Mafia Mask 241

Chapter 241: Perfect Plans Destroyed

Dominic's POV

I was counting down every minute until Gemma would finally come to my private penthouse after her shift at the boutique. Tonight, I had orchestrated something extraordinary for my goddess, and the anticipation was eating me alive as I sat behind my mahogany desk, completely unable to focus on the Thorne family's money laundering operations that demanded my attention.

By the afternoon, restlessness consumed my entire being. I decided to grab espresso from the building's private café and patrol the corridors to settle my nerves. That's when I accidentally intercepted Zoe's encrypted call with Ivy, discussing their strategic mission to infiltrate the mall and inspect some designer pieces Gemma had mentioned during their previous reconnaissance.

A stroke of tactical brilliance hit me like lightning. I rushed back to my command center and began mobilizing the crew one by one. If one woman from our inner circle was deploying to that location, I knew with absolute certainty that the entire female battalion would follow. It was an unbreakable law of warfare with them.

We coordinated our operation with military precision. Arriving early at the target zone, we established our surveillance post at the café overlooking Gemma's boutique, maintaining perfect visual control of all entry points. The moment we identified the women's convoy entering the mall, we executed our infiltration, advancing directly to the shop and claiming strategic positions facing the fitting room area.

The murderous glare Gemma directed at us could have incinerated steel. Her dark eyes screamed that we had completely lost our sanity showing up in her territory like this.

However, the other boutique employees displayed an entirely different reaction. They swarmed us like vultures to fresh blood, flirting with shameless aggression and clearly attempting to provoke Gemma's jealousy. I could see the deadly fire building behind her professional mask, but she maintained her composure with the restraint of a trained assassin.

I anticipated our women would execute us when they emerged from their fashion reconnaissance mission. Instead, witnessing the female employees practically draping themselves across us triggered

their territorial instincts. They decided to mark their property with lethal precision. Watching Zoe transform into a sweet, possessive queen as she advanced toward her target was absolutely magnificent.

Our women successfully intimidated several of the aggressive employees into strategic withdrawal, but one refused to acknowledge the threat. I recognized her immediately as the woman who had previously been entangled with Gemma's pathetic ex-boyfriend, and she was determined to penetrate Gemma's defenses. When she escalated to blatantly provocative advances, I knew it was time to demonstrate my position with unmistakable clarity.

I moved directly to Gemma and claimed her mouth in a deep, possessive kiss that left zero room for misinterpretation. The message was crystal clear: I belonged to her completely, and she was under my absolute protection. Zoe, never one for diplomatic subtlety, helped reinforce the point by forcing the persistent employee into complete retreat.

Perfect synchronization struck when Gemma's supervisor arrived and granted her early release from duty. We had just completed our shopping expedition and decided to commandeer the mall's restaurant for dinner. I was practically vibrating with excitement about Caleb's employment proposition for my goddess. Finally, she would escape that exhausting retail position and work civilized hours in a secure environment under our family's protection.

I pulled her against me and whispered against her ear, "I swear on my honor I didn't orchestrate this arrangement with Caleb. He genuinely requires someone he can trust completely as his executive assistant."

"I believe you without question," she replied softly. "It's an incredible opportunity. I'll negotiate the terms with him properly, and I'll likely accept and abandon the boutique."

"That would bring me immense peace of mind. You'll be infinitely safer within our organization."

"It would provide me greater security too. Nick won't be able to harass me at a corporate office. Additionally, my mother has decided to liquidate the house. We're planning to acquire a fortified apartment instead."

"That’s exceptional news! My future mother-in-law possesses brilliant strategic instincts!" Relief flooded through my system because Gemma’s current residence was a security catastrophe with its vulnerable perimeter walls and unprotected access points.

Gemma laughed at my enthusiastic response and rewarded me with a tender kiss.

"You know, I genuinely appreciated your demonstration at the boutique today," she said, pressing another soft kiss to my lips.

"What specific action did I take?"

"You made it absolutely clear to Vanessa that you belong exclusively to me," she whispered seductively against my ear.

"Naturally! I am completely yours, my goddess. I don’t comprehend how you managed it, but you possess me entirely."

"I love hearing that declaration! You earned significant points today."

"Will that guarantee me an extraordinary night with you?"

"That will guarantee you an absolutely incredible night with me," Gemma promised with confidence and heat radiating from her voice.

"Halt right there, you two!" Xavier interrupted dramatically. "I refuse to witness this torture session. I’m the only one still suffering in this brotherhood, despite maintaining exemplary behavior, yet my redhead continues playing impossibly hard to obtain."

"The most well-behaved member here is clearly my prince," Zoe jumped in defensively. "Even though you degenerates keep attempting to corrupt his innocent soul."

We were all enjoying the lighthearted conversation when catastrophe struck without warning. Several women approached our table and literally launched themselves onto my lap, Caleb's, and Xavier's. Beatrix had materialized with Elza and Yara Rossi as her backup.

This was about to become a complete nightmare.

They had the audacity to plant calculated kisses on us, but the situation turned truly toxic when the despicable Yara began broadcasting loudly about the night she had allegedly spent with Caleb during Heidi's farewell gathering.

The temperature at our table plummeted to arctic levels. Our women stared at us with pure homicidal intent before standing abruptly, collecting Jude and Finn, and turning their backs on us completely. I exchanged rapid glances with Caleb and Xavier, and through perfect silent communication, we all rose simultaneously, allowing those manipulative serpents to crash to the floor. Then we pursued our furious women at full speed.

But they refused to acknowledge any explanations. My heart shattered as I watched Gemma climb into Zoe's armored vehicle. The extraordinary night I had spent hours orchestrating evaporated before my eyes. I wanted to eliminate those devils who had destroyed everything.

We executed the only logical strategy remaining: retreated to Xavier's fortress to drink ourselves into oblivion while awaiting intelligence reports from Jude and Finn.

The news came quickly and was thoroughly depressing. Jude reported that the women were absolutely furious and completely unwilling to listen to any rational explanations. They had barricaded themselves in Zoe's apartment and were apparently plotting our collective destruction.

Then my phone buzzed with a text from Zoe that made my blood run cold: "Don't even think about contacting Gemma tonight, Dominic. She's done with all of you lying bastards. And if you think this job thing with Caleb will fix anything, you're delusional. Stay away."

I stared at the message, my hands shaking with rage and desperation. This couldn't be happening. Not when everything was finally falling into place. Not when Gemma was finally trusting me completely.

"Caleb," I said, my voice deadly serious. "I don't care what happens between us and them. You're not withdrawing that job offer. Gemma needs that position, and she's going to get it regardless of this disaster. She deserves security and safety, even if she never speaks to me again."

Caleb nodded grimly. "Agreed. The offer stands no matter what."

I poured another glass of whiskey and stared out into the night, plotting how I was going to win back my goddess and make those three witches pay for destroying the most important night of my life.

Chapter 242: Making Clean Break

Gemma's POV

I definitely hadn't seen that coming. Dominic had just sworn his loyalty belonged to me alone, and then this woman appears out of nowhere, practically throwing herself into his arms at the shopping center. I recognized her instantly - the same mafia princess who had been all over him at the Social Union's underground gambling hall. In that moment, I wanted to claw his eyes out and tear her apart with my bare hands.

We left the shopping center in complete silence, the weight of betrayal crushing down on me like stone walls closing in. I immediately called Lila, who told me her safe house was always open. Zoe offered to let me stay at one of the family's secure apartments with Ivy, but I declined. Ivy already had enough blood on her hands without me adding my mess to the Thorne family's territorial disputes.

I spent the evening at Lila's place, talking until the early hours about the dangerous world I'd gotten myself tangled up in. She gave me some hard truths about my situation with the Thorne family's most volatile Capo.

"Gemma, you're incredible and you deserve someone who won't get you killed in crossfire," Lila said as she hugged me goodnight. "I'm glad you have tomorrow off from the store. When I get home from my shift at the diner, we can do something that doesn't involve bulletproof vests."

"Sounds perfect, Lila."

The next morning, I called my mom to explain I was staying at Lila's safe house. She pressed for details about why I'd left my apartment in Dominic's protected territory, so I simply told her I had decided to distance myself from the Thorne operations. Minutes later, my phone buzzed with an unknown number. I answered and heard Caleb's voice - the Don himself. My first instinct was to hang up immediately, knowing how dangerous it could be to receive direct calls from the family boss. But he insisted he only wanted to discuss the job opportunity at his legitimate front company, which genuinely interested me given my precarious position.

After our conversation, I video-called the girls through encrypted channels. Ivy assured me it would be fine to accept the position and that working directly under the Don's protection would be good for my survival. So I decided to head to the shopping center and quit my current job at the boutique in Thorne territory. I called my boss and arranged an emergency meeting.

The moment I walked into the store, I was greeted by the usual toxic atmosphere that pervaded businesses forced to pay protection money.

"What are you doing here, you little tramp? It's your day off," Sabrina snarled the second she saw me, her voice carrying the particular venom of someone who resented having to work in mafia-controlled territory.

"I'm the tramp? That's rich, coming from someone who can't see a made man walk into this store without throwing herself at him. Let's not forget you're the one making out with soldiers in the stockroom," I shot back, my patience completely gone after everything I'd endured. Then I heard a voice behind me.

"What exactly did you just say, Gemma?" Estelle, the store owner, had arrived and caught the tail end of our exchange. Her face was pale - any mention of family business could bring unwanted attention from enforcers.

