Mafia Mask 311

Chapter 311: Safe House Seduction

Gemma's POV

I gasped when Dominic pushed open the bedroom door of his private safe house and led me inside. The room glowed under soft amber lighting, transforming the fortified space into something unexpectedly tender. My breath caught as I absorbed the scene before me—dark chocolates and imported truffles scattered across every surface, an enormous basket filled with the finest European confections positioned on the silk-draped bed, and handwritten declarations of devotion framed in sterling silver adorning the bulletproof walls. Crimson rose petals blanketed the Italian marble floor, evidence of meticulous preparation by the most dangerous man in Thorne territory.

Dominic moved the chocolate basket to the reinforced nightstand with careful precision, selected a piece infused with aged whiskey, and peeled away the gold foil slowly. He positioned it between my lips with the same deliberate control he used when handling firearms. As I bit into the liqueur-filled confection, a thin stream of the amber liquid traced down my chin. Without hesitation, the Capo leaned forward, his tongue following the sweet trail with predatory grace before claiming the remaining chocolate for himself, his emerald eyes never leaving mine.

The seduction had commenced with all the intensity of a mafia power play. He began unbuttoning his custom Italian shirt, revealing the muscled torso marked with scars from territorial wars, each movement calculated to build anticipation within me. When I reached for my clothing, he caught my wrists with hands that had orchestrated countless violent negotiations, insisting on removing each garment himself while his gaze consumed every inch of exposed skin with possessive hunger.

His mouth captured mine in a kiss that embodied both the tender protectiveness he showed his family and the ruthless dominance he wielded over his enemies. The sensation of his tongue moving against mine was intoxicatingly dangerous, communicating not merely affection but staking an absolute claim of ownership. The kiss carried raw desire, territorial possessiveness, and carnal satisfaction, yet simultaneously forged a direct connection to my soul, flooding my entire being with the kind of love that could survive mafia warfare.

"You taste sweeter than any prize I've claimed," Dominic murmured against my lips between kisses, his voice carrying the same authority that commanded respect in family meetings. "Every part of you belongs to me."

He captured my lower lip between his teeth with controlled aggression, then soothed the gentle bite with a slow sweep of his tongue, igniting flames within me that demanded complete surrender. Taking my hand in his scarred fingers, he guided me to the reinforced bed and lowered me onto sheets that probably cost more than most people's annual salary, supporting his weight above me with arms that had held both weapons and lovers. I followed his lead like a loyal soldier following her commanding officer through a deadly dance.

I wrapped my legs around his waist, feeling his hardness pressing against my heated center. Drawing him closer, I was rewarded with a deeper kiss accompanied by a possessive growl that sent electricity through every nerve in my body, reminding me that I belonged to a man who could eliminate threats with a single order.

Our surrender transcended the physical joining of our bodies—it represented the emotional merger of two souls who had survived betrayal, family warfare, and deadly enemies together. The space between us could no longer accommodate the doubts planted by past betrayals or the jealousy stirred by former enemies, only two hearts opening completely in the kind of vulnerability that could prove fatal in our world.

What I experienced beneath the man who ruled Thorne territory with an iron fist was almost overwhelming in its intensity. I traced my hands over the firm muscles that had been sculpted by years of physical combat, needing tangible proof that this moment of peace was real. Dominic seemed to share this desperate need for confirmation, his calloused fingers mapping every inch of my skin as if to convince himself that we had truly found our way back to each other.

Wherever his mouth traveled, leaving a burning trail of kisses, gentle suction, and teasing licks across sensitive areas, his hands followed in tactical exploration. When he reached the tender junction between my thighs, his tongue penetrated me with the same precision he applied to business negotiations, launching me into a whirlwind of sensations that obliterated rational thought. My vocabulary dissolved into incoherent moans and fragmented pleas lost in a storm of desire.

He withdrew his mouth and hands, positioning himself above me to enter me with an intensity that nearly stopped my heart. My body recognized his as an essential component of my existence, and we moved together in perfect synchronization, establishing a rhythm that spoke of reunion and unbreakable bonds forged in blood and loyalty.

His lips claimed mine again as our movements intensified with increasing urgency. He reached depths within me that triggered an extraordinary climax we achieved simultaneously, our whispered declarations of eternal devotion mingling as we dissolved into an orgasm that pushed the boundaries of human endurance.

The separation had been too brutal, the longing too consuming. We spent the night consumed by the fire burning between us, surrendering to passion while celebrating our survival of family betrayals and enemy attacks.

As darkness began surrendering to dawn, we moved to the armored living room, settling among velvet cushions under a cashmere blanket to watch the sunrise paint the horizon in shades of gold.

While morning light illuminated our secure haven, desire claimed me once more. I straddled Dominic, capturing his mouth in a commanding kiss before positioning myself above his rigid length. In one fluid motion, I took him completely inside me, reveling in the sensation of wholeness that came from being joined with the most powerful man in the territory.

Dominic's vocal responses encouraged my movements as I established a demanding pace, delighting in how perfectly he filled me. As passion surged through my bloodstream, I accelerated my rhythm. His primal sounds of pleasure fueled my determination to bring him to the edge, which arrived simultaneously with my own powerful release.

The Capo gripped my waist with possessive strength as he reached his peak, his raw expression of satisfaction coinciding with my own climax as I contracted around him. The experience transcended physical pleasure, elevating us to a sacred space where our union became a blood oath of eternal love and protection.

Exhausted, we collapsed together with our bodies intertwined, sweat cooling on our skin. Upon awakening, neither of us wanted to sever the connection, though we both understood that our perfect sanctuary would soon face intrusion from the dangerous realities of the mafia world we temporarily abandoned.

Chapter 312: Morning After Revelations

Dominic's POV

I woke alone among the scattered silk cushions in my private study, for a moment wondering if the previous night had been some elaborate fever dream conjured by months of desperate longing. The faint scent of Gemma's perfume lingered in the air, the only proof that my obsessive pursuit had finally succeeded. Making my way upstairs to the master bedroom, I found her clothes draped across the black leather chair - the same chair where I'd spent countless sleepless nights planning how to win her back after my father's betrayal nearly destroyed us.

When I entered the marble bathroom, there she was under the rainfall shower, her magnificent dark skin glistening with droplets like liquid diamonds. The sight of her in my territory, safe within the fortress walls of my compound, sent a possessive thrill through my blood. Unable to resist the pull of her presence, I slipped behind the glass door, wrapping my arms around her wet body and pulling her against my chest.

"Mmm, you're awake! And quite ready for action, I see," Gemma teased, pressing back against my obvious arousal with that fearless confidence that had first caught my attention during our volatile encounter at the boutique.

"You have that power over me, beautiful," I murmured, gently biting her earlobe in the way that always made her shiver. "When I found myself alone downstairs, I almost convinced myself you were still just a fantasy - that I was still trapped in that hell of wanting you and not having you."

She turned in my arms with that radiant smile that could disarm even the most hardened capo, pulling me into a kiss that tasted of redemption and second chances.

