneath him, her pulse hammering against her ribs like a trapped bird. She arched

harder, pressing her hips into his, the heat between them becoming unbearable-a fever they both

shared.

As he felt her walls tighten, her breath hitching as she neared the edge, Damien paused. He lowered his forehead against hers, his eyes dark, burning, and devastatingly focused.

His voice was a low, rough rasp that vibrated in her chest. “Tell me to stop,” he murmured, the

command warring with the raw need in his expression. “And I will.”

She didn’t pull away.

Instead, she hooked her arms around his neck, pulling him down until their hearts beat against one another. She felt the power coiled in him, the sheer force of his restraint, and she chose to break it.

“Don’t,” she whispered against his lips.

But Damien had other plans. Seeing her flushed face and sensing the intensity of the moment, he decided to shift the dynamic.

He leaned down, planting a soft kiss on her cheek, then her earlobe. Slowly, agonizingly, his hands

moved to her shoulders, gently creating space between them. He gave one final, maddeningly gentle stroke before whispering, “Mmm… but we have a visitor to attend to.”

Suddenly, he pulled away and stood at the end of the bed.

Maya was left lying on the bed, a mix of confusion and longing on her face. She looked up at him, her chest rising and falling, while Damien watched her from his height. A small, unreadable

expression played on his lips.

“Let’s finish later,” he said simply. He turned around, already starting to walk away.

The unexpected halt in their intimacy sparked a different kind of fire in her. Annoyance flared into a

sudden, bold courage. Maya sat up, kneeling on the very edge of the mattress, her eyes flashing

with a fire he hadn’t expected.

“Damien Blackwood,” she called out, her voice dropping into a low, dangerous warning. “Stop right

there.”

Damien paused. He turned slowly, his gaze darkening as he saw her kneeling there-proud, defiant.

He walked back to her until he was standing directly in front of the bed.

Maya didn’t back down. She reached out, her fingers trembling but certain as she grabbed his belt

and hauled him flush against the mattress.

“How dare you start something you’re not going to finish?” she challenged, her voice a husky dare.

Before he could answer, Maya’s hands moved with a sudden, focused intent. Her fingers found the

heavy buckle of his belt, the metallic click of it opening sounding unnervingly loud in the charged

silence of the room. Damien didn’t move; he stood like a statue, his chest heaving as his eyes

burned into the top of her head.

Next, she worked the button of his pants open. The sound was a sharp snap in the quiet air. Then,

with agonizing slowness, she gripped the tab of his zipper and began to slide it down. The low,

rhythmic rasp of the teeth parting was the only sound between them.

Chapter 425

Maya leaned forward until her face was inches from the hard planes of his stomach, her breath hot against his skin. She planted a row of soft, lingering kisses across his lower abs, feeling the muscles jump and ripple under her touch.

Damien's head fell back, his jaw tight enough to snap. A low, tortured groan escaped him as she continued her deliberate assault on his composure. He was vibrating with the agonizing effort of not touching her, his hands clenched into white-knuckled fists at his sides as he let her take exactly

what she wanted.

With a slow, predatory grace, she pulled his pants down. His c**k sprang free-long, mighty, and

achingly hard. Maya didn't flinch; instead, she gently wrapped her hand around the heated length

of him, stroking him with a rhythmic, maddening softness. At the same time, she leaned in,

planting a trail of searing, velvet-soft kisses across the hard ridges of his abs.

The sound that tore from Damien's throat was no longer a groan-it was a growl, becoming louder,

deeper, and darker with every second of her touch.

“Mmm… Maya… ugh, love…” he rasped, his breath hitching as he teetered on the very edge of losing the control he prized so much.

Then, just as his breathing shattered into jagged, broken gasps, Maya abruptly let go.

Damien’s eyes snapped open.

The sudden loss of her warmth was like a physical blow. She pulled back, tilting her head as she looked up at him with a triumphant, wicked smirk that perfectly mirrored the one he’d worn moments before.

“But you’re right,” she whispered, her voice dripping with sweet, icy irony as she threw his own excuse back in his face. “We have a visitor to attend to.”

With a lingering, mocking pat to his chest, she gently pushed him sideways. Maya slid off the bed with a fluid grace she didn't know she possessed, her bare skin catching the light as she started

walking toward the bathroom.

