Mafia Mask 21

Chapter 21 Confrontation and Deadly Protection

Ivy's POV

I finished coordinating the confidential territory briefing meeting with Jude for tomorrow and sent Heidi a message to confirm her availability. Once those details were sorted, I dove back into my remaining classified tasks.

About an hour later, I heard Caleb's office door slam open with enough force to crack the reinforced frame. Before I could react, he was leaning over my chair, his hands gripping both armrests, effectively caging me like a predator cornering its prey. His face was inches from mine, those ice-blue eyes burning with an intensity that made my breath catch and my pulse spike with danger.

"Ivy, listen to me very carefully." His voice was low and rough, carrying a lethal edge that made every word feel like a command from a man who wasn't used to being denied. "This situation between us ends today. I won't accept any more games or evasions. Clear your fucking schedule because we're not leaving this office until we settle this like the adults we are."

He held my gaze for what felt like an eternity, the air between us crackling with unspoken violence and desire. Then he straightened abruptly, turned on his heel, and stalked back to his office, the door slamming behind him with even more force than before—a sound that spoke of barely leashed fury.

I sat there completely stunned, my heart hammering against my ribs like it was trying to escape, when Xavier walked in looking thoroughly bewildered.

"Ivy, what the fuck happened to Caleb during that video conference?"

I blinked several times, trying to regain my composure before answering.

"I honestly have no idea, Xavier. Was there some kind of problem?" The lie rolled off my tongue smoothly, but guilt twisted in my stomach like a blade.

"He seemed completely distracted, like his mind was somewhere else entirely," Xavier said, glancing toward Caleb's closed door with genuine concern. "Anyway, I've already confirmed with Heidi that you two will be joining us for dinner tonight. I absolutely won't take no for an answer."

"I'd be honored to join you, Xavier, assuming my Don doesn't object."

"Your Don has plenty of other things to worry about right now," Xavier muttered darkly as he headed into Caleb's fortress.

I quickly grabbed my phone and texted Zoe, explaining that I'd be home late due to a business dinner and asking if Carmen could stay longer to watch Max. Her response came back almost immediately, telling me to enjoy myself and that she'd spoil her godson rotten. I couldn't help but smile at her message.

My good mood evaporated the moment Roman Rossi entered the outer office, his expression thunderous enough to kill. He was an imposing figure, tall and lanky with a ridiculous mustache, graying hair, and sharp, predatory eyes that seemed to miss nothing. From the moment Heidi had introduced him, something about the man had set off every alarm bell I possessed.

He stopped directly in front of my desk, his gaze filled with contempt and barely contained murderous rage as he spoke in a harsh, cutting tone that made my skin crawl.

"So you're the little nobody who humiliated my daughter yesterday. Because of your interference, Caleb embarrassed her publicly and his attack dog had to escort her out like common trash. But mark my words, you insignificant little secretary, this won't stand. I'll make sure he throws you out of here so fast your head will spin."

He slammed his palm down on my desk with enough force to make my coffee cup jump and my computer monitor shake, then turned toward Caleb's door like he owned the place. I shot to my feet, adrenaline flooding my system like liquid fire, and positioned myself between him and the door, my back pressed against it like a human shield.

"Mr. Rossi, I'm going to have to ask you to wait while I check if Mr. Thorne is available to see you. I apologize, but I'm following direct orders."

The man’s face went white with fury, then flushed red with homicidal rage. He completely lost control, his hand shooting out to grab my throat as he shouted loud enough for the entire floor to hear.

"Who the hell do you think you are, you worthless little bitch? I’m the underboss of this organization. I go where I want, when I want, and you’re nobody to tell me otherwise."

His grip tightened around my throat, cutting off my air supply, and for a terrifying moment I thought he might actually kill me right here. Suddenly, the door behind me burst open like an explosion and I felt Caleb’s powerful arm wrap around my waist, pulling me away from Roman’s crushing grip with lethal efficiency. The underboss wasted no time going on the offensive.

"Caleb, you won’t believe this. This woman just insulted me gravely and threatened me."

Pressed against Caleb’s chest, I could feel the murderous fury radiating from him, his breathing heavy and controlled like a predator preparing to strike. When he spoke, his voice was ice-cold and deadly calm—the tone of a man who had killed before and would do it again.

"Roman, first of all, lower your fucking voice immediately. Let me make several things crystal clear to you. First, from what I heard perfectly well, Ms. Brooks didn’t insult you whatsoever. Quite the opposite, in fact, and you owe her an apology. Second, she’s not my secretary. She’s my executive assistant and has my complete and total protection. Third, you know damn well that you need clearance before entering my office. This isn’t news to anyone. Fourth, and most importantly, if this is how you treat the people under my protection, I need to seriously reconsider your position in this family because I will not tolerate disrespect toward my people under any circumstances."

"But Caleb, I was just trying to..." Roman began, his tone suddenly wheedling and desperate.

"Never set foot on the executive floor again without being specifically summoned," Caleb cut him off, his voice sharp enough to cut steel. "Monica, get in here now."

Monica appeared in the doorway so quickly she might have been waiting outside with a weapon. "Yes, Mr. Thorne."

"Monica, escort Mr. Rossi to the street immediately. Schedule a disciplinary meeting between Mr. Rossi and myself for first thing tomorrow morning. The meeting will take place in his office. After he leaves, come to my office."

"Absolutely, sir. Mr. Rossi, if you'd follow me please." Monica's voice was perfectly professional, but I caught the gleam of deadly satisfaction in her eyes.

"Oh, and Roman," Caleb added, his tone carrying an unmistakable threat of violence. "If you ever lay a finger on Ms. Brooks or any other person under my protection again, you'll be looking for new employment in hell. Are we clear?"

Still holding me securely against his side like I was something precious to be protected, Caleb guided me into his office and closed the door firmly behind us. His grip remained protective as he led me to the chair in front of his desk and gently but firmly made me sit down.

The Don was clearly ready to go to war for me, and that realization sent a dangerous thrill through my system that I tried desperately to ignore.