Mafia Mask 16

Chapter 16 Playing with Fire

Ivy's POV

My boss's final message from last night had ignited something deadly inside me. If Caleb Thorne thought I would cower like some frightened little lamb, he was about to learn exactly how dangerous a cornered woman could be. This wasn't like me at all. I had always been the epitome of control, never one to let desire override reason or act on reckless impulses. But this infuriating man had awakened something savage in me, something I couldn't seem to contain.

I leaped from my bed and attacked my closet like I was selecting weapons for war. My fingers found the perfect ammunition - a sleek black dress that walked the razor's edge between professional and lethal. The fabric clung to every curve while maintaining an air of untouchable elegance, the hemline dancing at mid-thigh, the neckline offering just a whisper of what lay beneath. I paired it with crimson heels that could kill a man at fifty paces and selected the most scandalous lingerie I owned - barely-there panties that would leave no evidence beneath the clinging fabric.

My hair would cascade loose around my shoulders today. Professional protocol be damned. Caleb Thorne wanted to play dangerous games? I was about to show him what a real predator looked like.

The early morning preparation was worth every second as I armed myself for battle. I scribbled a quick note for Zoe before heading out, my pulse already quickening with anticipation. Today, I would make him suffer. He thought he was so clever, keeping me on edge with his midnight psychological warfare. Well, two could play at mental destruction, and I intended to annihilate him.

I arrived twenty minutes early - perfect timing to set my trap. The coffee maker gurgled as I positioned myself strategically behind my desk, arranging everything with lethal precision. I wanted him to walk in unsuspecting, to have that moment of recognition hit him like a sledgehammer to the chest. Sweet innocence would be my mask while I systematically destroyed his composure.

The elevator chimed at exactly our appointed time. I focused intently on my computer screen, though my every nerve was attuned to his presence like a weapon sensing its target. His cologne reached me first - that intoxicating blend that made my knees weak and my resolve waver. I heard his footsteps halt abruptly at my desk, followed by a sharp intake of breath that sounded like a man taking a bullet. Victory.

When he spoke, his voice carried that rough edge that sent liquid fire down my spine.

"Good morning, Miss Brooks. How did you sleep?"

I lifted my eyes to meet his with practiced innocence that could fool the devil himself. "Good morning, Mr. Thorne. Like an angel. And yourself?"

His smile was pure sin wrapped in expensive silk. "I had to work off some excess energy because of you." The way he said it made molten heat pool low in my belly. "Shall we head to my office?"

"Absolutely, sir." I rose gracefully, tablet in hand, and walked ahead of him with calculated sway. The muttered curse that escaped his lips told me my dress was performing exactly as intended - like a loaded weapon.

Inside his fortress, I moved toward his desk, but he redirected me with silky authority that made my skin prickle.

"The couch would be better, Ivy. Easier for us to review your screen together."

Something in his tone made predatory instincts flare, but I complied, settling onto the plush black leather and crossing my legs with deliberate precision. The dress rode up slightly, revealing a tantalizing glimpse of lace-topped stockings. I made no move to adjust it, savoring the strangled sound he made in response - like a man watching his execution.

"Is there a problem, sir?" I asked with feigned concern.

"Oh, there’s definitely a fucking problem," he replied, his gaze dropping meaningfully to his lap where his arousal was impossible to miss. "And we need to address it before my next territory meeting."

Internal satisfaction bubbled up as he sat beside me, close enough that his thigh pressed against mine with dangerous heat. This was going exactly according to my deadly plan.

"Perhaps you should learn some self-control," I suggested sweetly, uncrossing and recrossing my legs in a movement designed to drive him past the point of sanity.

But I had miscalculated. Caleb Thorne was not a man who played by anyone's rules but his own.

In one fluid motion that spoke of violence and control, he had me pinned against the couch arm, his powerful frame caging me like a predator trapping prey. His face hovered inches from mine, his breath scorching against my skin as his hand traced the length of my thigh with possessive hunger.

"Or maybe I should bend you over this couch and fuck you with nothing but those sinful red heels on."

My body betrayed me instantly, responding to his raw dominance with a need that stole my breath and every thought. His scent, his proximity, the lethal promise in his voice - it all conspired to melt my carefully constructed defenses like they were made of paper.

His hand gripped my hip with bruising possession as he settled his weight over me, grinding against me in a way that made stars explode behind my eyes. His mouth found my throat, tongue and teeth working my sensitive skin as he growled against my ear like a man possessed.

"You're fucking destroying me, woman."

Rational thought abandoned me completely. I wanted him to tear away every barrier between us, to claim me right here in his office like the savage he was. But just as I surrendered to the inferno consuming us both, he pulled back, turning away with hands pressed to his face in obvious torment.

Before I could process his withdrawal, he was on me again, his mouth crashing against mine in a kiss that tasted of desperation and deadly desire. His hands were everywhere - lifting my dress, palming my breasts through the fabric, finding the scrap of lace between my legs and tearing it away with savage efficiency that spoke of barely leashed violence.

The cool air against my exposed skin should have shocked me back to reality, but I was lost in sensation, drowning in need. His fingers explored my wetness with devastating skill, circling and teasing until I was trembling on the edge of complete surrender.

And then he stopped. Again.

"This is wrong," he said, retreating to the far end of the couch like I was radioactive. "I'm not some bastard who takes advantage of his people. But you're testing every fucking limit I have. Only one woman has ever affected me like this, and we need to figure out what the hell we're going to do about it."

I stared at him in disbelief, my body screaming with unfulfilled need that bordered on pain. He was seriously going to leave me like this? Twice?

Fury gave me lethal strength. I stood on unsteady legs, smoothing my dress while searching for my destroyed underwear. Of course, it was nowhere to be found - the second time in my life I'd lost panties to this man's games. The humiliation of asking for them back was more than my pride could bear.

Taking a steadying breath that tasted of smoke and ashes, I reclaimed my professional mask. If he wanted to play hot and cold, I could play ice queen until hell froze over. I settled back onto the couch without crossing my legs this time, picked up my tablet, and spoke with crisp efficiency.

"Mr. Thorne, perhaps some chamomile tea would help with your obvious agitation."

His frustrated expression was almost comical - a powerful crime boss reduced to a petulant child denied his favorite weapon. He stood abruptly, gesturing to his still-obvious arousal.

"Or maybe I should just handle this myself," he snapped, then turned his back to me like I was the enemy. "Ivy, I need a moment. Please return to your office."

I rose with deadly dignity intact and walked toward the door, but his voice stopped me at the threshold.

"Forgetting something?" The wicked amusement in his tone made my cheeks burn with humiliation and rage.

He had my panties, and we both knew it. But I'd be damned if I'd give him the satisfaction of begging for them back.

"No, sir."

I escaped to my office, closing the door firmly behind me like I was barricading myself against an invasion. But now my traitorous mind conjured images of what he was about to do behind that closed door, and I knew this day would test every ounce of my remaining sanity.

The war had officially begun.