Damien stood there for a heartbeat, caught entirely off guard, his chest heaving as he watched her retreating back. His eyes darkened several shades, turning into a void of pure, predatory focus. He stepped completely out of the pants she had left pooled on the floor, his movements sudden and sharp.

She didn't get five steps.

Damien lunged. His hand clamped around her thin waist like a vice, the heat of his palm searing against her skin. With a low growl, he spun her around, hauling her flush against his bare chest

before she could even gasp.

He towered over her, his superior height forcing her to tilt her head back to meet his gaze. "Where do you think you're going?" he rasped, his face inches from hers. The air between them was electric, radiating a dangerous, heavy heat that made her lungs feel tight.

Maya forced herself to maintain her composure, her eyes dancing with a defiant light. "I'm going to take a quick shower," she said, her voice breathy but steady. "And then I'm going back downstairs

to attend to our visitor."

Damien’s grip tightened, his fingers splaying possessively over the small of her back.

“Fuck the visitor,” he growled, the words vibrating through her entire body.

Maya arched a perfectly groomed brow, a small, knowing smirk tugging at her lips. “But…

Damien… you were the one who said…”

He silenced her with a kiss that wasn’t a request; it was a total, bruising takeover. It was the sound of his restraint finally snapping, a jagged, desperate thing that consumed her protest before it

could even leave her lungs.

In one fluid, powerful motion, he hooked his hands beneath her thighs and hoisted her up. Maya let

out a muffled cry against his mouth, her legs instinctively locking around his waist, her fingers

knotting into his hair as he drove her backward. Her spine hit the cool, solid surface of the wall, but she barely felt the impact-only the furnace-heat of his skin and the sheer, crushing weight of his

need.

Without breaking the kiss, his hand slid down, fingers hooking into the delicate edge of her black

lace underwear. There was a sharp, sudden snap of elastic, the fabric giving way under his strength, and then it was gone-pooling on the floor like an afterthought.

Chapter 426

Now, there was nothing left between them but friction and fire.

Damien pulled back just an inch, his forehead pressed against hers, his breath coming in ragged, scorched hitches. His eyes were no longer dark; they were black, reflecting a hunger that threatened to unmake them both. He cupped the underside of her hips, lifting her just enough to align her with the heavy, pulsing heat of him.

Then, with a single, slow, and devastatingly deep thrust, he entered her.

Maya's head fell back against the wall, her eyes snapping shut as a sharp, fractured gasp tore from her throat. The sensation was visceral-a tidal wave of fullness and heat that made her entire body shudder. It was too much and yet not nearly enough. Her fingers dug into his shoulders, her nails

marking the hard planes of his back as she arched into him, her breath hitching in a rhythmic,

broken sob.

“Damien…” she choked out, her voice a fragile thread of sound as she clung to his shoulders, her world narrowing down to the friction of his skin against hers.

He didn’t wait. He began to pump-in and out-with a punishing, rhythmic intensity that was somehow still careful, his body shielding hers even as he dismantled her composure. Every thrust was deep and deliberate, a physical conversation that needed no words.

A few moments later, he felt it-the sudden, frantic tightening of her walls as she hit the precipice. Maya’s head fell back against the wall, a broken, high-pitched moan escaping her as her climax began to ripple through her.

Damien didn’t pull back. Instead, he thrust deeper, riding the wave of her arousal, his voice dropping into a dark, gravelly command against her ear.

“Mmm… that’s it, love… come on my c**k. Yeah… feel me… all of it,” he rasped, his own breath hitching as her pleasure triggered his own.

He held her there, her back pinned against the wall, until the initial high settled into a heavy, pulsing heat. Without pulling away, he braced himself and lifted her, carrying her the short distance to the bed. He laid her back against the pillows, her hair fanning out like a dark halo.

He withdrew for only a second-just long enough to position himself over her, his eyes raking over her flushed, beautiful form.

“You’re so fucking perfect,” he growled, the words raw and unpolished.

Then, he entered her again. The second he was back inside her, the pace shifted. He thrust in and

out with a renewed, desperate passion, his hands pinning her wrists to the mattress as they lost themselves entirely in the rhythm.

The sounds echoing in the room were raw and primal-the rhythmic thud of the headboard, the

frantic hitch of their breathing-a testament to the storm that had finally broken between them. Skin collided in a relentless rhythm, breath breaking, tangling, claiming. The world beyond those

four walls ceased to matter.

What began as hunger turned into something fiercer-reclaiming what had almost been stolen. This wasn’t just desire. It was reconnection. It was taking back every inch a misunderstanding had nearly stripped away.