"Good afternoon, Estelle. Could we speak privately?" I asked, turning to face her while keeping my voice low to avoid drawing more attention.

"Absolutely. Let's go to my office, and you can explain what's been happening in my establishment." Estelle gestured toward the back office, shooting a warning look at the others who knew better than to eavesdrop on family-adjacent conversations.

"Tell me, Gemma, what exactly has been happening in my store when I'm handling the weekly collections?" Estelle asked once we were seated across from each other, her hands nervously adjusting the Thorne family's protection payment receipts on her desk.

"Listen, Estelle, I should apologize. I should have spoken up sooner, but I didn't want to create more problems - working in family territory is already dangerous enough." I started with an apology and then told her everything that had happened since I caught Sabrina with Nick, my psychotic ex who'd been muscling in on Thorne operations.

"Dear God, these people are turning my business into some kind of liability that could bring heat from the commission!" Estelle was genuinely terrified now. "I owe you an apology, Gemma. I had no idea this was going on under my roof."

"You don't owe me anything, Estelle, but I'm sure you understand why I can't continue working here. I came to submit my resignation," I said firmly, knowing this was the right decision for my safety.

"I understand completely, though losing you is a real blow to our operations here. I'll have to clean house with all of them, but I can't fire everyone at once - I need time to hire new people who understand how to work in family territory," she sighed heavily. "Is there anything I could do to convince you to stay?"

"Unfortunately, no. I've received an excellent job offer working directly for legitimate Thorne business interests, and after everything that happened with Nick trying to muscle in on this territory, I don't feel safe operating at street level anymore."

"I completely understand, dear. The protection racket only goes so far when you're dealing with unhinged individuals. I assume you want to leave immediately?"

"If that's possible, yes."

"Of course it's possible, Gemma. You're an outstanding employee who knows how to keep her mouth shut about family business. You deserve every opportunity that comes your way, and I won't be the one to hold you back. Could you just stop by accounting tomorrow to finalize your protection transfer paperwork?"

"Absolutely. But Estelle, my friends and I will definitely continue shopping here under the family's protection," I said with a genuine smile, wanting to be kind to this woman who understood the delicate balance of operating in Thorne territory.

"That makes me so happy to hear. I'll restructure the morning shift with employees who understand family protocol, and I'll make sure those troublemakers don't bring any more heat down on us. You'll have no reason to avoid this place." She smiled warmly, and I left her office feeling like I'd finally extracted myself from one dangerous situation.

As I was almost out the door, I heard Vanessa's voice behind me:

"I hope Estelle fired your ass for running your mouth about family business."

"Actually, I quit because I found a position with the legitimate operations, but she begged me to stay. Now let me give you some friendly advice: watch your back when you're mouthing off about things that could get you disappeared, witch," I said and walked out feeling like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

I immediately texted Caleb through secure channels that I could start right away. He confirmed and sent me an encrypted email with all the necessary information, asking me to begin Monday but requesting my attendance at a Saturday strategy meeting. I was genuinely excited about this new opportunity to work under the protection of the Don himself.

I decided to treat myself to lunch at the food court and grabbed a burger, keeping my head down and avoiding eye contact - standard protocol in neutral territory. I had barely sat down when I heard a familiar, cheerful voice calling out:

"Auntie, you gorgeous woman!" I turned to see Vincenzo approaching with several other young men who I assumed were his crew from the family's youth training program.

"My sweet Vincenzo!" I stood up and hugged that charming kid - he was absolutely magnetic, with all the dangerous charisma that ran in the Frost bloodline.

"Can we sit with you? Or are you waiting for my uncle?"

"Of course you can join me, sweetheart. I'd love the company." I smiled as Vincenzo immediately grabbed one of my fries with the casual confidence of someone born into power.

"We'll grab our food and be right back."

Vincenzo returned with his crew and their trays. We chatted and laughed - they were genuinely good kids despite being raised in the life, with sharp senses of humor and street smarts.

"Auntie, my mom wants to invite you to our family Sunday dinner," Vincenzo mentioned casually, referring to the weekly gathering where family business was often discussed.

"And I bet she has no idea you're already extending the invitation," I teased, knowing Vincenzo was completely transparent and couldn't keep secrets to save his life.

"She's planning to ask my uncle to bring you around."

"I don't think I can make it, nephew. Your uncle and I aren't running together anymore."

"What did that idiot do? Tell me and I'll put him in the ground."

I laughed despite the very real threat in this kid's voice - the protective instinct of the Frost family was terrifying even in teenagers.

"I just realized your uncle isn't the right person for me. But we're still good, okay? I'll still help you with your math homework when you need it."

"You better! But my uncle isn't going to give up on you easily - you know that, right? When Frost men claim something, they don't let go."

After saying goodbye to Vincenzo and his crew, I headed back to Lila's place with that ominous warning echoing in my head. For the rest of the week, I completely ignored Dominic's messages and calls that

came through multiple burner phones. And he was remarkably persistent, trying to reach me through every secure channel the family had access to, proving that Vincenzo had been absolutely right about Frost men never knowing when to quit.

Chapter 243: Blood Turned Molten

Dominic's POV

Gemma's cold shoulder was driving me to the edge of madness. The situation turned worse when my nephew Vincenzo called, demanding to know what the hell I had screwed up this time. He had encountered her during a routine family business run downtown, and she flat out told him we were finished. Like hell we were. I refused to let it end like this, not when my entire world revolved around her.

The only silver lining was her new position within Caleb's legitimate front operations. At least I could catch glimpses of her when I visited his corporate offices for family meetings. Unfortunately, Caleb and Xavier were drowning in the same relationship hell I was dealing with.

Then came that disaster of a lunch when our women met up with some crew from a rival family's associates. Thank God Gemma wasn't there to witness the spectacle. Those bastards were shamelessly flirting with our women, and the girls were playing right along, probably just to spite us.

Friday night, we arranged a meeting at Xavier's secured penthouse. I figured we could strategize our next moves while venting our frustrations. Since Gemma entered my life, no other woman existed for me. She consumed every waking thought, every plan, every breath. Now, thanks to one catastrophic misunderstanding orchestrated by my backstabbing father, I was living in pure torment.

When I walked into Xavier's place and saw Finn and Jude already nursing drinks, I couldn't help but laugh at Jude's murderous expression.

"Don't tell me you two got the boot as well?" I asked, finding dark humor in their miserable faces.

"We're suffering because of you idiots," Finn shot back. "Zoe declared tonight was strictly girls' night, no family business, no men allowed."

"Everything was running smoothly when I was the only one in a committed relationship," Jude grumbled. "Nora has never been this impossible before. This is all on you three for thinking with the wrong head during family operations."

"Jude, come on, it was just a massive setup by my father," I protested.

"Your family drama is costing us quality time with our women," Finn snapped back, his frustration evident.

"What if we surprised them wherever they are?" Xavier suggested, like he had just solved world hunger.

"Brilliant plan, genius. You happen to know their location? Because Nora isn't sharing intel," Jude's irritation was reaching dangerous levels.

"Not exactly, but you could figure it out through your connections," Xavier gave Jude that devil's grin of his.

"Absolutely not, Xavier. The last time I used family resources to track her, it took considerable effort to get back in Nora's good graces. That was exactly because you wanted to chase after her cousin during that Brooklyn territory dispute. I swore I wouldn't use surveillance on her again unless someone was dying," Jude was getting heated.

"Hold up," Caleb interrupted. "What exactly are you talking about?"

"Jude can track Nora's phone through his security network. He can locate all the girls," Xavier explained, and we all turned to stare at Jude.

"Jude, this is a legitimate security concern," I tried convincing him.

"Hell no, Dominic," he fired back.

"Maybe it’s not an emergency yet, but what if they’re with those associate crew again?" Finn commented casually. "Those losers have been circling our women like vultures. We could just verify they’re safe, and if they’re alone, we head straight back here."

"Damn you, Finn. Now I’m actually worried about territorial complications," Jude growled. "Fine. Let’s see where these stubborn women ended up."

Jude pulled out his encrypted phone, accessed some security app, typed rapidly, and when he located Nora, he cursed under his breath.

"Nora is going to pay for this security breach," Jude muttered. "They’re at Silas’s uncle’s restaurant in Little Italy. I guarantee they’re not there alone."

We all moved simultaneously, taking separate armored vehicles. Halfway there, Jude sent a group message through our secure network. The women had relocated and were now at some underground establishment downtown.

The place was absolutely packed when we arrived. We had to slip the doorman some serious cash and flash family credentials just to get inside. We watched from a strategic distance and saw the girls completely letting loose. Caleb decided to approach Ivy directly, while the rest of us chose the confrontational method - march up there and extract them immediately.

I was absolutely furious. My anger reached boiling point when Gemma claimed she owed me zero explanations for her whereabouts.

Things got explosive when they demanded to know how we had tracked them down. After a heated confrontation, they refused to leave with us. Perfect. At least Parker’s crew weren’t complete disrespectful and invited us to remain. But by closing time, none of the girls wanted rides from any of us and called their own secure transportation home.

Since we were already in relationship purgatory, the next day we encountered the girls at the Social Union, once again socializing with Parker’s little fan club. We all ended up back at Xavier’s penthouse playing some ridiculous blackjack game where kisses were the stakes.

