Intern 72

Chapter 72

Her phone vanished into her bag like a magician's sleight of hand. She turned to James like he was a life raft. "Hi, Mr. Horton!"

Damien gave a brief nod, eyes narrowed.

James-ever the buffer-stepped in smoothly. "Heading home, Ms. Lin?"

"Oh, not yet!" Harper said, still catching her breath. "I'm stopping by the hospital to visit Maya. We've been texting all afternoon, and she said Ms. Janice is bringing her famous lasagna for dinner-ugh, that woman's cooking should be illegal. I had her casserole last week and nearly proposed to her. Like, full-on ring and everything." She made a dramatic chef's kiss gesture. "Ten outta ten."

Damien said nothing-but one brow twitched, the only visible sign of disbelief.

James, ever the composed one, coughed softly into his fist. "That… sounds promising," he said, the corner of his mouth twitching like he was holding back a laugh.

Harper caught the flicker in James's expression and Damien's raised brow.

She gasped, dramatically clutching her chest. "Don't judge me! You haven't lived until you've tasted that woman's cooking. I'd trade my 401(k) for another slice of that casserole. No regrets!"

Then she grinned and pointed at them both. “You two look like you’ve never skipped lunch for lasagna. Amateurs.”

“You’ve been texting her all afternoon?” he asked-too evenly.

Harper blinked. “Yeah… but don’t worry, boss! I wasn’t slacking, I swear!” She held up her hands like she was under oath. “I got all my tasks done first-every last one. I’m a multitasking queen, promise!” She forced a grin. “PR never sleeps… even if I do text a little on the side.”

So she wasn’t asleep.

Wasn’t resting.

She had the energy to text Harper all afternoon… but not him?

Damien’s jaw tensed, fingers flexing once against his side.

The realization wasn’t rational-but it stung. A bitter little knot twisted low in his chest.

She could joke, chat, text all afternoon – But not a single word for him.

He forced himself to breathe, jaw ticking as he reined it all back in-cool, composed, unreadable.

“I’m looking forward to that lasagna,” Harper went on, patting her stomach. “Only ate a salad for lunch to make room. Oh! And I need to get Maya’s size too.”

Damien blinked once, his tone deceptively flat. “Size?”

Harper didn’t miss a beat. “Yeah-bra size! I’ve been trying to get it from Maya so I can order bikinis for the Isla Aurelia trip. She’s being super stubborn about it. If I can’t get it out of her, maybe Jamie or Ms. Janice can be my backup spies.”

She giggled, clearly amused by her own scheme.

Damien said nothing.

He didn’t need to.

His jaw tightened, his shoulders stiffened like granite – an intense, simmering stillness that hung heavy in the air, the kind that warns a storm is coming.

“Bikinis,” Damien repeated, voice low and flat.

Harper’s eyes lit up as she leaned in, a playful grin spreading across her face. “Oh, yes! I found this emerald green one-so gorgeous it practically glows. I swear, it would make her skin look like it’s lit from within.” She tapped her fingers thoughtfully against the elevator wall. “And then there’s red-fiery, bold. Just imagine that on her. Have you seen her skin? Porcelain. Like the sun’s never even touched it. It’s almost unreal.”

She sighed dreamily. “And those curves… Ugh! If I were a switch hitter, I might’ve fallen head over heels for her.” She threw her hands up with mock surrender, chuckling softly. “But nooo, I’m totally straight. Like, one thousand percent. So don’t go getting any ideas!”

Her voice lowered to a teasing whisper, eyes sparkling with mischief. “But honestly? She’s so conservative, it drives me crazy! You know that saying-‘if you’ve got it, flaunt it’? Well, Maya? She’s the exact opposite. Old-lady vibes-mysterious, buttoned-up, like she’s hiding some delicious secret beneath all those layers.”

Then her expression softened into something fond. “And Ms. Janice! That sweet old lady, bless her heart-she told me Maya’s had a lot of suitors. Neighbors, schoolmates, even at the coffee shop where she works. One time, two guys-total testosterone overload, you know?— were trying to impress her so badly, they ended up beating each other up!”

Harper threw her hands up dramatically, laughing. “And Maya? She just flat-out rejected both

of them! The two idiots got fired over the fight. And Maya… well, it’s not her fault. Being beautiful is not a sin! But her no-nonsense boss? Still gave her a warning!”

She shook her head, eyes blazing. “If I’d known her back then, I would’ve marched right into that manager’s office and given him a piece of my mind.”

Harper’s grin softened into something more sincere. “Honestly, Maya’s stronger than most people realize. That’s exactly why I want to get her those bikinis-to help her shine the way she deserves. Who knows? Maybe she’ll even find the man of her dreams on that island.”

Damien’s jaw tightened imperceptibly, his eyes darkening with a storm of protectiveness and something deeper – something almost like jealousy. The thought of Maya shining for someone else tightened his chest in a way he hadn’t expected.

The elevator dinged, breaking the charged silence.

Lobby.

“Oh! This is me!” Harper chirped, completely unaware of the sharp, almost lethal aura simmering just behind her. “Have a good night, boss! Mr. Horton! Bye!”

The elevator doors slid shut, and the car resumed its smooth descent to the private underground valet level.

Silence settled between them, heavy and taut.

Damien’s voice broke it-low, clipped, almost brittle.

“Are you sure you gave her the right number?”

James, calm and unreadable, slowly turned to meet Damien’s gaze.

“Positive, sir.”

Damien said nothing more.

His fingers were steady-but inside, a storm churned. An impatient, restless ache that pulsed like a warning.

He pulled out his phone again. The screen lit his face in the dim elevator.

No messages.

No missed calls.

Not even a damn emoji.

James saw it-the twitch in Damien’s jaw, the fire barely held behind his eyes.

The girl had done what boardrooms, empires, and billions hadn’t:

Made Damien Blackwood wait.