Every thrust was a vow.

Every gasp, a seal.

This wasn’t just passion.

It was reclamation.

Beyond that room, war was already breathing.

Volkov was watching.

Plans were shifting.

Blood would soon be owed.

But here-skin to skin, pulse to pulse-they surrendered to the only war they could control.

And this was the only battlefield where surrender meant winning.

Chapter 427

The storm had finally stilled.

The privacy meant to mend what had fractured between them had done far more than that. It had led to forgiveness. Understanding. Acceptance.

And then something reckless.

Bold. Burning.

They had known each other's bodies before – but this… this had been different.

Deeper. Hungrier. Fiercer.

Even for Damien – a man long past amateur curiosity, long accustomed to control – nothing had

ever felt like that. Not the intensity. Not the surrender. Not the way she had undone him.

Now, exhaustion wrapped around them like a second skin.

Their breaths were still uneven, slowly finding rhythm again.

Maya lay draped across his chest, her skin warm, her fingers lazily tracing invisible patterns along

the firm planes of him. Her hair spilled over his shoulder, soft against his throat.

The heat between them had softened into something warmer now – steadier.

Damien's hand rested at her waist, thumb brushing slow, absent circles as if reassuring himself she

was still there.

Still his.

Still real.

For a long moment, there was nothing but the steady rhythm of two hearts that had chosen each

other.

Then-

Maya's voice broke the quiet.

"So… you're a licensed aviator, huh?"

Damien's lips curved faintly. "Mmm… I thought you knew."

She lifted her chin to look at him. "And how exactly would I know that?"

He glanced down at her, one brow lifting. "Back on the island. I flew the helicopter. Remember?"

Maya squinted. "Oh, that? That's different."

His brows rose higher. "Different how?"

She propped herself up slightly, resting her chin on his chest. "Well, for one, helicopters are smaller. And isn't that… I don't know… easier? Aren't there tons of people who can fly those?"

Damien stared at her for a beat.

Then he gave a low, amused huff.

“Is that what you think?” he asked, an incredulous smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“Easier?” he repeated, “Sure, it may be easier than flying a commercial airliner with three hundred passengers or a private jet that practically lands itself, but it also requires a hell of a lot more than

just sitting there looking pretty.”

Maya grinned, propping herself up on her elbows. “Oh? Do tell, Captain.”

“A helicopter wants to fall out of the sky every second you’re in it,” he said, his voice dropping into

that low, authoritative vibrato she always felt in her bones.

“It’s about coordination. You’re using both hands and both feet just to keep the thing from spinning in circles. It’s constant. It’s exhausting.”

He reached out, his fingers sliding into the hair at the nape of her neck, pulling her just an inch

closer.

“And unlike a jet, it doesn’t have an autopilot to save you if you stop paying attention. You have to

stay focused. You have to stay in control. I actually like that.”

Maya tilted her head, her eyes searching his. “Is that why you like it? Because it forces you to stay

in control?”

The playfulness in his expression flickered, replaced by something more honest, more grounded.

He looked at her-really looked at her-and she realized he wasn’t just talking about the aircraft

anymore.

“Maybe,” he admitted. “Control is survival. But not everything is meant to be controlled.”

A long silence followed – the kind that usually felt peaceful, but now carried a faint, jagged edge. The ease they had shared moments ago began to thin.

Maya exhaled and lifted her gaze to his, her eyes glassy. “I’m worried, Damien,” she whispered, her voice breaking the quiet.

Damien leaned forward, closing the small gap between them. “About what?”N

She slipped from his arms and sat up against the headboard, drawing the blanket to her chest. Her fingers tightened in the fabric as she met his gaze again. The heat from moments ago had vanished, replaced by something fragile.

“About everything that’s about to happen.”

She hesitated, then forced the words out. “What if something goes wrong? What if Volkov sees

through it faster than we think? What if we’re not as prepared as you believe we are?”

Chapter 428

She swallowed, her gaze dropping to her hands as they fidgeted with the blanket in her lap. “What

if…”

The weight of the name-Volkov-reintroducing the danger they had briefly managed to forget.

Damien sat up slowly, the mattress dipping beneath him. He didn't speak. Instead, he reached for her, sliding an arm around her shoulders and pulling her firmly against his side.

Maya didn't resist. She let her head rest against his chest, listening to the steady, grounding rhythm of his heart.