To make everything infinitely worse, that moron Hunter won a hand and kissed Gemma's ear. My blood turned molten. I shot up from my chair and pulled Gemma against me with barely controlled violence.

"Listen very carefully, Hunter. That's the last time you'll ever put your hands on my woman. We're leaving, Gemma. And don't even consider arguing," I snarled and stormed toward the exit, dragging her with me.

"Have you completely lost your mind, Dominic?" Gemma demanded when I stopped to unlock the car.

"Yes, I've lost my mind. I'm insanely jealous and completely obsessed with you. For crying out loud, Gemma, you didn't even give me a chance to explain before you jumped to conclusions about that setup."

"Is there actually anything worth explaining?" Gemma crossed her arms defensively.

"Get in the car, Gemma. Let's go somewhere private and discuss this properly. Beatrix means absolutely nothing to me, never has. I was involved with her occasionally, that's it." I was attempting to explain myself to a woman for the first time in my entire life, and I had no idea how to do it properly.

"Look, you already know how Yara Rossi stalks Caleb relentlessly despite his marriage. It's the exact same situation with Beatrix and me, except I'll be completely honest - I did have relations with Beatrix in the past, while Caleb never touched Yara."

I was rambling without pause while Gemma studied me silently, her expression unreadable.

"I haven't been with any woman since I met you in that shop. I swear on my family's honor," I finished desperately.

Gemma uncrossed her arms and slid into the passenger seat without saying a word. When I walked around and got behind the wheel, she finally looked at me and spoke.

"I really hope you don't disappoint me, Dominic. I hope I'm not making a huge mistake here."

"You’re not, my goddess." I lifted her hand and pressed my lips to her palm. "I want to take you home with me. Will you come?"

Chapter 244: Steel and Surrender

Dominic’s POV

Walking into my heavily fortified compound with Gemma beside me felt like entering uncharted territory. The bulletproof windows and reinforced steel doors that normally provided comfort now seemed to emphasize the dangerous world I was bringing her into. My palms were damp, my pulse racing in a way that was completely foreign to me. In my years as a Capo for the Thorne family, nothing had ever made me this anxious, but Gemma was different. She turned this feared lieutenant into a fumbling teenager desperate for approval.

"This place is like a fortress," Gemma said, her gaze sweeping across the surveillance monitors and reinforced living room as I disabled the security system.

"It has to be in my line of work. I had everything ready for you earlier this week, but then you stormed off." I flashed her my most apologetic expression. "Today I’m completely unprepared, but I need you to hear me out. What you saw at the mall was nothing."

"Then explain it to me, Dominic. Because I watched that woman throw herself at you like she owned you. She kissed you, and you just stood there like some made man who couldn’t handle his own business."

"I was shocked, not willing. That kind of public display could have compromised both our positions." Frustration crept into my voice. "Look, why don’t we sit down with some wine? I’ll tell you everything you want to know about how our world really works."

Gemma studied my face, probably noting the tension that came from years of looking over my shoulder, before nodding slowly. I settled her on the leather couch that faced away from the weapons cabinet and disappeared into the kitchen, returning with wine, glasses, and a hastily assembled cheese board. After pouring the wine and handing her a glass, I sat close enough to catch her perfume but far enough to respect the invisible barriers between our worlds.

"Gemma, before you came along, I lived without any real attachments. In the Thorne family, commitment makes you vulnerable, and I never committed to anyone. Yes, I've been with many women from our circle, sometimes repeatedly."

"How reassuring," Gemma said dryly, her expression souring.

"I'm in my thirties and a Capo in one of the most powerful families on the East Coast. I have a history, and I was never celibate. But I was also never careless."

"I understand that, Dominic." She sighed heavily. "It just bothers me that these women keep circling you like they have some claim on family business."

"Beatrix, the one from the mall, is the only one who's become a real problem. She's connected to families we do business with."

"Tell me about her."

"Caleb, Xavier, and I have known Beatrix and her circle since we were kids running numbers for our fathers. Same territory, same family connections, we practically grew up in the same blood-soaked streets."

"And?"

"Yara always chased our Don, Caleb Thorne. Elza went after Xavier, our Consigliere. And Beatrix set her sights on me. Caleb had the sense to stay away from Yara, but Xavier and I made the mistake of getting involved with the other two. Now they think they have territorial rights."

"Involved how? Were you in a relationship?"

"No, Gemma. It was purely physical arrangements, and I made that crystal clear from the start. In our world, you don't mix business with emotions. I never wanted anything serious with anyone. Until you completely turned my world upside down and made me forget every rule I lived by."

"What do you mean?"

"For the first time in my life, I want more than just physical release or strategic alliances. I want a real relationship, even if it puts a target on both our backs. I don't understand how it happened, but I'm in love with you, Gemma. You're everything to me now, worth more than any territory or family loyalty."

"Then why did that woman launch herself at you in broad daylight?"

"Because she has no boundaries and thinks her family connections give her privileges. But there's nothing between us anymore, and there never will be again."

"Did you make it clear that you're taken?"

"I'm taken?" A grin spread across my face despite the gravity of what that meant in my world, and Gemma glared at me. "I chased after you instead of dealing with her properly, but if I see her again, I'll make it perfectly clear that touching me is a death sentence."

"Fine. I believe you," Gemma said simply.

"You do?"

"Yes, I believe you. But I'm warning you now. I've been betrayed before, and you know it. I won't survive that again, especially not in your dangerous world. Are we clear?"

"Crystal clear, my goddess. You'll never experience that pain again. I'd burn down every rival family before I let anyone hurt you." I pulled Gemma onto my lap and captured her lips with mine.

The moment our mouths connected, electricity shot through my entire body. I tangled my fingers in her curls and kissed her like she was my lifeline, my other hand mapping the curves of her body, feeling her shiver under my touch as I pressed her closer against me.

Gemma traced my face with gentle fingers, probably feeling the scars from territorial disputes, before sliding them into my hair, pulling me deeper into the kiss. It was the perfect kiss to seal our dangerous truce and grant me permission to explore every inch of her.

We stayed on the couch, embracing and kissing while sipping wine. I worshipped her body with my hands, kissed her like she was the sweetest addiction. I needed her to know that only she mattered, that I'd abandon every family loyalty for her. Tonight I would show her exactly how much she meant to me.

"I want to take you to my bedroom and lose myself in you. Will you let me?" The question came out rough with desire, and her answer came in the form of another searing kiss.

In my bedroom, I left only the bedside lamps glowing softly, keeping the security monitors dimmed but visible. I held Gemma close and pressed gentle kisses along her neck. She wore an emerald silk dress with flowing sleeves, a flared skirt, and a deep V-neckline that drove me wild.

I traced the neckline with one finger, watching her shiver and break out in goosebumps. I took her breast in my mouth through the thin fabric and bit gently. Gemma gasped and arched toward me.

"You can't imagine how many times I've fantasized about this moment while counting dirty money and planning territorial moves," I murmured against her lips.

I grasped the hem of her dress and slowly slid it up her toned body. Gemma was breathtaking, her body firm and her skin luminous. I pulled the dress over her head and let it fall to the floor beside my shoulder holster.

The sight of her in that lingerie nearly brought me to my knees. It was a green bodysuit matching her dress, halter-style in delicate lace with sheer side panels and a thin satin belt. The plunging neckline and transparent fabric showcased her perfect form, igniting a fire in my blood.

I walked slowly around her while unbuttoning my shirt, drinking in every angle like I was memorizing evidence. Stopping behind her, I pulled her against my chest, my shirt hanging open, feeling her skin through the thin fabric.

Gemma arched back against me as I ran my hands up her sides to cup her breasts. I gently moved the lace aside and felt her bare nipples against my palms. The sensation was intoxicating. I massaged her breasts while kissing her neck and shoulders, teasing her nipples until they were hard points in my hands.

Her sweet moans were driving me insane with a hunger that had nothing to do with violence for once. I brushed her curls aside and pulled the thin ribbon holding the halter top, untying the delicate bow. The lace fell away and I hooked my fingers in the sides, sliding it down her incredible body.

Finally she stood naked before me, her body displayed like a work of art more valuable than any stolen treasure. I guided Gemma to the bed where she lay down with the grace of a dancer. I traced her entire body with one finger, leaving her covered in goosebumps.

After shedding my remaining clothes and the knife I kept strapped to my ankle, I positioned myself over her, drinking from her mouth and swallowing her moans.

"Gemma, I had no idea how desperately I needed you," I whispered in her ear, marking her skin with kisses from ear to neck to breasts. I lavished attention on each one, caressing and sucking until she was writhing beneath me.

She was incredibly responsive, moaning beautifully under my touch, arching toward my mouth as if trying to fuse us together.

I continued my journey down her flat stomach, circling her navel before reaching her most intimate place, teasing down her right thigh before switching to her left.

"Finally, I get to taste you," I said, looking into her eyes that sparkled like stars.

I lowered my head and touched her with my tongue, gently exploring every fold, losing myself in her taste. I worshipped her until she climaxed under my tongue, trembling and crying out her pleasure.

"You’re even better than I imagined, Gemma. Forgive my greed, but I need more."

Without pause, I continued my assault on her senses, using my tongue to drive her to another peak that left her shaking even harder. My body was rigid with need, demanding release.

"Now, my goddess, I need to be inside you. I need to feel your heat."

"I want you inside me, Dominic."

"And you'll have me, my goddess."