"You know, the night you came to my apartment after escaping that ambush, I woke up thinking the adrenaline and fear had made me hallucinate your presence. I was completely devastated," she confessed, resting her forehead against my chest where the Thorne family crest was tattooed over my heart.

"But I left you a message," I replied, confused. The memory of that night was burned into my consciousness - slipping past rival family surveillance to reach her building, desperate to explain before my enemies could poison her against me.

"Which I only discovered recently," she said, leaving me even more bewildered.

"I don’t understand."

"Let’s finish in here, and I’ll explain everything over breakfast. I’m starving," she said, her dark eyes flickering with that familiar heat that never failed to ignite my blood.

I couldn’t help myself - I took her right there against the shower wall as warm water cascaded over us. Her skin was like silk under my hands, every curve and valley a territory I intended to reclaim and defend with my life. I craved this constant connection with the woman who had transformed me from a cold-blooded enforcer into something resembling human, wanting to worship every inch of her remarkable body until she understood that she owned me completely.

During breakfast in my secure dining room, we couldn’t keep our hands apart. Having her back within my protection was intoxicating - feeling her warmth, tasting her kisses, experiencing her gentle touch against skin that bore too many scars from family wars.

"You’re absolutely incredible, so perfect. I still can’t believe you actually love a bastard like me," I said, emotion roughening my voice as I thought of all the blood on my hands, all the enemies I’d eliminated to keep her safe.

"I’m the fortunate one that you choose to love me! It seemed impossible, considering your reputation with women before," she replied playfully, but I tensed immediately. Discussions about my past conquests - the meaningless encounters I’d used to fill the void before her - felt like stepping into a minefield.

"Tell me more about what you mentioned in the shower - about thinking you’d imagined my visit," I redirected, desperate to avoid any conversation that might remind her of the hollow man I’d been before she saved me.

"I never saw your note. The window must have been open when I was trying to air out the apartment, and the wind probably blew it to the floor where it got tangled in some laundry." Seeing my continued confusion, she elaborated with that vulnerable honesty that made me want to burn down the world for her.

"After that night, I fell apart completely. Depression took over, and my apartment became a disaster zone. I never picked up those clothes, so I never discovered your note all this time."

"How did you finally find it?" I asked, intertwining our fingers and marveling at how small her hands looked against mine - hands that had pulled triggers and broken bones, now gentle enough to hold something precious.

"After seeing you at Ivy and Caleb's compound, I was destroyed. Zander came over and was horrified by the state I was in. He lectured me like a protective brother before helping me clean up the mess. While sorting through the laundry pile, your note suddenly fell out."

"I want to hear about Zander's role in this later, but first - what did you do after finding my message?"

"Didn't Zoe tell you anything?"

"Not a word. What should she have told me?"

"I was frantic, thinking you'd given up on me since I never responded to your apology. Zander convinced me to track you down before it was too late. I called your secure line, but it was switched off. I even worried you might be with someone else, maybe one of those society women who hang around the family businesses." She sighed. "I got dressed, and Zander drove me to your compound, but your security said you weren't receiving visitors. Then we tried your downtown office - no luck there either. Finally, I called Zoe, who promised to contact me the moment you surfaced. But she never did, and I'm going to strangle that manipulative witch!"

I laughed heartily at her fierce expression, but there was something I needed to know - a question that had tormented me during our separation.

"What would you have done if I had been with another woman when you came looking? Would you have walked away?"

"Never. I would have followed Zander's advice to the letter."

"Which was?"

"March in there, throw the bitch out, and make it crystal clear that you belong to me and nobody else!" The possessive fire in her eyes made my smile spread across my entire face.

"You know what? I'm starting to love Zander!" Gemma smiled back, then her expression grew thoughtful. "What do you think about spending the weekend at your beach house? Our friends will start calling soon if they don't just show up uninvited. I'm certain Zoe has already spread the news through the entire organization."

"Actually, since you weren't answering your phone and Zoe was being evasive, I called everyone in our circle looking for you," she admitted sheepishly. "By the time Zoe finally appeared, I was at Xavier's safe house with Vincenzo, and when I left there, half our friends were already gathered waiting for updates."

"Wait - how did Vincenzo get mixed up in your search mission?"

Gemma recounted the entire saga of her desperate hunt for me across the city, which I found both touching and amusing. I was falling deeper in love with this fearless woman who had faced down my family's world without flinching.

I then shared everything that had happened to me since watching her leave Caleb's compound in what I'd thought was forever - the rage, the self-destruction, the gradual realization that I needed professional help to become worthy of her again. She listened with tender attention, laughing when I mentioned the luxury spa retreat and making me promise to take her there for our honeymoon.

"So, my beautiful nightingale," I whispered against her lips, "shall we escape to the coast before our friends and my entire household staff descend upon us?"

"Yes! But I need to stop by my apartment for clothes and toiletries."

"Mmm..." I murmured between kisses along her neck, breathing in her scent.

"If you keep doing that, we won't leave this compound," she warned breathlessly. "But first, I want to collect all my photos and notes from upstairs - I haven't had time to look at everything yet."

Gemma glanced up at the balloons still floating near the ceiling from my elaborate apology setup.

"Don’t worry about cleaning up. I’ll have my people take care of it and leave everything organized in the guest room for you," I said, pulling her toward the stairs.

After packing my bag with essentials and changing into casual clothes suitable for a weekend away from family business, I was ready to leave. Gemma clutched the gourmet chocolate collection I’d imported from Europe, having already gathered all the scattered pieces from around the house.

"These are coming with us," she declared, eyes sparkling with anticipation.

"All of them? That’s enough chocolate to feed a small army!" I was amused watching her protect the treats like precious contraband.

"Why, won’t they fit on your little yacht?" She pouted adorably.

"My yacht can accommodate anything you desire, sweetheart," I responded, thinking of the weapons cache and communication equipment hidden below deck.

"Good, because if forced to choose, I’m picking the chocolate." I laughed, but her serious expression made me wonder if she meant it. I certainly didn’t want to lose her to imported confections, regardless of their quality.

We loaded everything into my armored Mercedes, including wine and provisions for the weekend. I called the marina requesting my yacht be fueled and prepared for immediate departure.

As we were pulling out of the compound gates, something at the neighboring estate caught my attention, making me brake abruptly. My mother Bee was emerging from Dr. Taylor’s front door while her driver waited by the car. The good doctor pulled her into an intimate embrace, running his fingers through her silver hair in a gesture that struck me as disturbingly familiar and possessive.

"That’s my mother!" I exclaimed with surprise and rising irritation.

"Oh, you're right!" Gemma observed the scene with curious interest. "Bee and the doctor - she's chosen well this time!"

"What did you just say, Gemma?" I asked, both confused and annoyed by her casual acceptance.

"Oh, Dominic, don't be such a child! Look at them - they're clearly together," Gemma said with an amused smile that only fueled my agitation.

"She's my mother, Gemma!" I warned, feeling my protective instincts flare.

"Of course she is, but she's also a woman - a beautiful, vibrant woman. Did you think mothers exist in some sacred, untouchable bubble?" Her look was challenging, but when she turned back to the scene, her smile widened as she pointed. "Look there! Didn't I tell you?"