The heat of his skin felt like a silent promise pull her under.

–

– a temporary fortress against the what-ifs trying to

"Volkov is a predator," Damien said, his voice steady now, stripped of any trace of earlier playfulness. "And predators survive on predictability. He thinks he knows me."

He pressed a kiss to the top of her head, then let his hand move in a slow, rhythmic caress along the curve of her shoulder, providing a silent comfort that spoke louder than any words.

"He's looking for the man I was before, Maya. The man who calculated every move based on facts, logic, and cold assets."

He paused, his gaze sharpening as he stared ahead, something colder settling into his expression. “He isn’t prepared for a man who has something to lose that isn’t a line on a balance sheet.”

“That makes you more vulnerable, Damien,” she countered, her voice tight with worry. She shifted closer, her grip firm around his waist as if she could anchor him against the coming storm. “Not stronger.”

“In his world, yes,” Damien conceded with a grim ghost of a smile. “But a man with everything to lose is the most dangerous person in the room. Because he’ll burn the whole room down just to keep one flame alive.”

Maya pulled back, sitting upright so she could look him directly in the eyes. The fear was still there – but now it was threaded with something desperate and fragile. Hope.

“I just want a simple life, Damien. A quiet one,” she whispered, her gaze searching his. “With Jaime. With you.”

He reached up and cupped her cheek, his thumb tracing slowly along her jaw. He didn’t look away. He anchored her with a stare that was as steady as it was fierce.

“And I will do everything in my power to give you that life,” he said, his voice low, more oath than

reassurance. “Just trust me. Okay?”

Maya nodded, the tension in her shoulders finally beginning to ease.

Damien gave her a soft, rare smile the kind he reserved only for her. “And when this is over, I’m going to ask you to marry me.” He leaned in, his lips brushing hers. “And you are going to say yes.”

The certainty in his voice stole the air from her lungs. A small, breathless smile broke through her

lingering worry, her eyes shimmering.

“Yes,” she whispered, the word soft but sure. “I will.”

The word had barely left her lips before Damien claimed her mouth again.

This wasn’t the tender reassurance from moments ago. This was hunger. Possession. Reclaiming.

He moved with a sudden, fluid grace, shifting his weight until he was hovering over her, his body a

warm, heavy anchor. She sank back into the pillows as his hand traced a slow, familiar roam down

the silken curve of her side.

His kisses trailed a path of fire down the column of her neck, his breath hot against her skin.

“Let’s go for a second round,” he murmured against her pulse, his voice rough, low- the sound

alone enough to weaken her.

“Wait… wait,” Maya gasped, her head falling back as a traitorous moan escaped her. “I need to… m

mnh… I need to take a shower. I have to check on Jaime before he falls asleep. I-”

Her protest dissolved into a broken breath as his lips returned to her throat, stealing every

coherent thought she had left.

Chapter 429

“Mmm… not yet,” he murmured against her skin, his voice a low, vibrating growl.

One hand slid from her waist to the small of her back, arching her upward, molding her body to his.

“The shower can wait,” he added, almost lazily. “And I’m sure grandpa has Jaime trapped in a

chess match by now. He's fine."

He pulled back just enough to catch her gaze, his eyes dark with a heat that made her pulse spike.

"But I'm not done with you."

Her hands pressed to his shoulders in weak protest, but the moment his thumb traced a slow

circle along her hip, her resistance melted into a quiet cling.

He felt it.

And he smiled.

"Damien… they're probably wondering where we are," she whispered, though the protest was dissolving with every breath he stole. "And Aunt Alice… she's-mmnh…"

"You worry too much," he murmured against the sensitive curve of her neck, his voice a low

vibration that made her shiver. “My mother will handle her.”

He trailed a line of kisses toward her ear, his smirk audible in his tone. “They’ll assume we’re

talking. Working things out.” A faint smirk touched his lips near her ear. “They’ll know we’re busy.”

He lifted his head just enough to meet her gaze, his eyes dark, steady, unapologetic.

“And they’re right. We’re very busy.”

Before she could argue again, he captured her mouth – deeper this time, slower, more possessive

– silencing her doubts with a kiss that felt inevitable.

As they merged together, his hand began a slow, deliberate glide down the curve of her waist to

her hips, then lower still along her thighs. With a gentle, possessive pressure, he moved one of her

legs aside, creating the space he needed.