I teased her entrance before reaching for protection and sheathing myself. Hovering over her, I slowly entered her welcoming heat. It felt like coming home to the only safe harbor in my violent world.

I began moving slowly, savoring the way she gripped me. She was warm, wet, and eager.

"Dominic..."

"What do you need, my goddess?"

"I need you to take me hard and fast."

"Your wish is my command."

I increased my pace, thrusting powerfully as her body yielded beneath mine. Her moans were music to my ears, driving me wild with possessive hunger. When she tightened around me, I knew I was close to the edge. I withdrew, smiling at her protest.

"Turn over for me, my goddess."

Gemma smiled and positioned herself on her knees. I admired her beautiful form and gave her a playful swat that made her moan with pleasure. I positioned myself at her entrance.

"My goddess likes it rough?" She purred in response, and I delivered another playful slap as I began moving with more force.

My movements were quick and powerful. With one hand I held her steady while the other stimulated her most sensitive spot as I took her completely.

Her moans grew louder as she begged for more. We were both approaching the precipice. I increased the pressure and moved even deeper. Gemma climaxed with a cry that pushed me over the edge, and as she tightened around me, I finished with a primal roar.

My body collapsed onto hers, our breathing ragged, our sweat-slicked bodies nearly fused as one.

"Damn, Gemma, do you realize what you've done to me?"

She smiled with closed eyes. She had captured me completely, made me addicted to her touch, and turned a ruthless Capo into her devoted slave. And she knew it.

Chapter 245: Hostile Territory

Gemma's POV

As much as every fiber of my being craved another night wrapped in Dominic's arms, duty demanded my attention. After our blissful Sunday at Xavier's safehouse, reality forced me to return home and prepare for Monday's milestone - my first day working inside Caleb's legitimate front operation. Dominic's reaction was nothing short of petulant fury.

"If I had known you'd abandon me tonight, I never would have let you escape my bed this morning," Dominic growled repeatedly as his armored vehicle idled outside my apartment building, two of his soldiers maintaining watchful positions nearby.

"Then we would have missed that wonderful afternoon with our family," I countered, watching his jaw clench with barely controlled possessiveness.

"Sure, it was great. But nothing compares to having you beneath me, completely mine."

His crude honesty sent molten heat racing through my veins, and I couldn't suppress my laughter at his brooding expression. The truth was, I wanted him just as desperately. Our bodies had discovered a rhythm so perfect, a connection so complete, that denying our physical compatibility was impossible. In the dangerous world we now inhabited together, these stolen moments of intimacy felt even more precious.

After kissing Dominic goodbye with whispered promises of making up for lost time, I stepped inside to find my mother's knowing smile waiting for me.

"Someone had quite the weekend," she observed with that maternal intuition that never failed to read me perfectly, though I noticed her glance nervously toward the window where Dominic's security detail remained visible.

"I did, Mom. I've found my place within an incredible family, and I have a man who would burn the world down to protect me," I said, closing my eyes with a dreamy sigh that made her chuckle despite her obvious concerns about my new reality.

"That's wonderful, sweetheart. And remember, tomorrow you begin working directly for the Thorne organization."

"I know. Everything feels like it's shifting into something bigger than I ever imagined."

"Which is exactly why I'm calling our realtor tomorrow morning to accelerate our apartment search. We need to find something in a more secure area. I want you involved in every decision."

"Of course, Mom. I'm actually relieved about leaving this neighborhood behind. Just remember I can only look during lunch breaks or after hours. Caleb seems understanding about family obligations, but I refuse to take advantage of his generosity, especially when I'm still proving myself."

"Smart thinking, honey. I'll coordinate with your schedule. Are you hungry?"

"No thanks, I already ate. I need a hot shower and my bed - I'm exhausted. Good night."

After kissing my mother's cheek, I slept more peacefully than I had in months, knowing Dominic's network of protection extended over our building.

Monday morning arrived with unexpected hostility. At the Thorne Group's downtown headquarters, the reception desk became my first battlefield. Something was seriously wrong when the blonde receptionist refused me entry entirely, treating me like a potential threat rather than Caleb's new employee.

I pulled out my phone and dialed Caleb's direct line. He sounded genuinely confused and asked me to wait while he came down personally to handle the situation.

"Good morning, Gemma," Caleb said as he emerged from the private elevator, his expression darkening as he surveyed the scene. "What exactly is happening here?"

"That woman at reception claimed I wasn't authorized for building access. When I tried explaining my position, she called security and had me physically removed from the premises," I replied, my irritation barely contained while recognizing this could be something more dangerous than simple workplace politics.

"This is completely unacceptable, Gemma. Come with me immediately."

Caleb's tone carried the unmistakable authority of a man accustomed to absolute obedience. He marched me back inside, his presence commanding instant respect from every employee we passed. After I identified the security guard who had manhandled me, he summoned both the guard and receptionist for an immediate explanation. The woman insisted my entry hadn't been properly cleared and that she'd received specific instructions to remove me, but she refused to reveal her source.

Caleb's response was swift and decisive - both employees were terminated immediately and escorted directly to Human Resources, though I suspected their departure from the Thorne organization would involve more than just collecting final paychecks.

He personally arranged my security credentials and building access before escorting me to my designated workspace within his inner circle.

"Monica, I need an explanation for why Gemma's building access was deliberately blocked," Caleb addressed his personal secretary with barely controlled menace.

"Who is Gemma, sir?" Monica's innocent act was transparently false, and I could see the calculation behind her eyes.

"Drop the performance, Monica. I sent you detailed instructions regarding her integration into our operations. I expect zero complications moving forward."

"Sir, I honestly don't understand why you require additional administrative support when I've managed everything flawlessly," Monica protested with obvious resentment and something that looked dangerously like jealousy.

"Since when do you question my strategic decisions?" Caleb's patience had clearly reached its limit, and his voice carried undertones that made even me nervous.

"I apologize, sir."

"Arrange the workspace beside yours exactly as I specified. You'll be responsible for training Gemma on our protocols. I've been considering promoting you to head of operations, Monica, but if you're too comfortable with your current responsibilities, perhaps Gemma would be better suited for advancement."

The threat worked like magic. Monica's demeanor shifted instantly from resentful to obsequiously helpful.

"Thank you for this opportunity, sir. I'll ensure Gemma learns everything she needs to know about our organization," she said with newfound enthusiasm that didn't quite reach her eyes.

The moment Caleb disappeared into his private office, Monica's friendly mask evaporated completely.

"Listen carefully, little girl. Don't create problems for me, or I'll make your life very unpleasant," she hissed with undisguised venom.

"Don't worry, Monica. I'm sure we'll work together perfectly," I replied, matching her coldness with my own steel composure while mentally noting that I'd need to discuss this potential internal threat with Dominic.

My new position brought genuine satisfaction, even if tolerating Monica's constant provocations and subtle sabotage attempts throughout the week proved exhausting. Fortunately, Katelyn from accounting proved to be an absolute treasure - funny, loyal, and wonderfully supportive.

The entire week passed without seeing Dominic, as apartment hunting with my mother consumed my evenings. He voiced his frustration repeatedly during our nightly calls, but I promised to compensate him thoroughly over the weekend.

Friday brought triumph when my mother and I finally discovered the perfect apartment in a building with excellent security and discrete connections to Thorne family interests. After viewing countless properties, we found a beautiful space that exceeded our expectations while meeting Dominic's stringent safety requirements. The financial arrangement worked ideally - we could use our current house as payment and move in as soon as the legal paperwork was completed.

Since the apartment viewing ran late, my mother and I decided on pizza for dinner. I invited Dominic to join us, but he graciously declined, suggesting we enjoy our mother-daughter bonding time while his security detail maintained discrete surveillance. His thoughtfulness never ceased to amaze me.

Later that evening, I called my dangerous boyfriend, who answered with characteristic dark humor.

"Hello, source of my constant torment and sleepless nights."

"Oh Dominic, your dramatic intensity is ridiculous," I laughed. "How was your day managing the family's interests?"

"Lonely and violent without you," he sighed heavily. "I never imagined sharing you with Caleb's operation would steal so much of your time."

"It was just my initial week establishing myself within the organization, that's all. Plus finding secure housing complicated everything."

"Tell me about this fortress you found."

I spent several minutes describing our discovery and expressing excitement about all the upcoming changes, including the building's discrete but comprehensive security features. Dominic listened attentively, asking pointed questions about exit routes and defensive capabilities.

"Now tell me, my dangerous goddess, do I have you completely to myself this weekend?"

"Every single minute."

"Perfect, because sharing wasn't negotiable anyway. I'm collecting you early tomorrow morning and returning you Monday morning."

"The entire weekend?"

"Every single second. I've made special arrangements at one of our family's private compounds. Pack a swimsuit."

"I love the sound of that."

"You're going to love what I've planned for us." Dominic's voice dropped to that husky tone that made my pulse race dangerously. "I need to lose myself in you completely, Gemma."

"I think I'll let you do exactly that," I whispered back, and we continued talking until late into the night.

After ending the call, anticipation coursed through me like electricity. I carefully packed light clothing and several swimsuits in a small bag, set aside Monday's work outfit, and organized everything I'd need for our mysterious weekend at what I suspected would be a heavily fortified Thorne family retreat.

Saturday morning couldn't arrive fast enough.