Dr. Taylor was giving my mother a decidedly passionate kiss that made my jaw clench with homicidal rage. I was ready to march over there and remind that presumptuous doctor exactly who he was dealing with.

"I'm going over there," I declared, hand already reaching for the door handle, but Gemma gripped my arm with surprising strength.

"You're not going anywhere!" she commanded with an authority that reminded me why I'd fallen for her in the first place. "If you get out of this car, I'm going home, and you won't see me for months."

"You wouldn't dare," I challenged.

"Oh yes, I would! I have plenty of chocolate to sustain me, and I refuse to let you play the possessive son who ruins his mother's chance at happiness. You're far too mature for such behavior."

Her tone was deadly serious, and I recognized the steel beneath her gentle exterior.

"Fine. I won't interfere," I conceded reluctantly.

"Good. Now let's head to the marina. If you behave yourself this weekend, I might give you a private show on your yacht." The mischievous promise in her dark eyes made me temporarily forget about my mother's romantic entanglements, at least for now.

Chapter 313: Reconciliation at Sea

Dominic's POV

During our voyage to the secluded marina, I sent encrypted messages to my crew informing them we'd be unreachable for the next few days. As expected, none of my associates were pleased about the communication blackout, especially Zoe, but I needed this private time to reconnect with my woman without the constant threat of family business interruptions.

I temporarily shelved thoughts about my mother, resolving to deal with that situation later, though I definitely planned to discover what schemes she was cooking up with that corrupt doctor. For now, I was simply basking in the satisfaction of having the woman I'd kill for back in my arms.

"Dominic, I messaged Vincenzo. He's dying to know if everything worked out between us," Gemma said, pulling me from my darker thoughts.

I smirked. "That kid thrives on family drama. He's probably already spreading the news through the entire organization." My nephew had a big mouth, but he was still loyal blood.

We retreated to our private sanctuary, that isolated cove near an uninhabited island where no rival families could track us. That whole day belonged to us alone, making love, enjoying the ocean breeze, catching up on the months of separation that had nearly driven me insane.

We silently agreed not to poison our reunion with heavy topics, so I avoided mentioning that Marcus was under investigation by both federal authorities and family enforcers for various crimes including assault. That reckoning could wait.

The next morning, I awakened to find Gemma in the galley kitchen. She wore a minuscule white bikini barely covered by a sheer lime green wrap that left nothing to imagination.

"Woman, why not just go completely naked?" I growled, pulling her against me from behind. "These beach outfits you wear are downright lethal."

"Perfect! That's exactly the effect I was going for," she turned in my arms and kissed me with the kind of heat that could start wars. "To be lethal?" When she nodded with that wicked smile, I couldn't help grinning.

"That's how I keep my dangerous man interested." She pressed against me and kissed me again, her body fitting perfectly against mine. "Now explain something – why was a phone hidden in the oven?"

Gemma extended her hand, revealing a cell phone she waved before me. It was my missing burner phone, which made me laugh despite myself. "In the oven?" I asked, genuinely amused. "Hell..."

"That's my old burner. I bought a replacement after losing it with no clue where it disappeared to."

"How exactly does a mafia Capo put a phone in an oven and forget about it?" she asked, clearly fascinated by my stupidity.

"I was completely wasted that night. It was the day you slipped me those enhancement pills." Her jaw dropped and her face flushed crimson. "How did you figure that out?"

"I knew something wasn't right that day – I didn't feel normal. I suspected foul play because that erection wouldn't subside even after I got furious with you, which should have killed any arousal."

I explained the entire episode to Gemma – the emergency hospital visit, how I later came to the yacht and spent the day getting drunk at sea while contemplating whether to have her eliminated or just disappeared for drugging a made man. That explained why I couldn't remember where I'd stashed my phone. I told her about the marina security informing me she had fled the area and my subsequent decision to hunt down Marcus's network across the country. She looked both shocked and ashamed.

"I don't know how to properly make amends," she finally admitted. "I was furious and reckless. It wasn't until I told my mother and she explained the dangers of those medications that I realized I'd lost control and could have actually killed you." She couldn't even meet my eyes.

"Gemma, that’s ancient history now, and that’s where it stays buried." I gently lifted her chin with the same hand that had snapped necks. "Look at me."

"Forgive me," she whispered as tears spilled down her cheeks.

"Stop that! Just imagine Vincenzo’s reaction when he shares this story with our children someday!" I grinned broadly, and she couldn’t help laughing despite her tears.

"You didn’t actually tell Vincenzo about this, did you?"

"Not yet, but I will. I’m just deciding whether to tell him first or Xavier." She covered her face with both hands. "They’re going to have a field day sharing this with the entire family." We both ended up laughing uncontrollably about the whole situation.

After our laughter died down, I grabbed the breakfast tray and led her to the deck.

"So you never saw my messages? Or did you choose to ignore them?" Gemma asked, gazing out at the endless ocean.

"What messages?"

"I sent you messages that night, apologizing for what I’d done."

"I never saw them, I swear on my mother’s grave. If I had, I would have responded immediately. But I’ll charge that phone, and we can look at them together."

I pulled her into a kiss that tasted like redemption, and she melted into me beautifully, settling onto my lap facing me. I untied her beach cover-up and tossed it aside like discarded evidence.

"Gemma, that barely qualifies as clothing," I said, desire flooding through me like molten steel.

"It covers all the essential parts." She smiled while I stared transfixed at her magnificent body, mesmerized by how the white bikini contrasted with her sun-kissed skin.

"Jesus! It looks incredible on you, but it conceals absolutely nothing." She laughed with genuine delight.

"I bought it specifically for you! But since it looks so good, maybe I'll wear it to public beaches." She admired herself, and I delivered a firm smack to her perfect ass.

"Don't you dare show what belongs to me to other men!" I warned with deadly seriousness.

"If that's how you're going to discipline me, I might wear something even smaller to the beach." She gave me a mischievous, lustful smile that could bring down governments. This woman drove me to the edge of madness.

"So my goddess enjoys being punished on that beautiful ass?" I lifted her off my lap and stood from the lounger. "Get on all fours, baby. Today you're paying the price for drugging a made man." She smirked and positioned herself exactly as ordered.

Gemma was perfection incarnate – beautiful, sensual, fearless, confident, more sexually adventurous than any woman I'd encountered in the underworld, always eager to be wicked and explore new territories. She owned me completely.

Seeing her on all fours, wearing only that microscopic white bikini on her toned body, she was breathtaking, and I was ready to lose myself in her completely, but she clearly wanted something different, and I was more than willing to oblige.

I began tracing her body with my fingertips, starting at her shoulders and moving downward with feather-light touches. I caressed her perfect upturned ass and continued down her thighs. When I brought my hands back up, I paused at her center and slipped my fingers beneath her bikini. She was already wet and released a soft moan. I withdrew my hand and stroked her right cheek, while she watched me over her shoulder with those dark eyes that could make me commit murder.