He moved over her, his gaze never leaving hers as he slowly found his way back to her.

He slid home with a rhythmic, steady focus, filling the silence of the room with the sound of their joined breaths.

Maya's breath fractured, a broken, helpless sound escaping her as she arched into him. Her eyes fluttered closed, her fingers digging into the firm muscles of his shoulders, anchoring herself to the

only thing that felt real in the world.

It wasn't just the physical sensation-it was the way he filled the hollow ache she had carried for so long. She felt every inch of him, a steady, pulsing reclamation that made her heart race in sync with

his.

He stilled, his forehead resting against hers, their breaths mingling in the hush between them. His eyes were dark – not just with hunger, but with something fiercer.

"I told you I always get what I want, Maya," he rasped. "I was wrong."

"I don't just want you."

His hand tightened at her hip, holding her exactly where he wanted her.

“I need you under me. With me. Every damn way there is.”

Chapter 430

As he spoke, he moved with a slow, agonizingly deep pressure, sliding home until there was no space left between them.

“Mmnh… Damien…”

The name broke from her lips, a fragile thread of surrender as she arched against the sheets. She

wrapped her legs tightly around his waist, pulling him deeper as if she could claim him in return.

He answered with a kiss that swallowed the sound, steady and relentless, until the world narrowed

to heat and breath and the rhythm of them.

As he buried himself deep within her, she felt the raw, pulsing power of him-a rhythmic, relentless

reclamation that made the world outside the room vanish.

Her fingers clawed into the firm muscle of his shoulders, her nails leaving crescents of red against his skin as she dragged him down, seeking the friction, the heat, and the very soul of him.

In this space, there was no shadow of the past and no fear of the future. Any remaining thoughts of the outside world, of Volkov, or even of the morning to come, finally faded into the searing heat of the moment.

Only this.

Only them.

Only him.

Finally, it was a little past midnight by the time the fire between them burned down to embers.

They lay tangled in damp sheets, breathing in sync, skin still warm.

But before sleep could claim her, Maya forced herself upright.

The moment she shifted, a strong arm circled her waist, pulling her back against him.

“Where are you going?” Damien’s voice was rough with sleep as he buried his face in the crook of her neck – warm, possessive – but alert beneath it.

“I’m showering,” she murmured. “Then I’m moving to Jaime’s room. I told you, I want to spend more time with him before his surgery.”

The mention of the surgery acted like a bucket of cold water, momentarily clearing the haze of lust in the room.

His grip didn’t loosen – but it changed.

“Can I join you?” he asked, quieter now.

She slipped from his arms and sat up, wincing faintly at the pleasant ache in her limbs.

Looking back over her shoulder, her hair a tangled cascade down her bare back, she laughed tiredly. “Are you not exhausted?”

Damien’s smirk returned, deepening into a grin that was both wicked and devastatingly handsome.

He sat up, the sheets pooling at his waist, looking entirely too refreshed for a man who had just spent hours “beating the air into submission.”

“Exhausted?” he repeated, the word sounding like a challenge. “You think a couple of rounds is enough to drain me?”

A renewed blush crept up her already flushed cheeks, a soft smile tugging at her lips before she

rolled her eyes and slid out of bed. “You’re ridiculous.”

“And you love it,” Damien said confidently, a knowing smirk settling on his face.

Maya glanced around for her clothes, but they were scattered somewhere beyond reach. Instead, her fingers found Damien’s abandoned white dress shirt on the floor.

She picked it up and slipped it on.

The fabric swallowed her whole.

It hung past her thighs like a dress, the crisp white cotton stark against the warm flush of her skin. She rose slowly to her feet, the shirt falling loosely over her curves.

The soft glow of the bedside lamp mixed with the silver spill of moonlight filtering through the balcony doors. The light caught the sheer outline of her figure beneath the thin fabric, tracing the

subtle silhouette of her body without revealing it.

Bare.

Hidden.

Dangerously tempting.

She had barely taken three steps toward the bathroom when the mattress dipped behind her.

He rose without hesitation, unconcerned by his lack of clothing.

The dim light carved along the hard lines of his body as he closed the distance.

Before she could reach the doorway, he stepped in front of her cutting off her escape.

Close enough that she had to tilt her chin to meet his eyes.

“I can go as many rounds as you want. Just say the word, love,” he murmured, reaching up to tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear. The gesture was unexpectedly gentle – a quiet contrast to the heat still lingering between them.