Chapter 246: Beyond All Reach

Gemma's POV

Dominic remained secretive about our destination, that dangerous smile revealing nothing as we cruised along Port Serenity's coastline. Living in this port city controlled by the organization's operations had taught me to appreciate the ocean's brutal beauty, so when he suggested I pack something revealing for the water, anticipation mixed with the familiar thrill of being with a man who commanded fear from half the city.

Our drive through mafia-controlled territory felt relaxed despite the armed checkpoints we passed. Dominic's soldiers nodded respectfully as his black sedan rolled through their positions. During our journey, he asked about my new role managing finances for the legitimate businesses, his genuine interest in my adaptation to the family's world making something flutter dangerously in my chest.

The closer we approached the private marina where the family's assets were docked, the more restless I became. Dominic caught my excitement and flashed that predatory grin that always reminded me exactly what kind of man had claimed me. We entered the heavily guarded marina district, sliding into a restricted parking area where armed sentries stood watch.

"Come on, beautiful, time to see how a Capo travels when he wants privacy," Dominic announced, grabbing our weekend bags before clasping my hand and leading me past security checkpoints toward the exclusive docks.

We stopped before a massive yacht that dominated the private pier like a floating fortress.

"Dominic, this is incredible," I breathed, staring at the vessel that clearly cost more than most people earned in lifetimes.

"Not just incredible, it’s completely untouchable out there," he said with casual pride at my amazement. "No surveillance, no interruptions, no rival families. Just us."

My jaw dropped as he helped me aboard past additional security stationed on deck. The interior resembled a luxury penthouse more than a boat, designed for conducting sensitive business or disappearing from mainland dangers entirely. Dominic gave me an enthusiastic tour, his pride in this floating sanctuary evident. Everything screamed expensive without crossing into flashy territory that attracted unwanted attention. Several spacious bedrooms for housing associates, a kitchen suitable for feeding crews, and an impressive entertaining area with leather seating and a mahogany conference table that had clearly hosted serious family discussions.

"Dominic, even for someone at your level in the organization, this seems excessive," I commented, still absorbing the implications of such wealth.

"The ocean offers complete freedom from surveillance and jurisdiction," he answered with brutal honesty. "And my woman deserves to see how I live when nobody can touch us."

"I love the feeling of being untouchable."

"Then how about spending our entire weekend beyond anyone’s reach?"

"A whole weekend in your floating kingdom sounds perfect."

"Then we’re leaving harbor immediately." Dominic pulled me against him possessively and captured my lips. "Now slip into something that reminds me why I killed to keep you."

This dangerous man constantly amazed me with his dedication to my happiness, even as his methods reminded me of the violence that surrounded our world. I headed to the master cabin and selected a vibrant yellow bikini that looked stunning against my dark skin. The design was daringly minimal - the bandeau top barely restrained my breasts, while the string bottoms covered only what was absolutely necessary. I added a flowing white cover-up that resembled expensive resort wear, swept my hair into a high ponytail, and went to find him commanding the bridge like he commanded everything else.

He looked magnificent standing there with the confidence of someone who owned everything he surveyed. Wind tousling his hair, completely in his element, wearing that dangerous smile that had first terrified then captivated me. I approached from behind and slipped my arms around his waist, pressing a soft kiss to his neck while feeling the concealed weapons he always carried.

"Perfect, gorgeous, you feel incredible," Dominic murmured, covering my hands with one of his while the other remained on the controls. "See that rocky outcrop ahead? The private island the family uses for sensitive meetings?"

"Yes."

"There's a completely isolated beach there. Want to anchor and enjoy having no witnesses?"

"That sounds absolutely perfect."

When we reached Dominic's chosen location, he cut the engines and efficiently dropped anchor with the precision of someone accustomed to quick departures and arrivals. He worked with focused competence, checking security systems and communication equipment. Once satisfied we were truly alone, he stripped off his shirt and approached me with that predatory expression that never failed to make my pulse race.

"Now you're completely mine. No family business, no territorial disputes, nothing but us," Dominic said with the supreme confidence of a man who had eliminated every threat to claim me.

He kissed me breathlessly while his skilled fingers untied my cover-up, sliding it away and tossing it onto the leather sofa. Only then did he step back to really appreciate me with the hungry gaze of a man who had fought wars to possess what he wanted.

"Beautiful, that barely qualifies as clothing. Promise me other men will never see you like this," he commanded, his stare burning as it traveled over my body with possessive intensity.

"Why? It covers the important parts," I said, doing a playful spin that I knew would drive him wild. When I turned around, he delivered a sharp smack to my bottom that made me gasp with desire while sending heat racing through me.

"This covers absolutely nothing that belongs to me," he growled, pulling me back against his chest while his hands explored my breasts, trailed down my stomach, and reached between my legs, making me moan desperately. "Swimming will definitely wait."

Dominic's hand moved upward as he kissed my neck and untied the strings holding my top, letting it drop to the deck. He captured one nipple, rolling it between his fingers until I cried out with pleasure. Then both hands moved to my hips, untying my bottoms and pulling them away.

The sensation was intoxicating - his powerful body pressed against my back, his heated hands claiming every inch while ocean breezes caressed the skin he hadn't marked yet. I leaned back into him, feeling his arousal pressed against me as his fingers found exactly where I needed him most.

"Dominic," I breathed, my head falling back against his shoulder as pleasure built inside me with each skilled stroke of his fingers.

"That's it, beautiful. Let me hear how much you need this," he commanded, his voice rough with desire as he worked me closer to the edge while his other hand continued its assault on my breasts.

When I shattered against him with a cry that echoed across the empty water, he spun me around and lifted me easily, carrying me to the cushioned seating area. The leather was warm from the sun against my bare skin as he positioned himself over me, his dark eyes burning with possessive hunger.

"You're mine," he growled, claiming my mouth in a kiss that tasted like danger and promise. "Every inch of you belongs to me."

"Yes," I gasped against his lips, arching beneath him as he settled between my legs. "Only yours."

He entered me with a thrust that made me cry out, my nails digging into his shoulders as he filled me completely. The yacht rocked gently with our movements, the sound of water lapping against the hull mixing with our breathless moans and whispered words of possession.

Dominic moved with controlled power, each stroke designed to remind me exactly who commanded my body and soul. When I tried to match his rhythm, he pinned my wrists above my head with one large hand, his smile predatory and satisfied.

"No, beautiful. You take what I give you," he said, slowing his pace until I whimpered with frustration. "Tell me who you belong to."

"You, Dominic. Only you," I gasped, writhing beneath him as he rewarded my submission with deeper, harder thrusts that had me seeing stars.

When my release crashed over me again, he followed with a growl of satisfaction that vibrated through his chest into mine. We stayed connected, breathing hard as the afternoon sun warmed our tangled bodies and the ocean stretched endlessly around our private sanctuary.

Later, after he'd carried me to the master cabin's luxurious shower and we'd made love again against the tiled walls, we lay wrapped in Egyptian cotton sheets watching the sunset paint the sky in shades of fire. Dominic's fingers traced lazy patterns on my bare shoulder while I rested my head on his chest, listening to his steady heartbeat.

"This is perfect," I murmured, pressing a kiss to his warm skin. "Just us."

"Always just us when we're out here," he agreed, his arms tightening around me possessively. "No one can touch what's mine."

As darkness settled over the water and stars began to appear above us, I drifted off to sleep in the arms of the most dangerous man I'd ever known, safe in our floating fortress where nothing could reach us except the endless desire that consumed us both.

Chapter 247: Final Banishment

Dominic's POV

This weekend with Gemma was everything I never knew I needed. Pure bliss consumed me as we explored every inch of that private yacht anchored in international waters, our bodies finding each other in ways that left me breathless. The crystal-clear waters surrounding us became our playground, and

every surface of that boat held memories I would treasure forever. That yacht had already impressed me, but now it held a sacred place in my heart as our sanctuary away from the blood-soaked streets.

Sunday evening, she stayed at my heavily fortified penthouse. I presented her with the designer makeup collection and silk lingerie I had selected from the family's high-end smuggling connections. Her eyes lit up with genuine appreciation, though she playfully scolded me about the extravagant gifts. I confessed the lingerie was purely selfish - I wanted the pleasure of removing it from her perfect body myself.

When I dropped Gemma at Thorne's legitimate front office Monday morning, she radiated this incredible energy that made my chest tighten with pride. Her skin glowed, her smile was infectious, and she moved with the confidence of a woman thoroughly satisfied and completely protected. I felt invincible. Nothing had felt this right in years. Every moment with Gemma became the highlight of my existence in this violent underworld.

The armored elevator ride to my operations floor filled me with unstoppable energy. Zoe stepped in on the fifteenth floor, and I could barely contain my enthusiasm despite the bulletproof glass and surveillance cameras surrounding us.

"Good morning, gorgeous!" I planted a kiss on her cheek, grinning like a teenager who had just survived his first hit.

"Well, well, Frost! That ridiculous smile plastered across your face tells me everything I need to know about your weekend activities." She raised an eyebrow knowingly. "Gemma really took care of you, didn't she?"

My laughter echoed through the reinforced space. "Zoe, you're absolutely priceless! But yes, Gemma is incredible in every possible way!"

"I can see that written all over your face." Her mocking smile made me laugh harder. "But come back to reality because today is going to be brutal, and I have important intelligence."

"Bring on the warfare! I'm ready for anything today!"

"I love when powerful capos submit to me!" She winked, sending me into another fit of laughter.