"You think I need chemical assistance, Gemma?" I asked with authority and landed a firm spank on her right cheek. "Answer me." I delivered another spank, harder than the first, and she moaned beautifully.

"Maybe." The little minx was testing me, enjoying our dangerous game. I gave her left cheek an even harder spank and she moaned louder.

"My cock isn’t enough for your greedy little pussy?" I spanked her harder and she moaned more intensely, the sound going straight to my head.

"Your cock is perfection and my pussy always craves more," she replied provocatively.

I spanked her harder and slipped my fingers under the small fabric, finding her clit and stimulating it with practiced precision. She was considerably wetter now and moaned even more. I spanked her again and she moaned louder. I removed my fingers and spanked her pussy directly, making her cry out as I felt more of her arousal coating my hand.

The tiny bikini bottom was completely soaked, and Gemma writhed at my touch while moaning continuously like a siren calling ships to their doom.

"That’s it, baby, moan like my personal little siren," I spanked her again and removed my swim trunks.

My cock was rock hard, pre-cum glistening at the tip. I rubbed and spread that moisture over the head, moved aside her ridiculously small bikini bottom, and thrust into her in one powerful motion that claimed her completely.

Gemma gasped and screamed. "More, Dominic, I need more," she begged with the desperation I craved.

"Want more, baby? Then take everything I give you." I spanked her ass again and started thrusting hard inside her, powerful and relentless.

Gemma moaned deliciously, each sound driving my hunger higher. I knew how aroused she became from dirty talk, so I didn’t censor my vulgar vocabulary.

"Say it, baby, say you’re my personal little siren," I whispered in her ear.

"I’m your siren... aaah... you’re my dangerous man... huuummm... I love when you take me hard and fast. Aaaaahhh..."

She responded perfectly to my dominance. This woman sent me into pure ecstasy. I was taking her exactly as she craved, fast and hard, spanking her perfect ass.

I leaned over her and started kissing, nibbling, and sucking her neck like a man possessed. I lowered my hand and slipped it into her bikini bottom, finding her hard clit and stimulating it with circular motions.

"Mmm, Gemma, your pussy is so greedy for me. If you keep squeezing me like that, I won’t last," I whispered in her ear, and she moaned desperately.

"Dominic..." Gemma panted and moaned. "I’m going to come, I’m going to... AAAAHHH!"

With a delicious scream of pleasure, Gemma climaxed around me. I felt her pussy tighten around my cock and pulse rhythmically, her arousal flowing hot and sweet around me, and I couldn’t hold back. I released inside her with one final powerful thrust that filled her completely.

"Fucking incredible!" I held her in position momentarily, savoring the aftermath.

When I withdrew, she moaned again. I laid her on her back on the lounger and positioned myself above her, pulled aside her bikini top, and began devouring her breasts hungrily. I sucked one while squeezing the other, licking, nibbling, kissing. I alternated between them, always caressing the one my mouth had temporarily abandoned.

"I thought you were going to remove my bikini," Gemma said between moans.

"No, my goddess, it looks too beautiful on you. I want to take you all day with it on," I replied with a wicked laugh.

And that’s exactly what I did for the remainder of the day. I took that woman every way imaginable – we made love, we fucked, I was gentle and loving, dominant and possessive, I took her fast and hard, slow

and tender. I wanted to compensate for all the time we'd lost before facing the deadly reality awaiting us back on shore.

Chapter 314: Dangerous Revelations

Gemma's POV

We arrived at Dominic's fortified estate Sunday evening after our secluded weekend at his family's private coastal compound. Exhaustion weighed on my bones from the constant vigilance required in our world, yet we couldn't stop reaching for each other. After sharing a shower in his marble-lined bathroom, we settled into the king-sized bed, simply savoring gentle caresses under the silk sheets.

"Songbird, I want you back under armed protection," Dominic murmured against my temple, using the endearment he reserved for our most intimate moments. His calloused fingers, scarred from years of violence, traced lazy patterns across my bare skin.

I nestled closer against his powerful chest, feeling the raised marks from old knife wounds beneath my palm. "My handsome, I really don't need bodyguards. Nick is rotting in county lockup and has no idea about my new apartment or my position with Caleb's organization. Besides, those death threats stopped arriving weeks ago."

Dominic exhaled deeply, his breath warming the sensitive curve of my neck. "Songbird, your psychotic ex isn't our only threat in this business."

"Roman is already doing hard time upstate," I reminded him, closing my eyes to better absorb the sensation of his battle-hardened fingertips skimming my shoulder. The contrast between his lethal hands and their tender touch never failed to make my heart race.

"I'm talking about Marcus." His words sent immediate tension coursing through my body like ice water.

I pulled back slightly to study his face in the dim light filtering through the bulletproof windows. "Why would I need protection from your father?"

"It’s a twisted, bloody story. I’d prefer explaining tomorrow, away from our bed. But please, accept the security detail." The gravity in his emerald eyes was unmistakable, carrying the weight of secrets too dark for pillow talk.

"Our bed?" I smiled despite the ominous turn in conversation, focusing on the possessive pronoun that made my chest warm.

He chuckled against my neck, the sound rumbling through his chest. "Is that all you caught from what I said? Yes, our bed. Which reminds me—when will you finish selecting furniture for our house and officially move in?"

"Our house?" I turned to face him fully, unable to suppress the smile tugging at my lips. Even in this dangerous world we inhabited, Dominic’s claim on me made everything feel possible.

His intense gaze captured mine, those emerald eyes that could freeze a man’s blood in his veins now soft with vulnerability. "You know I want to build our home and establish our household here... unless you’d prefer somewhere else? Maybe the penthouse in the city, or we could acquire something new."

"No! I love this estate. I’ll continue with the interior selections tomorrow," I replied enthusiastically, thinking of the sprawling mansion with its hidden passages and state-of-the-art security systems.

Dominic dipped his head to nuzzle between my breasts, his stubble rough against my sensitive skin. "And when are you moving in permanently?"

"Could we take this step by step?" I asked carefully. "First the furnishing, then we’ll see how things develop. We’ve only just reconciled after everything that happened."

He continued placing heated kisses along my collarbone, undeterred by my hesitation. "You’re just postponing the inevitable. You came back to me, and that decision is final. I won’t lose you again to anyone—not rivals, not law enforcement, not even my own damned family."

"Give me some time to adjust?" I pleaded, knowing how precarious our position was in the Thorne organization’s hierarchy.

"Hmm. I want you with me every single day," he grumbled against my skin, his possessive nature showing through every word.

"If I accept the bodyguard detail, will you give me breathing room?" I attempted to negotiate, knowing Dominic responded better to tactical discussions than emotional pleas.

"You will accept the protection!" He sighed heavily, his arm tightening around my waist. "That's not up for negotiation, Gemma. Not in our line of work."

I propped myself on my elbows, studying the hard planes of his face. "Why are you so insistent? Your father barely acknowledges my existence anymore since Caleb vouched for me."

"We'll discuss it tomorrow. Come here—let's enjoy what's left of our perfect weekend. I don't want to bring family politics and blood feuds into our bed." Dominic drew me back into his protective embrace, and I drifted to sleep under his gentle caresses, surrounded by the security of his arms and the fortress he'd built around us.

