Mafia Mask 25

Chapter 25 Underground Investigation

Ivy's POV

Everyone assembled in Caleb's office, and he instructed me to secure both my office door and his before we began. We settled into the leather sofas arranged in a circle, the atmosphere heavy with unspoken tension and danger. Caleb's jaw was set tight as he started speaking with the authority of a man used to commanding life and death.

"What I'm about to share stays between us five. You're the only people in this organization I can trust completely right now." His voice carried a lethal weight I'd never heard before. "Six months ago, I started noticing discrepancies in our financial reports. Small things at first, but they didn't add up when I cross-referenced them with our territorial accounting and shipment data. Xavier and I have been quietly investigating, and after the last quarterly report, we're certain of one thing. Someone is systematically stealing from our operations."

The words hit me like a physical blow. I glanced at Jude, whose usual easy demeanor had vanished completely, replaced by the cold focus of a soldier preparing for war. His hands were clenched on his knees, mirroring my own growing anxiety. Xavier leaned forward, his expression lethal.

"It's worse than simple embezzlement," Xavier continued, his voice low and controlled like a predator stalking prey. "They're bleeding our other resources too. We've lost three major shipping contracts this month alone, and several others have significantly reduced their arrangements with us. This isn't coincidence—this is warfare."

Heidi's face went pale. "If we're being attacked on multiple fronts, this organization could be completely destroyed. We could be looking at the end of everything." Her voice trembled slightly, betraying the fear we all felt.

Caleb ran both hands through his hair, a gesture of frustration I'd rarely seen from this controlled man. "Exactly why I had you pull those accounting documents yesterday without warning, Heidi. But this situation is massive, and we need a comprehensive investigation to understand the full scope of the betrayal."

A chill ran down my spine as pieces clicked into place with deadly clarity. "Caleb, if this is happening across multiple departments simultaneously, we're not dealing with a lone wolf. This is organized, coordinated. It's a conspiracy." I paused, remembering something that made my stomach drop. "I've seen this before. When I worked at the construction company, one of Kyle Miller's associates experienced something identical. His business seemed rock solid one day and was completely destroyed the next."

Xavier's eyes sharpened with dangerous interest. "What exactly happened to him?"

"Harold Scott owned Zenith Steel. He thought he was being cautious by hiring a professional audit firm when he noticed irregularities. The auditors gave him a clean bill of health, and within a week, his company was bankrupt. Everything had been systematically stripped away." I felt the familiar anger rising as I remembered Scott's devastation. "Kyle assigned me to help him for three months afterward, trying to piece together how it happened."

Caleb's expression shifted to one of recognition mixed with surprise. "Wait, you're talking about Harold Scott? He was my father's close friend. I met with him after the bankruptcy, and he mentioned someone had helped him expose the conspiracy. That was you?"

"Yes. We discovered the audit firm had been compromised from day one. The perpetrators bought off the auditors before they even started working. That's why I strongly advise against hiring an external audit firm right now. The moment we do, whoever is behind this will know we're onto them. They'll destroy evidence, sabotage the investigation, or corrupt the auditors."

Jude looked confused and worried. "But Ivy, without professional auditors, how do we catch these traitors?"

I had been thinking about this exact scenario since Xavier first mentioned the missing money. "We create our own investigation team, but we do it covertly. We hire three or four people who appear to be regular new employees, but they're actually undercover operatives we trust completely. They infiltrate different departments as spies, monitoring daily operations while conducting their real work after hours when the building is empty."

Caleb and Xavier exchanged a look of lethal understanding that told me they were already seeing the deadly possibilities. My boss leaned forward intently. "You have a complete battle plan, don't you, Ivy?"

I nodded, feeling more confident as the strategy crystallized in my mind. "The building has that empty floor below the executive suite. We announce renovations and clear it out completely, then set up a secure investigation headquarters there. Just like you've done with the executive level, we restrict access to only the people in this room. Our undercover operatives work their regular jobs during the day, gathering intelligence and copying documents. Meanwhile, you install surveillance equipment throughout the building, recording devices in offices and on phone lines. The actual analysis happens at night when our team can work without any contact with regular employees."

Xavier nodded approvingly but looked puzzled about one detail. "The night shift makes sense for secrecy, but why exclusively nights?"

"Complete isolation prevents discovery and eliminates corruption opportunities. If they never interact with company employees, no one can figure out what they're really doing or attempt to buy them off. Plus, strangers working during business hours would raise immediate suspicion."

Heidi's expression brightened for the first time since we'd started talking. "Ivy, that's brilliant. But where do we find trustworthy people with the necessary skills for this kind of dangerous work?"

"I still have contacts from Scott's investigation. Independent professionals, highly qualified, and they've handled this exact type of corporate warfare before. Actually, Mr. Scott himself would be invaluable. He's become something of an expert in detecting and destroying these conspiracies since his own experience."

Caleb's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Harold Scott is still doing this type of work?"

"He had to reinvent himself after losing everything. He took extensive courses in forensic accounting and fraud detection. He's helped several other organizations that found themselves under similar attacks." The sadness in my voice was impossible to hide. "He's a good man who didn't deserve what happened to him."

"I remember the case," Xavier said grimly. "The legal warfare is still ongoing. Several arrests were made, but Scott never recovered most of what was stolen from him."

"His family's other small businesses kept them from complete financial ruin, but he lost his life's work." I felt angry all over again thinking about it. "Caleb, Scott would be perfect to lead this investigation. He knows exactly how these schemes operate and how to destroy the perpetrators."

Caleb's decision was immediate and decisive. "Then that's exactly what we're going to do. Ivy, your plan is our weapon." He looked around the circle at each of us with lethal authority. "Xavier, are you on board?"

"Completely. It's perfect warfare."

"Heidi?"

"Absolutely. It's our best option for survival."

"Excellent. We start implementation immediately, but there's one more requirement. From now on, our strategic meetings happen at my compound. Ivy and Jude, you'll be compensated for the additional time, naturally." We all nodded our agreement. "Heidi, I know you're transitioning out, but if we need you back for this war, can you return?"

Heidi's maternal instincts showed in her warm smile. "Whatever you need, dear. I'll be there."

"Perfect. I'll arrange a meeting with Scott at my compound next Saturday. Heidi, your final assignment is relocating everyone from the floor below executive level. Start spreading news about the renovation project. I'll also meet with Fisher, our head of security. He's completely trustworthy and will help us install the surveillance equipment." Caleb's voice carried renewed confidence and dangerous determination. "From this moment forward, we discuss this matter only in private meetings at my compound. Never in this building again."

One by one, everyone agreed and filed out of the office like soldiers preparing for war. I started to follow, but Caleb's weary voice stopped me.

"Ivy, stay for a moment, please."

The tone suggested this conversation would be about more than just business.