"Tell me your prince is just as obedient, Zoe."

"My prince, just like you, little Dominic, knows exactly who runs the show in our relationship." Her mischievous grin was infectious. "Now focus! You completely ignored me when I mentioned intelligence."

"Please tell me it’s something good, Zoe!"

"It’s absolutely perfect. Guess who escaped from hell?"

"No way! Did Ivy forgive Thorne?"

"Exactly! So boss, yours wasn’t the only incredible weekend happening."

"That’s absolutely fantastic! I’m thrilled for them, Zo. Caleb and Ivy deserve happiness after everything they’ve survived in this blood-soaked business. Though I suppose I’m losing my best intelligence asset, aren’t I?"

"Possibly. She hasn’t made her final decision about staying with the family operations yet."

"I don’t care. Their happiness is worth more than any territorial arrangement."

Mia was frantically pacing outside the elevator when we arrived, her hand hovering near her concealed weapon. Her nervous energy immediately dampened my mood.

"Oh damn, Mia! Every time you pace like that with your gun hand twitching, disaster follows. Don’t destroy my perfect Monday morning - this weekend was too good to ruin," I said, already dreading whatever news she carried.

"Sweetheart, I’m sorry, but I’m not the one destroying your day. I’m just the messenger," Mia warned with that familiar expression she wore when discussing family betrayals.

"What has my exiled father done this time, Mia?" I recognized that look - the one she wore whenever discussing my worthless, banished father.

"He's been waiting in your operations center for a short while, Dominic. Arrived with that arrogant attitude and superiority complex you know so well. You know I can't legally stop a blood relative from entering, even a disgraced one." Mia's disgust was palpable.

"I understand, Mia." I sighed and turned to Zoe. "He's going to be inappropriate and disgusting toward you, so feel free to inflict serious damage if necessary. Family exile doesn't protect him from consequences."

"Don't worry, Frost. I've got this handled!" Zoe's confidence was reassuring.

I entered my operations center to find Marcus sitting behind my command desk like he still held rank in the family. The same desk he hadn't earned the right to occupy since his disgraceful exile. If his reckless betrayals had continued, we would have lost everything to rival families.

"Look what finally showed up - the little boy decided to grace us with his presence," he spoke with that condescending tone that made my blood boil.

"I stopped being a boy the day you were exiled. Get away from my desk immediately!" My voice was ice-cold.

"Watch your tone with me, boy! Everything you have exists because of my bloodline."

"Actually, father, if the family had kept you in power, my mother, sister, and I would be dead in some rival family's warehouse!"

When my parents divorced, I assumed control of his territory. After my grandfather's assassination, the family council voted to exile Marcus completely from operations. His reckless spending and massive resource drains were destroying everything we had built through blood and violence.

"Show some respect!" He slammed his fist against the desk, standing aggressively.

"What do you want? Why are you here?"

"I've been trying to reach you for weeks, and you ignore every attempt."

"I'm running a criminal empire. State your purpose."

"I need more money. What you're sending isn't sufficient for my lifestyle anymore. And I want exclusive access to the family aircraft next month - I'm taking my girlfriend on a European tour. I'll provide your assistant with a list of five-star hotels for reservations." He delivered these demands like a don addressing subordinates.

"The money I provide allows you to live luxuriously in exile. Forget about the aircraft - it's for legitimate family operations, not your entertainment. And never give orders to my soldiers again."

"Listen carefully, Dominic. I'm your father, and I'm not asking - I'm telling you!" His voice rose dangerously.

"And I'm telling you not one additional cent! I don't obey you, and I certainly don't respect you!" I shouted directly in his face.

"Dominic, should I call the soldiers?" Zoe and Mia appeared at the doorway, hands near their weapons.

"Well! Is this your new intelligence officer? Are you sleeping with this one too?" Marcus's disgusting gaze traveled over Zoe like she was merchandise.

"Don't you dare! If you have no respect for women, at least respect your allies," I warned, but he was already moving toward Zoe.

"You're quite attractive," Marcus said, reaching toward Zoe's face with his filthy hands.

Before he could touch her, she grabbed his wrist and drove her knee into his groin with devastating force. He collapsed to the floor, clutching himself and screaming in agony.

"Don’t you dare touch me with your disgusting hands, you pathetic exile!" Zoe leaned down and screamed in his face. She stood up, flipped her hair back, and delivered the final blow: "Oh, and by the way, I’m Zoe Miller! I’ll be sure to tell my father, Don Robert, exactly what kind of scumbag violates family alliances."

"You idiot, you hired Miller’s daughter?" Marcus gasped through gritted teeth.

"Get up and get out of my territory," I said with complete disgust. "And do me one favor - pretend I don’t exist. Your monthly exile allowance will continue, but don’t ever come looking for me again."

Pure hatred blazed in Marcus’s eyes. We had never gotten along, but after his exile, our relationship deteriorated beyond repair. I couldn’t tolerate him anymore. The fact that he was my biological father meant absolutely nothing to me - I didn’t romanticize blood relations in this business. I only continued supporting him because of my sister. Nadia had been devastated by the family scandal, having adored her father, and despite knowing his true nature now, she still harbored affection for him.

He struggled to his feet and took two threatening steps toward me. I lost what little composure remained.

"GET OUT OF HERE RIGHT NOW!" I roared at him. "Or I’m calling armed soldiers to remove you forcibly."

"This isn’t finished, Dominic," Marcus glared at me one final time before limping out.

I immediately called family security and banned him permanently from all family territories. Zoe left briefly, and Mia sat across from me.

"Boy, it was past time you removed that toxic man from your operations. He’s poison for the family," Mia said, and I squeezed her hand, agreeing completely.

"Frost, it’s not Gemma’s special tea, but it’ll help calm your nerves after family drama," Zoe returned with a steaming cup, making me smile despite everything.

"You’re absolutely impossible, you crazy woman!" I thanked her and drank the soothing tea. "Are you going to tell your father what happened here?"

"Absolutely. I won’t have that exile anywhere near my mother or our family operations," Zoe said firmly.

"Good. Your father knows his character, but he’s getting worse every day. He doesn’t deserve a noble ally like Don Robert." I supported her decision completely, though I would speak to Miller personally. What my worthless exiled father did was completely unacceptable and disrespectful to family alliances.

Chapter 248: Safe Serenity Found

Dominic’s POV

The chaos Marcus had unleashed on the family needed time to settle. After his venomous visit to my territory, I immediately contacted my mother to warn her that the exile had returned to Port Serenity. Her response was swift and decisive, exactly what I expected from a woman who had survived decades in the Thorne organization.

"I’m leaving for a wellness retreat with the other wives," she announced without hesitation. "I refuse to let that toxic bastard destroy my peace again."

Smart woman. She had endured enough of his manipulation and psychological warfare over the years before the family finally cast him out.

Around mid-afternoon, Vincenzo burst through my office door like a ray of sunshine cutting through the storm clouds of family politics. Zoe glanced up from her intelligence reports as he approached with that trademark grin that could disarm any tension.

"Hey gorgeous, if your beauty kills me, will you give me CPR?" he delivered with theatrical flair that would make any wise guy proud.

Both Zoe and I erupted in laughter despite the day's stress. "Kid, you're absolutely shameless," I said, shaking my head at my nephew's audacity.

"Sweetheart, when you're legal, I might just take you up on that offer," Zoe played along, batting her eyelashes while never missing a beat in her work.

Vincenzo clutched his chest dramatically like he'd been shot. "A few years, beautiful. Mark your calendar because I'm holding you to that blood oath."

He dropped into the chair beside Zoe's desk, his playful demeanor shifting as the reality of our family situation crept back in. "So I heard you had the pleasure of meeting our beloved patriarch?"

The sarcasm in his voice was thick as molten lead. My nephew had witnessed firsthand how Marcus had psychologically tormented his mother during his reign of terror, watching her breakdown countless times before his exile.

"Let's not even discuss that snake," Zoe replied with pure disgust. "Thank God you and your uncle turned out nothing like him."

"Trust me, he represents everything I despise about the old ways," Vincenzo said, his usual humor fading into cold hatred that reminded me he was Thorne blood through and through. "And I'm just a teenager saying that."

"How did you even know he was back in territory?" I asked, though I suspected the answer would ignite my rage all over again.

"Because he's camping out at our house, poisoning Mom's mind against you," Vincenzo rolled his eyes with teenage exasperation mixed with genuine concern. "I had to leave before I did something that would require Zoe to clean up bodies. He kept ranting about how ungrateful you and Grandma are for not welcoming him back into the organization."

"And your mother is buying into his psychological warfare again?" I sighed heavily, feeling the familiar weight of family obligations crushing down.

Vincenzo nodded grimly, looking older than his years. "All those therapy sessions with the family counselor down the drain. He shows up and destroys all her progress every single time with his manipulative bullshit."

"Dominic, women in our world process these toxic family relationships differently than soldiers do," Zoe interjected thoughtfully, her fingers never stopping their work on the encrypted communications.

"Zoe, you saw him yourself. The man is pure poison, manipulative and dangerous," I explained, remembering how she'd witnessed Marcus's verbal assault firsthand. "Nadia doesn't know how to protect herself from his psychological games."

"What about Grandma?" Vincenzo asked with genuine concern threading through his voice. He adored my mother with the fierce loyalty that ran through our bloodline.