When morning arrived, Dominic had already departed for his early meetings at Zenith Systems, the legitimate front for his money laundering operations. After showering and dressing in professional attire suitable for my role in Caleb's organization, I gathered my collection of fabric samples and furniture catalogs before heading downstairs to the kitchen.

"Good morning, my nightingale." Dominic stood from his seat at the marble breakfast counter to greet me with a lingering kiss that tasted of rich espresso and danger. "Meet Maia. She previously managed my downtown apartment and prepared meals when I was running solo operations. She's here to oversee the household staff and coordinate security rotations. When you have time, she'll introduce you to everyone on the domestic team."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss," Maia offered with the practiced discretion I'd learned was essential among mafia household staff.

"The pleasure's mine, Maia. Please call me Gemma—we don't need formalities within family walls." I settled into the chair Dominic held for me as Maia tactfully withdrew to give us privacy.

"Gemma, we need a proper dining table for that formal room," Dominic remarked casually, scrolling through messages on his encrypted phone.

"Yes, but I enjoy our meals in here."

"We can continue eating here regularly, but we have many associates and extended family members. They won't all fit in the kitchen when we host strategy meetings or celebration dinners."

"I understand your reasoning," I smiled, imagining the elegant dinner parties that were essential for maintaining alliances in our world.

His expression brightened considerably. "I want to host gatherings frequently, like Xavier and Caleb do at their estate."

"I love that idea!" My enthusiasm made his smile widen further, transforming his usually intimidating features into something almost boyish.

"Now, about something far less pleasant." His expression shifted back to the dangerous mask he wore for business matters.

"About Marcus?" I guessed, already dreading whatever revelation was coming.

"Yes. He backed off his harassment because we separated and he thought you were no longer useful as leverage against me. But now that we're reunited, I'm afraid he might target you again with more direct methods." Genuine worry creased his brow, and I could see the fear beneath his controlled exterior.

"Dominic, as uncomfortable as his attention makes me, all he's done is send those expensive flower arrangements and call repeatedly. It's awkward when we encounter each other at family gatherings, but I can handle an old man's inappropriate interest." I thought he was being overprotective, not understanding the true scope of the threat.

"Gemma, I'm afraid he might escalate far beyond flowers and phone calls." Dominic looked directly into my eyes, letting me see the fear that he normally kept hidden from everyone. "My father is a predator. A rapist."

His revelation left me speechless, my mouth falling open in shock. My heart hammered against my ribs as Dominic detailed his father's crimes in methodical, clinical terms—the internal family investigation, multiple complaints from women in their territory, and his brief arrest that hadn't even lasted a full day before family lawyers and bought judges intervened.

"My God, he's a monster," I whispered, horrified by the implications.

"Yes, he is," Dominic confirmed grimly, his jaw clenched with barely contained rage. "That's why I need to keep you safe. Please accept the protection!"

"Alright. We'll do it your way." As I agreed, visible relief replaced the fear in his emerald eyes. "What's your security plan?"

"Armed escorts at all times, everywhere you go. I'll personally drive you to your position with Caleb's organization and collect you each evening. When I can't due to operations, Nadia's driver will handle transport. And you're moving in with me immediately—partly for safety, but mostly because I want you here," he outlined with military precision.

"But Dominic, we agreed to take things slowly," I protested weakly.

"If after Marcus is eliminated and your psychotic ex is permanently silenced you want to return to your apartment, I'll accept that decision." His easy acquiescence surprised me.

"Just like that?"

A predatory smile spread across his handsome face, transforming him back into the dangerous Capo who commanded respect through fear. "Just like that. If you want to move back, I'll respect your choice. I'll pack my weapons and surveillance equipment and relocate there with you." His wink made me laugh despite everything—he was absolutely impossible! "You're not getting rid of me, Gemma!"

I threw my arms around his neck, pressing a quick kiss to his lips. "I don't want to get rid of you. If that's how it's going to be, we can go to my apartment after work to collect my belongings. And we could have lunch together and shop for that dining table—what do you think?"

"You're perfect!" He grabbed my waist and gave me a long, sinful kiss that promised much more to come once we were alone again in our fortified sanctuary.

Chapter 315: Growing Suspicion

Lila's POV

Sunday passed in solitude with Daniel handling Thorne family business, giving me the perfect opportunity to reorganize my academic priorities. My study schedule had completely transformed since joining Dominic's legitimate front company. Previously, when working at the mall, my mornings were dedicated to coursework. Now, with evening shifts, I found myself dragging through college lectures already drained of energy. But such is life's rhythm when pursuing dreams within the shadow of the Thorne empire.

By day's end, I'd accomplished more than expected. The dining table was perfectly arranged when Daniel finally arrived looking utterly worn out from his enforcement duties. Without hesitation, he crossed the room and swept me into his arms, lifting me off the ground. His passionate kiss pressed me against the wall, stealing my breath and igniting my desire.

Instinctively, my legs wrapped around his waist, arms encircling his neck. His intoxicating scent alone was enough to awaken every nerve ending in my body.

"Ah, little one," he whispered, eyes closed, forehead resting against mine, his wandering hand sliding upward along my thigh. "I just need to lose myself in you right now, need to feel myself inside you."

"Please do," I gasped, feeling heat pooling between my legs. "I've missed you terribly today!"

The ache for him squeezed my heart—an almost painful longing that only his touch could soothe. When Daniel's eyes opened, I witnessed pure desire darkening his dilated pupils.

"I need you too," I pleaded softly.

Without further conversation, his hand moved between my legs, feeling the evidence of my arousal through thin fabric.

"Ah, little one, you're delicious," he groaned, his gaze locked with mine. "Hold tight."

He kept me pinned against the wall with his body while freeing himself from his pants. Supporting my weight with one strong arm, he used his other hand to push aside my underwear and position himself at my entrance.

Though he started gently, his control quickly shattered. He filled me completely in one swift motion, drawing a pleasure-filled cry from my lips. The momentary discomfort was nothing compared to the exquisite sensation of being fully joined with him.

"Sorry, little one," he murmured, kissing along my jawline while remaining perfectly still within me. "I couldn't control myself. You drive me insane with want."

"Don't apologize," I whispered back. "It feels wonderful. It's always so good!"

My body trembled beneath his masterful touch as he covered my neck, ears, and mouth with kisses. Slowly, he began to move while tugging down my dress straps to expose my breasts, taking one into his hungry mouth.

I surrendered completely, clinging to his neck, feeling each deep thrust. My teeth found his shoulder to muffle increasingly loud moans. Nothing existed beyond the addictive pleasure this man was giving me.

His pace intensified, thrusts becoming harder and faster until a powerful orgasm ripped through me, making me writhe against the wall, crying out his name. He followed immediately, his guttural groan hot against my ear as he emptied himself inside me.

We remained embraced against the wall, catching our breath. Eventually, Daniel carried me to the bathroom, only then setting me down to remove our clothes. His eyes held mine with an unusual intensity, as if trying to preserve the moment forever.

