

Chapter 858 Proximity

Adah acted on pure instinct, focused solely on making Allan pay for his teasing. She didn't think about trajectory or consequence. When Allan jerked sideways at the last possible second, her hand landed—through some cruel cosmic joke—high on his inner thigh, inches from disaster. A precarious, intimate spot. Her palm had grazed something it absolutely should not have.

Allan hadn't seen it coming. Neither had Adah. For one suspended heartbeat, they locked eyes in mutual, horrified shock.

She'd grabbed hard. Allan should've crumpled. But shock delayed everything—even pain. Several seconds ticked by before he finally dragged in a sharp, hissing breath.

The moment he flinched, Adah jolted back to awareness, her face erupting in flames. Her brain screamed at her to move, but her hand stayed frozen in place, as though she'd forgotten the basic mechanics of pulling away.

Allan's voice came out low and rough. "Planning to leave it there all day? Bit of an audience for that, don't you think?"

Adah's stomach dropped. She yanked her hand back like she'd touched a hot stove. As she did, she swept her gaze around the cabin and realized—with sinking horror—that everyone wore the same expression. That knowing, barely concealed look.

Cole lifted one deliberate eyebrow and then turned toward the window with theatrical disinterest.

Elliana let out a quiet laugh and shrugged, her face saying, "Oh, I saw it all. Not braced for the scene, though."

Rita and Sophie dropped their chins, suddenly very committed to pretending they'd been napping.

The rest of the staff glanced anywhere but at Adah, mouths twitching

Mortified didn't even come close. Adah turned on Allan, voice strangled and furious. "Get. Out."

But as the initial shock wore off, something almost blissful flickered across Allan's face. He leaned closer, voice dipping into dangerous territory. "So you touch me where you want and then throw me out? Quite heartless, you know."

For someone who looked so polished, his mouth was filthy.

Adah felt rage and embarrassment collide. "Allan—one more word and I swear I'll stitch your lips together!"

He mimed zipping his mouth shut and went silent. Then, he sank back into the couch, eyes closing. His head still pounded. Exhaustion weighed on him like a lead blanket. He needed sleep—badly.

Adah opened her mouth to banish him again, but the plane had already started climbing. She snapped her jaw shut and said nothing.

The plane lifted off from the Evans estate, destination Cadena.

Before long, Allan slipped into a deep, heavy sleep.

Adah's flight, however, turned into a quiet war. As Allan slept, gravity—or maybe something less innocent—kept pulling him toward her until his head dropped onto her shoulder. She'd shove him off. Minutes later, he'd drift back.

The cycle repeated itself for the entire flight. Lean. Push. Lean again. A wordless, ridiculous battle that lasted from takeoff to landing.

By the time the plane touched down in Cadena, Adah had reached her limit. She shot to her feet and strode toward the exit.

Without her shoulder propping him up, Allan's head pitched forward and smacked the seatback. The impact jolted him awake. He blinked groggily, just in time to see the hatch swing open and Adah marching out into the daylight.

Behind Adah, Elliana helped Rita and Sophie down the stairs.

Cole hung back. He kicked Allan's shin without ceremony, voice dripping with disdain. 'Alright, drop the act. You've been taking advantage of her the whole flight. Getting a little pathetic, wouldn't you say?'

Then, Cole turned and walked off.

Allan cleared his throat, smoothing wrinkles from his shirt and dragging fingers through his hair before following.

The truth? He'd fallen asleep initially. But he'd surfaced somewhere over the clouds to find his head resting on Adah's shoulder, and the moment had felt too perfect to surrender. So he'd kept his breathing even, his eyes closed, his body still. Every lean after that? Calculated.

Once they landed, the group secured a car to the suburban villa Rita remembered.

Adah wasn't giving Allan another opportunity. She slid in beside Elliana before he could blink, forcing him into the back with Cole.

As the car rolled forward, Cole kicked Allan. "This is on you." He kept his voice low and bitter. "Could've been sitting next to my wife."

Allan grinned despite the abuse. "You've got two kids already. Still can't handle ten minutes apart?"

Cole didn't dignify that with a response. As the villa drew closer, Adah's entire body shifted. Her spine went rigid, shoulders locked. Her mind spiraled through a thousand versions of what came next—her mother's face, her voice, whether her mother would recognize her after all this time, whether she'd collapse or stay standing.

Elliana's hand found hers and squeezed until it hurt. Anchoring.

Rita and Sophie were already crying, tears carving silent paths down their faces.

When the car stopped and they pushed through the gate, hope died instantly. Weeds choked the courtyard in a dense, strangling mass. Dead leaves buried the ground in layers so thick that they looked like sediment. Years of neglect screamed from every corner. Sally hadn't set foot here in ages—if ever again.

"No." The word cracked coming out of Adah's mouth. "This can't—" If her mother wasn't here, where the hell had she gone?

Adah couldn't accept it. Wouldn't. She broke into a run, tearing through weeds and rot toward the villa.

Elliana bolted after her without hesitation. Rita and Sophie exchanged one stricken look before following, Allan and Cole crashing through behind them.