"She's already gone. Probably boarding her private jet as we speak," I smiled with genuine pride at her quick tactical retreat.

"Thank God," Vincenzo exhaled in relief that seemed to come from his soul. "Uncle, can I crash at your safe house until he leaves territory? I swear I won't interfere with you and Aunt Gemma."

I could tell he'd been building up courage for this request since he walked through my door.

"If your mother clears it through family channels, absolutely. I'll make the call."

"My bag's already with Mia," he grinned sheepishly, revealing he'd already planned his escape route.

"Well then, since you're here seeking sanctuary, you're working," Zoe declared with the authority of someone who commanded respect throughout the organization. My nephew jumped to follow her orders without complaint. The woman had natural leadership that would terrify most capos.

The afternoon flew by in a blur of family business and damage control. When closing time arrived, I left with Vincenzo to collect Gemma from Caleb's legitimate front office. We had dinner plans, and she'd agreed to join our impromptu family gathering.

"Auntie, my angel!" Vincenzo barely waited for me to park before launching himself at Gemma like she was his salvation.

"Vincenzo, you charmer!" She embraced him warmly, and the genuine affection between them always made something fierce and protective unfurl in my chest. "So tonight I get dinner with the two most dangerous guys in the city?"

"Well, one dangerous guy and one decent-looking old soldier," Vincenzo gestured toward me with a smirk that earned him a warning glare.

"Watch it, smart mouth," I warned before pulling Gemma close for a kiss that tasted like home and safety.

"Auntie, please don't let him take us somewhere boring and fancy," Vincenzo pleaded with exaggerated desperation.

"Yeah Dominic, no stuffy mob hangouts tonight," Gemma winked at him conspiratorially. "We want pizza!"

"Alright, pizza it is," I conceded, kissing her cheek and tasting the sweetness that could wash away any family poison.

"And bowling afterwards," she added with a mischievous grin that spelled trouble for my dignity.

"You're really going to torture me with bowling?" I groaned, knowing my reputation would never survive another public humiliation.

"If you come without complaining, I'll spend the night at your place," Gemma whispered seductively against my ear.

"I absolutely love bowling!" I declared immediately, making them both burst into laughter that echoed through the parking structure.

Dinner was filled with Vincenzo's hilarious adventures and embarrassing stories that had nothing to do with blood or territory wars. At the bowling alley, I suffered a humiliating defeat while they mercilessly mocked my terrible technique. Despite my wounded pride, the evening was exactly what my soul needed after dealing with Marcus's toxicity.

Later, I sat on my bed watching Gemma emerge from the bathroom wearing the white silk nightgown I'd bought her along with expensive cosmetics that probably cost more than most people's cars. She looked absolutely breathtaking, like something worth killing for.

She approached slowly, climbing onto the bed and straddling my hips while placing her hands on my shoulders with practiced confidence.

"Want to talk about what happened with your father today?" she asked gently, her voice carrying the kind of understanding that could heal bullet wounds.

"I'm sure Zoe filled you in on all the bloody details."

"Of course she did. She's my sister-in-arms, and she knows I want to support you and clear the poison from your mind," Gemma traced patterns on my chest that made my blood sing.

"Is that the only reason you're staying over?"

"Hell no, Dominic. I'm here because you've got an incredible body and I've been thinking about you all day," she said with such matter-of-fact honesty that I laughed out loud.

"I thought maybe you came to comfort me with some herbal tea or something therapeutic."

"Tea?" she raised an eyebrow with amusement dancing in her dark eyes.

"Yeah, Zoe mentioned something about you giving me special tea, but she was confused. What you really gave me was something much better that I can't stop craving."

Gemma looked at me with pure amusement, shaking her head at my ridiculous attempt at innuendo.

"You always say such provocative things to me."

"I love getting you worked up. It drives you wild," I murmured, pulling her closer and kissing her neck where her pulse thundered against my lips.

"It absolutely does. I love when you talk dirty while you're inside me," she breathed against my ear before kissing me with enough fire to burn down rival territories. "Maybe we should explore more of that tonight."

I laughed at her boldness, amazed by this incredible woman who could make me forget every drop of blood on my hands. I was completely addicted to her presence, her strength, her fearless love. Our laughter eventually gave way to passion that consumed us both, and we spent the night lost in each other with very little sleep and zero regrets.

Chapter 249: Letter Brings Fear

Threats

Gemma's POV

I hadnt seen Dominic since earlier this week when he left to handle some urgent family business with his nephew Vincenzo. After encouraging him to focus on Thorne family matters, I seized the opportunity to help Mom prepare for our upcoming relocation to the new safe house that Caleb had arranged for us.

Time seemed to slip away effortlessly. Don Caleb had assigned me the task of redesigning both his private office and his sister Cora's workspace at their legitimate front company, which I found absolutely thrilling. The only dark cloud hanging over this exciting project was having to endure Monica, that venomous snake who worked as receptionist and seized every opportunity to make my life miserable.

Monica launched into her usual routine as she spotted me heading toward Don Caleb’s office. "Certain individuals with their shiny foreheads seem to believe theyre untouchable around here just because they caught a capo’s attention."

I fixed the don’s poisonous employee with my most expressionless stare. "You must be completely obsessed with me. Listen carefully, sweet Monica, do me a favor and leave me alone whenever humanly possible."

"Better watch your step, you little nobody," she hissed back venomously.

I glanced skyward dramatically. "Dear God, please help me resist the overwhelming desire to introduce some peoples faces to concrete."

Monica stepped closer, her voice dripping with false sweetness. "Allow me to offer you some friendly guidance, precious Gemma. You might want to start browsing job listings because your little protected status here has an expiration date."

"You know what, Monica? I would totally value your perspective, but my patience meter just hit empty."

Jude emerged from the elevator, walking in our direction. As one of Caleb’s trusted soldiers, he sensed the brewing tension between us and addressed us with genuine concern. "Is there some kind of issue happening here, ladies?"

"Not at all, Jude, everythings perfectly fine." I shot Monica a look, noting the pure venom radiating from her gaze. Before making my exit, I decided to deliver one final jab. "Just so were crystal clear, darling Monica, whatever beef you have with me belongs entirely to you." I blew her an exaggerated kiss and swept into Don Caleb’s office with Jude trailing behind me.

"Gemma, whats the real story here?" Jude inquired once we were alone in the don’s office.

"Jude, that woman never passes up an opportunity to get under my skin. Im just maintaining my cheerful facade to avoid having Dominic turn her into fish food."

Jude erupted in laughter. "Gemma, youre absolutely incorrigible. This wall color you selected for the don is stunning."

"Gorgeous, isnt it? Im completely in love with this project."

"Your aesthetic sense is impeccable. Just keep brushing off Monica. Dominic would lose his mind if she caused you real trouble." Jude gave me a conspiratorial wink before departing to handle his security rounds.

Later in the week brought a phone call from Dominic. The moment I picked up, he launched into his complaints with that familiar possessive growl.

"This situation is completely unacceptable, Gemma. You should come with a warning label from the surgeon general."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, genuinely confused.

"A big red warning stating that you cause severe physical and psychological addiction to dangerous men." I dissolved into hysterical laughter at his ridiculous declaration.

"Dominic, you are absolutely ridiculous."

"My beautiful goddess, out of all the places your mind could wander, you refuse to leave mine. Its becoming a serious problem. I cannot concentrate on family business." Dominic let out an exaggerated sigh while I continued cackling.

"You bring so much joy into my life, you know that?" I managed between giggles, wiping tears from my eyes.

"Perfect, because Vincenzo and I are coming to collect you this evening, and were bringing a complete dinner to share with your mother. I know youre drowning in moving preparations for the safe house."

"She will absolutely adore that idea. And honestly, so will I."

When we arrived home, Mom was already deep into packing kitchen supplies. "Mom, we have company," I announced as we walked through the door.

My mother emerged from the kitchen, her face lighting up when she spotted Dominic behind me.

"Well, well, my future son-in-law finally decided to grace me with his presence," Mom teased Dominic playfully.

"My sincere apologies, dear mother-in-law. Family obligations kept me away longer than I intended," Dominic responded with equal playfulness, embracing my mother warmly.

"And who might this handsome young gentleman be? Is he your son, Dominic?" Mom examined Vincenzo with curious interest.

"This is my oldest nephew, Vincenzo," Dominic explained.

"Ma’am, we brought a complete meal and extra hands to assist with your packing," Vincenzo announced enthusiastically. I could immediately tell he had completely charmed my mother.

"I have excellent feelings about this young man," Mom smiled approvingly at Dominic.

"How could you not? Vincenzo is an absolute angel," I added, watching Vincenzo turn pink with embarrassment.

"Wonderful, lets enjoy our meal first, then tackle some work while you share stories about your uncle, Vincenzo. I need to determine whether hes worthy of my Gemma," Mom joked, and Vincenzo eagerly joined the game.

"Well, ma’am, Im honestly not entirely convinced he deserves her," Vincenzo replied with mock seriousness. Dominic shot him a warning glare that could have melted steel, sending us all into fits of laughter.

Later, I accompanied Dominic and Vincenzo to the front gate. Vincenzo said his goodbyes and settled into the armored car. Dominic drew me against his chest, his hands possessively gripping my waist.

"How does dinner sound tomorrow evening? Just the two of us, a romantic night alone at my private estate?" Dominic whispered seductively in my ear.