"Big guy, is something wrong?" I asked, caressing his face.

"Just family business, little one. But I don't want to think about that now." He smiled, kissing my palm. "All I want is to shower with you, eat something, then take you to bed and listen to those scandalous little moans of yours for hours." His teasing smile made me laugh.

"Scandalous little moans?" I attempted to look offended.

"You're not exactly quiet, little one." He embraced me, guiding me toward the shower. "I love your scandalous moans—hearing your pleasure turns me on."

He wasn't exaggerating. After dinner, he fulfilled his promise, making me scream with pleasure for what felt like hours. I fell asleep wrapped in his strong arms, feeling completely secure. Yet I woke in the middle of the night alone. A note on the nightstand explained he'd been called back to handle urgent Thorne business.

This had never happened before—returning to family duties after completing his assignments. I tried dismissing my concerns as paranoia, but sleep eluded me. The ceiling became my silent companion for the remaining hours of darkness. When morning arrived and I left for work, Daniel still hadn't returned.

Outside the office building, I spotted Gemma and Dominic engaged in a passionate embrace, their happiness radiating like sunshine after surviving the dangerous betrayals that had nearly destroyed them.

"Finally got her, Capo Jordan!" I called out as I approached.

"Little Lila!" Dominic greeted me enthusiastically. "She's mine and I'm never losing her again!"

"You better not," I teased. "You're my favorite couple!"

"And here I thought your favorite couple was you and Daniel," Gemma joked.

"We're good, but you two are special. After all, I helped this underboss win you back," I reminded them, recalling how Dominic and I first met through the family's legitimate operations.

"And I'll always be grateful!" Dominic's smile was contagious. "How's Thorne treating you?"

"Just as well as you did." My response was genuine—I truly loved my current position within the family's corporate front.

"Good to hear. Remember, there's always a place for you in my division if you ever want to return." Dominic's offer was sincere.

"I know. Thank you." I smiled appreciatively before heading inside.

"I'll join you, Lila." Gemma gave Dominic one last kiss before falling into step beside me. "So how are things with Daniel?" she inquired once we were alone.

"They're fine," I answered, eyes fixed on the floor.

"What's wrong, Lila?" Gemma studied me carefully. "Besides those marks your makeup isn't quite hiding—though those aren't exactly a problem..."

"The marks are wonderful," I smiled briefly. "It's just...something's bothering me."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure, Gemma. It feels like something's happening, but I can't pinpoint what. He's been tenser lately, answering his phone differently. Last night he left in the middle of the night—just a note saying he'd gone back to handle Thorne business. That's never happened before."

"Have you asked him about it?" Gemma's expression turned serious.

"Yes, and he always blames family operations. Which is probably true—I know his work for the Sterlings is dangerous."

"It certainly is, Lila." Gemma offered a reassuring smile. "Keep paying attention. If this continues or if his behavior becomes more unusual, confront him directly."

"I will," I promised as we reached Gemma's floor. Ivy was waiting for the elevator.

"Finally!" Ivy stepped in, preventing Gemma from exiting. "Let's grab coffee upstairs. And before I forget—dinner at my house tonight! Everyone's coming to celebrate Gemma and Dominic's reconciliation. I couldn't stand sharing Caleb with Dominic's mopey self any longer."

"We all suffered through that," I laughed at her complaint. "Dominic was unbearable without Gemma."

"You have no idea!" Ivy rolled her eyes dramatically. "One night when Caleb was handling territorial disputes, Dominic came to see the kids and I got stuck with him. We ended up having a romantic comedy marathon with ice cream and chocolate. He cried like a heartbroken teenager over Gemma."

We dissolved into laughter, regaling Gemma with stories of how utterly pathetic the powerful Thorne capo had been during their separation.

Chapter 316: Heart Stopping Truth

Dominic's POV

The moment I stepped out of the elevator at Zenith Systems headquarters, I was cornered by Zoe, Nora, and Mia, who were practically vibrating with anticipation like soldiers awaiting intel from a successful operation.

"About time you showed up, Frost!" Zoe huffed as I glanced at my watch, her tone sharp enough to cut glass.

"I’m not even late, Zo," I protested, showing her the time on my Rolex.

She rolled her eyes dramatically. "But you could have been considerate enough to arrive early and fill us in on what happened with Gemma. We’re absolutely dying here! And need I remind you that I was your fairy godmother in this whole bloody affair?"

I couldn’t help but grin at their eager expressions. These women ran some of the most dangerous operations in our territory, yet they were gossiping like schoolgirls. "Ah, so that’s what this ambush is about. Come on, let’s grab some coffee. My weekend was nothing short of spectacular."

The three women erupted into delighted squeals, jumping up and down like teenagers at a concert. After giving them a condensed version of how Gemma had forgiven me and how ecstatic I was about our reconciliation, we dispersed to our respective duties in the organization. However, I made sure to pull Zoe into my office. I knew she was hiding something I needed to know about, and in our business, secrets could get people killed.

"Get in here, Zo. You’ve got some explaining to do," I said, practically dragging her through the reinforced doorway of my secure office.

"About what?" She feigned innocence, but her calculating eyes gave her away.

"My mother and Andrew Taylor," I stated plainly, watching guilt flash across her face. Andrew was a former family doctor turned private physician for high-ranking members, and lately he’d been spending considerable time with my mother.

"She finally told you, huh?"

"’Finally’? Just how long has this been going on?" I demanded, my voice taking on the edge that made subordinates tremble.

"What exactly do you know, baby Dominic?"

"Don’t ’baby Dominic’ me, you scheming matchmaker. Spill it. I caught my mom with Taylor on Saturday, but Gemma stopped me from confronting them. Now it seems your conniving little brain had something to do with this whole situation," I complained, pacing the floor like a caged predator.

"Sit down, Frost," Zoe commanded with unusual seriousness. "Gemma was right to stop you. I’ll give you the essential information."

"Essential information?" I questioned, confused by her formal tone.

"Yes, just enough so you don’t act like a territorial five-year-old when you talk to Bee." Her tone made it clear this was non-negotiable.

"First thing you should know," Zoe began, settling into her briefing mode, "is that Andrew is an incredible man. His marriage has been deteriorating for years. A while ago, his wife demanded a divorce, and they were handling it civilly until he discovered she’d been feeding information to a rival family for years while carrying on with their accountant. Can you believe that treacherous bitch?"

"Damn, poor bastard," I said, genuinely feeling for him. Betrayal within family circles was a death sentence in our world.

"Absolutely. He took it harder than you did with your situation. But he finalized the divorce and, with his daughters backing him, left that backstabbing woman with nothing but the clothes on her back – exactly what she deserved. Naturally, she moved in with her contact that very day."

"Does Taylor still have feelings for her?" I asked, suddenly concerned about my mother getting hurt.

"Like I said, their marriage was already broken beyond repair. He doesn’t love that woman anymore, but it was a relationship of many years that he honored. He was devastated because he felt humiliated and completely played."

"I know that feeling all too well," I muttered, thinking of my own past betrayals.

"Anyway, he wanted to completely renovate his house because in his anger, he destroyed a bunch of his ex-wife's precious possessions. That's why I introduced him to Bee," Zoe concluded with a self-satisfied smile.

"So it was just for her to redecorate his house?" I asked hopefully.

"Of course not, Frost! If it was just about interior design, I would have recommended this fantastic decorator I know," Zoe laughed, crushing my naive hope. "The thing is, your mom is gorgeous, kind, and utterly lovable. Andrew is equally amazing. I wanted to set them up. Your mom went through similar betrayal, and I thought they'd understand each other perfectly."

"Zoe, you orchestrated this entire thing?" I asked incredulously.

"Absolutely!" She beamed. "And don't be ridiculous, Andrew is treating your mom like the queen she is, and your mom is happier than I've seen her in ages. She's even making good use of those security upgrades you installed for her."

"God, Zo! That was excessive," I groaned. "And you know he lives in my neighborhood, right?"

"Oh right! I didn't even consider that," Zoe burst into laughter. "Afraid of hearing your mom's happiness, Frost?"

"You're evil. Pure evil!" I pointed accusingly as she doubled over with laughter in my office chair. "Does Finn know about your little scheme?"

"Of course he does. He helped me plan it," Zoe wiped tears of laughter from her eyes.

"Traitor," I grumbled. "You're both incorrigible matchmakers."

"Frost, let your mother experience happiness, for heaven's sake. Love is amazing, and having someone wonderful who appreciates you is even better. Don't be selfish!" Zoe's words hit home. She was right, even if it was uncomfortable to think about my mother's romantic life.

After Zoe left, Caleb called to invite us to dinner at his fortress-like mansion to celebrate my reunion with Gemma. Our crew was eager for all the juicy details.

I met Gemma for lunch, and we seized the opportunity to purchase the remaining furniture for our heavily secured house. Her excitement was contagious as she added more decorative items to our collection. We were simply happy building our fortress together. After our shopping spree, she didn't return to work; I dropped her off at her apartment and headed to my mother's penthouse.

"Dominic, sweetheart!" My mother greeted me with a radiance I hadn't seen in ages. "I didn't expect you so soon." I gave her a puzzled look. "Zo called me."

"Of course the meddling intelligence officer called you," I complained, which made her laugh.

"Come, son, let's talk." My mother guided me to the secure living area. "What do you want to know?"

"Aren't you going to ask about Gemma?" I deflected, settling into the reinforced seating.

"Vincenzo already told me everything when he called earlier," she said with a knowing smile. "He was quite excited about your reconciliation."

"Of course he did. Can't keep anything quiet in this organization," I muttered, though I wasn't really annoyed.

"So, about Andrew..." my mother began, her expression becoming more serious.

"Mom, I just want to know if this is serious. I don't want you getting hurt again."

She reached over and took my hand. "Dominic, it is serious. We've been seeing each other for months now, and I care about him deeply. He's a good man who treats me well."

"And he knows about... everything? About what we do?"

"He’s been our family physician for years, sweetheart. He’s always been discreet and loyal. Nothing has changed except that now we care for each other."

I studied her face, seeing genuine happiness there. "If you’re happy, then I’m happy for you, Mom."

After spending time hearing more about how their relationship developed, I left to pick up Gemma for dinner at Caleb’s, which was conveniently close to our new home.

When Gemma opened her door, I was alarmed to see her terrified expression and eyes swollen from crying. She was too distraught to speak and simply handed me an envelope.

I was torn between examining the envelope and comforting Gemma. I guided her to the couch and pulled her onto my lap. Only then did I look at what she’d given me, and my heart nearly stopped.

Chapter 317: Letter from Hell

Gemma’s POV

The day had started like a beautiful dream. Don Caleb had given me the afternoon off from my duties at his legitimate front, knowing I had plans with Dominic. We spent those precious hours shopping for our fortified safe house, laughing and debating over security equipment and furnishings for our heavily guarded home. But the moment Dominic’s armored vehicle dropped me at my apartment building in the dangerous territory, my perfect day shattered like glass under a sledgehammer.

The building’s security guard, one of Dominic’s men stationed there, greeted me with a respectful nod and handed over my mail. Among the usual bills and advertisements lay an envelope that made my blood turn to ice in my veins. That handwriting. I recognized it immediately.

The street rat had found me again. But how was that even possible with all of Dominic’s surveillance networks?

I stumbled into my apartment, the envelope clutched in my trembling fingers like a live grenade. I couldn’t bring myself to open it. Instead, I collapsed onto my couch, staring at it as if it might explode. Tears streamed down my face without my awareness, the terror building inside me like a gathering hurricane.

When the doorbell rang, I nearly jumped through the ceiling. Peering through the reinforced peephole, I saw Dominic’s familiar face. Relief washed over me as I disarmed the multiple locks and threw myself into his arms, sobbing uncontrollably against his bulletproof vest.

"Gemma! What happened? Talk to me!" His voice carried that dangerous edge that made enemies flee, but his arms were protective steel around me.

Words failed me completely. All I could do was thrust the envelope into his hands with shaking fingers.

Dominic guided me to the couch, pulling me onto his lap as he opened it with the careful precision of a man accustomed to handling explosive devices. Though he read silently, I felt every muscle in his powerful body turn to granite beneath me.

"We’re getting out of this death trap, Gemma," he said, his voice carrying the deadly calm that preceded bloodshed as he stood, setting me on my feet. "Let’s go to the compound."

"Dominic..." I struggled to compose myself. "I need my things."

"When did this piece of garbage arrive?" His jaw was clenched tight enough to crack teeth.

"Just now. Your man downstairs gave it to me when I came in."

"Why didn’t you call me immediately?" There was no accusation in his tone, only the protective fury of a predator whose mate was threatened.

"I froze up. I’m terrified, Dominic." I swallowed hard. "What does that animal say?"

"You don’t need to read this poison."

"Yes, I do. I need to know what I’m facing from this street scum."

Dominic reluctantly handed me the envelope. That familiar scrawled handwriting on the outside, the post office box I'd hoped never to see again. With trembling fingers, I unfolded the paper:

"Do you really think you can run away from me, little Gemma? You can't hide behind your Mafia boyfriend forever! I already know you've moved addresses and changed jobs, but I also know where you live now and where you're working. My connections tell me I'll be out soon. Wait for me, kitten, because when I get out, the first thing I'm going to do is make up for lost time with that sweet little body of yours. Your boyfriend's money can't protect you from everyone. Nick."

Terror paralyzed me. Nick was truly a rabid animal, and somehow, he was still controlling my life from behind bars through his network of street criminals. Would I ever escape this nightmare?

"Gemma!" Dominic's voice cut through my panic like a blade. "Let's grab what you need and leave. Tomorrow, make a list of everything else, and I'll send my crew to collect it. You're never coming back to this exposed position."

"But Dominic, it's my apartment. I can't just abandon it." Even as I said it, I knew it was foolish thinking in our world.