"That sounds absolutely perfect." He pressed his lips against my neck, sending delicious shivers down my spine. "But what about Vincenzo?"

"Hes returning home tomorrow. My sister contacted me saying our dear father finally moved to a neutral hotel, so she wants Vincenzo back home." Dominic continued his assault on my neck with gentle kisses. "Ill arrive in the evening to pick you up in the armored vehicle. The weather forecast predicts things are going to get very hot tomorrow."

I burst into laughter at his terrible pun. He was wonderfully corny and armed with an endless supply of cheesy lines that somehow made my heart race despite his deadly reputation.

Mom was preparing for bed when I returned inside.

"Sweetheart, Im exhausted. Well finish packing tomorrow." She kissed my forehead, and as she headed down the hallway toward her bedroom, she suddenly remembered something important. "Oh, Gemma. You received a letter today. I found it rather strange since who actually sends physical letters anymore, especially with no return address? I placed it in your bedroom."

"Probably just some promotional material, Mom. Thank you." I smiled and headed to the kitchen for water, though something cold settled in my stomach.

The letter sat waiting on my nightstand when I reached my room. Examining the envelope closely, I found it deeply unsettling. It definitely wasnt advertising material or anything resembling typical mail. The sender remained unknown to me, and I didnt recognize the handwriting either. The writing

appeared feminine but somehow menacing, and the sender had provided no name, only an unfamiliar address that made my skin crawl. I changed into comfortable clothes, and settling onto my bed, I carefully opened the envelope with trembling fingers. Terror washed over me as I read the contents, my blood turning to ice.

Chapter 250: Black Velvet Box

Dominic’s POV

"Uncle, don’t you think this might be crossing into dangerously sentimental territory?" Vincenzo questioned, watching me scatter the final handful of deep red rose petals across my penthouse carpet.

"Not even close to excessive," I replied with satisfaction, surveying my apartment transformed into what could only be described as a romantic fortress. Blood-red petals carpeted every surface like fallen soldiers, elaborate floral arrangements commanded each corner like silent sentries, and metallic heart balloons floated against the ceiling like surveillance drones.

The rose trail wound through the entire space, creating a crimson pathway that led straight to my bedroom sanctuary, where I had devoted equal attention to transforming the bed and bathroom into a silken paradise.

"I’m fairly certain you monopolized every flower vendor in our territory," Vincenzo observed, his trained gaze sweeping the decorated room with the analytical precision our family had drilled into him. "Same situation with those heart balloons."

"Don’t be ridiculous," I shot back. "I placed specialized orders through our network contacts weeks in advance."

"Christ, uncle! Who knew the Thorne family’s most ruthless Capo had such an outrageously romantic side buried beneath all that calculated violence!" Vincenzo burst into laughter, clapping me on the shoulder with genuine amusement. "But I need to extract myself now. Mother dispatched her personal driver."

"I already informed her I would escort you home personally," I protested, my protective instincts automatically engaging.

"You understand how Mother operates within family protocol," Vincenzo shrugged apologetically. "Uncle, this entire week under your roof has been absolutely incredible."

"Kid, the sentiment is completely mutual. My territory is permanently open to you. This stronghold is your sanctuary too." My nephew wrapped me in an enthusiastic embrace, and I realized how profoundly I had treasured having him under my protection.

"Thanks, uncle. We'll see you both at tomorrow's family gathering, correct?"

"Without question. Gemma and I wouldn't dare miss the family assembly. Your mother guaranteed me your grandfather won't be making any unwelcome appearances."

After seeing Vincenzo safely to his extraction point, I retreated to the guest bathroom for a strategic cleansing, carefully avoiding my masterpiece in the master suite. By evening precisely, I was positioned at my goddess's front door like a disciplined soldier.

"Dominic! Good evening, sweetheart," Gemma's mother welcomed me with notably enhanced warmth.

"Good evening. You look absolutely radiant tonight!" I meant every calculated word - she possessed genuine beauty, and Gemma had inherited those commanding features that could stop traffic or negotiations cold.

"You're such a smooth operator! I'm orchestrating my own romantic campaign actually," she beamed with obvious contentment. "Allow me to introduce you to Ryder, my gentleman companion."

After some diplomatic conversation, my goddess and I were finally advancing toward my fortified apartment. I couldn't help registering that Gemma seemed unusually withdrawn, her mind clearly processing some internal intelligence.

"My goddess, I've arranged an intimate operation at my headquarters, but if you'd prefer to relocate to neutral territory, just give the order."

"No, Dominic, your place sounds absolutely perfect for tonight’s mission!"

"Excellent, because I’ve been going completely insane missing you! This entire week felt like a prolonged siege," I confessed.

"I’ve missed you desperately too." Her smile didn’t quite achieve full deployment, and something was obviously weighing heavily on her strategic thinking. "So what’s behind that troubled expression you’re carrying?"

"It’s genuinely nothing significant. Probably just tactical exhaustion. We spent today completing all the logistics for the territorial relocation, and soon the moving crew will transfer all assets to the new safe house."

"Aren’t you excited about establishing new ground?"

"I’m absolutely thrilled and counting down the hours until I’m operating from completely secure territory."

"Perfect. But I should provide fair warning that sleeping definitely isn’t included in tonight’s operational parameters." I deployed a predatory grin, and Gemma finally laughed with genuine warmth.

"And what exactly is included in tonight’s tactical agenda?"

"Getting completely lost exploring that incredible body of yours and spending all night finding my way back to myself through you!" Gemma erupted into laughter, and whatever had been troubling her seemed to fade into background noise, at least temporarily.

"You’re absolutely without shame!" She was still giggling.

"That’s entirely your responsibility for being so devastatingly lethal!" I lifted her hand to my lips, pressing a reverent kiss to her palm. "I genuinely hope you’ll appreciate the surprise operation I’ve coordinated."

"There’s going to be a surprise mission?"

"Multiple surprise deployments, actually!"

"I’m completely obsessed with surprises!" Her excitement made her look like a little girl discovering Christmas morning treasures, and my heart expanded watching her genuine joy.

Gemma’s jaw dropped completely when we reached my apartment and I swung the reinforced door open. Before departing earlier, I had activated every small amber illumination unit throughout the space, along with countless LED installations designed to simulate flickering candles. Vincenzo had successfully negotiated me away from using actual flames, convincing me that the quantity I desired could potentially compromise the entire building’s structural integrity.

"Holy hell!" Gemma breathed slowly. "Are you secretly operating some kind of rose distribution empire or something?"

"Not currently, but that’s actually not a terrible investment strategy," I replied with calculated amusement. "Do you find it objectionable?"

"Dominic, I’m completely in love with it! It’s exactly as wonderfully over-the-top as our entire dangerous relationship!" Gemma’s smile made me laugh with genuine relief. She launched herself into my arms, wrapping around my neck for a passionate kiss that tasted like victory. "This is absolutely magical! Thank you."

"I’m so relieved you’re pleased with the operation. I have considerably more surprise maneuvers planned for tonight."

"Oh really?"

"Definitely, and we’re commencing with dinner service."

The evening was unfolding exactly according to my strategic plan. Dinner was flawless, and afterward we established position in the living room with premium wine, engaging in intimate intelligence sharing.

Gemma enthusiastically described the security improvements she had implemented at Caleb and Ivy's legitimate front operation and how fulfilled she felt in her new position within our organization. I shared the intelligence that Ivy would be returning to active duty soon, which clearly delighted her.

"I need to escort you to the bedroom immediately," I murmured, tracing my finger along the elegant curve of her cheek.

"Finally!" Her response caught me completely off-guard, and my surprise must have registered clearly across my face. "What? Did you assume you're the only one burning with desire and craving to make love? Absolutely not, my gorgeous man. I'm equally desperate to lose myself in your incredible body and discover myself through you."

"You're too perfect to exist in reality. Sometimes I'm convinced I must be experiencing some elaborate dream." I captured her lips in a kiss, feeling the heat building between us immediately, but I wanted to advance operations to the bedroom where I had one final special surprise positioned. I stood, pulling her with me. "Come on!"

When we entered the bedroom, Gemma appeared just as amazed as she had witnessing the living room transformation. Beyond the romantic fortifications, I had prepared a bottle of champagne chilling in tactical ice alongside fresh strawberries with whipped cream and rich chocolate.

"Now I'm the one questioning if you're actually real," Gemma said, turning to face me completely. "It's like you materialized straight from my most dangerous fantasies."

I smiled and drew her into a kiss that was burning, wet, and heavy with raw tactical desire. My arousal was already straining obviously against my tactical pants. While kissing my goddess deeply, I guided her backward toward the bed with military precision. I seated her gently on the edge and reluctantly broke our kiss.

"I have something special for you. It's unconventional, but I'm hoping you'll find it acceptable," I said, gesturing toward the black velvet box resting on the bed like a small piece of artillery.

Gemma looked at me with curious eyes, drew the box closer with careful precision, and opened it with the delicate attention of someone defusing explosives. Her eyes went wide, her lips forming a perfect circle of surprise, but she remained completely silent. She ran her fingertips over the contents with

meticulous attention, and anxiety began building in my chest like incoming enemy fire, wondering if perhaps this hadn't been such a brilliant tactical decision after all. But Gemma still wasn't speaking, and the longer her silence stretched, the more my panic grew that I had made a catastrophic strategic error. She just continued examining the box's contents with intense concentration like she was analyzing classified intelligence.