"Gemma, listen to me. We'll do this my way. This weekend, we bring your mother into the family's protection. She needs to know what we're dealing with, and you two can decide what to do with this place. But I won't let you take unnecessary risks with street vermin hunting you."

I nodded weakly. "You're right. Will you help me pack some things?"

"Of course, nightingale." He embraced me tightly before leading me to the bedroom with the efficiency of a military operation.

I threw open a reinforced suitcase and filled it with clothes and essentials, just enough to last until Dominic could arrange for his soldiers to move the rest. We left quickly for our compound—our fortress. Even in my distress, that thought brought comfort. This place where we were building our empire together felt increasingly like an impenetrable home.

After a scalding shower and changing into clean clothes, I felt somewhat restored. The security of our heavily armed sanctuary enveloped me like an armored shield.

"Feeling better?" Dominic asked, his calloused hands tenderly framing my face.

"Yes. I feel protected here. I feel safe with you and your family's power."

His answering smile held the warmth of a man deeply in love and the cold promise of death to any who threatened what was his.

"You are safe. Do you want to stay in tonight? I can tell Don Caleb we're not coming to the family dinner."

"No, I want to go. Being with the inner circle will help. And we need to show this threat to Daniel."

"Leave that to me. Shall we?"

I took his hand, drawing strength from his lethal touch as we headed to dinner with our crime family.

After the meal at the private dining room of Caleb's restaurant front, Dominic decided to address the letter situation with everyone present. We were among the most trusted members of the organization, and they would find out eventually. Still, I hated darkening the mood and involving others in my problems—especially Lila, who had defended me against Nick multiple times when we worked in the dangerous shopping district under family protection.

Dominic passed the letter to Daniel, the corrupt detective whose expression hardened like concrete as he read.

"Another threat from this cockroach," he growled. "And now he knows your new safe house location. We need to find who's feeding him information. We've pressured his entire crew, but they seem genuinely clueless about his intelligence sources. Only his mother visits him in prison occasionally."

"Yes," I confirmed. "Nick never had good relationships with his father or brothers in their petty crime ring. And his mother would never be involved in this."

"Well, regardless," Dominic announced with the finality of a death sentence, "Gemma is moving permanently to the family compound. We'll decide with her mother what to do with the apartment."

"Smart move," Daniel nodded approvingly. "The compound has military-grade security, cameras covering every angle. But..."

"There's always a complication," Lila muttered darkly.

"But Roman managed to breach the perimeter once. We can't forget that professional hit," Daniel pointed out, looking meaningfully at Lila.

"Roman probably had inside connections and used those somehow," Xavier suggested, referring to the rival family's assassin.

"Yes, but we never identified exactly how he penetrated our defenses," Daniel added grimly.

"I'll triple the security detail," Dominic stated with absolute authority.

"How long will I have to live like I'm in witness protection?" Tears welled in my eyes again as Zoe wrapped a comforting arm around me with surprising gentleness for the family's ruthless information broker.

"It's going to be handled, Gemma," Nora squeezed my hand reassuringly.

"Company security has already been enhanced since the Roman assassination attempt," Don Caleb explained with the calm authority of a man who controlled life and death. "But I'll assign a bodyguard to accompany you inside and outside the building, Gemma. Same protection level for you, Lila."

"I'll handle everything beyond the legitimate business, Caleb," Dominic interjected. "I just need your security inside the building. I'll station two armed men at the building entrance to escort her everywhere, plus an armored vehicle with a trained driver at her disposal."

"Perfect. I'll designate a secured parking space for your driver so Gemma won't need to exit the building in the open to reach the car," Caleb replied.

It struck me that no one had bothered asking for my opinion on any of these arrangements.

"Does this mean I can't leave the compound? Am I becoming a prisoner of my own protection now?" I protested.

"Gemma, it's not imprisonment," Dominic said gently, though his eyes held the steel of absolute determination. "When you leave, you'll have armed protection with you. I won't risk anyone hurting you—and I don't just mean Nick and his street crew. Please, give me this peace of mind."

"Fine," I conceded with a frustrated sigh. "Do whatever you think is necessary."

I glanced at Lila, who nodded absently, seemingly lost in her own dark thoughts about the dangerous world we'd all been drawn into, far away from our conversation.

Chapter 318: Sweet Amid Bitter

Gemma's POV

I woke up with a splitting headache, the aftermath of yesterday's emotional carnage. My eyes were puffy, underscored by dark circles that made me look like I'd been through a street war. The tears had taken their toll, leaving me feeling hollow and irritable, like a gun with no bullets.

When I dragged myself into the living room, Dominic was commanding attention like a don addressing his soldiers - security personnel and household staff lined up attentively in military precision. The moment he spotted me, his serious expression transformed into a warm smile as he extended his hand with the grace of a man who controlled half the city's underground.

"Gemma, good morning, beautiful!" His lips brushed against my hair as he guided me through introductions to the small army of people who would be ensuring our safety from rival families and street threats. The sheer number of armed guards and surveillance specialists was overwhelming, a reminder of just how deep into Thorne family territory I'd fallen.

Once everyone dispersed to their positions, Dominic pulled me into an embrace that felt like sanctuary behind bulletproof walls. His arms around me provided momentary relief from the throbbing in my temples and the constant fear that had become my shadow.

"Are you okay, sweetheart?" he whispered, his breath warm against my ear, voice carrying the tenderness he reserved only for me.

"Not really. My head's killing me and I just feel... off-center somehow. It's hard to explain," I mumbled against his shoulder, allowing myself to lean into the strength of a man who could level entire city blocks if someone threatened what was his.

"Aw, my poor goddess," Dominic cooed, his tender tone coaxing a reluctant smile from me despite the circumstances. "Come on, let's get some breakfast in you, then a painkiller. I'll call Caleb to let him know you're taking a sick day from the legitimate operations."

"I absolutely will not!" I pulled back, suddenly indignant at the suggestion.

"But you're clearly not feeling well," he reasoned, concern etching his features in a way that made him look less like a feared capo and more like a worried boyfriend.

"So what?" I challenged, my tone sharper than intended. "A headache doesn't render me incapable of handling the family's financial records."

Dominic, wisely sensing my mood and remembering how I'd once held a gun to his chest without flinching, backed down. "Are you certain you can handle the numbers today?"

"Completely," I affirmed with unwavering conviction that would make any soldier proud.

"Breakfast first, then," he conceded, steering me toward the kitchen with the protective instinct of a man who'd killed for less important things.

My spirits lifted marginally at the sight of chocolate cake waiting on the table - imported from some exclusive European bakery that probably cost more than most people's monthly rent. I devoured a generous slice alongside my coffee before downing a painkiller and preparing to face another day in the legitimate front of a criminal empire.

As Dominic drove me to work in his armored sedan, flanked by discrete security vehicles, he reminded me, "Gemma, arrange something with your mom and Ryder. We need to talk to them about protection protocols."

"I'll call her today," I promised, watching the city pass by through bulletproof glass. "Any particular day work better for family security briefings?"

"The sooner the better, Songbird," Dominic's tone was serious, his knuckles white on the steering wheel. "They need to understand the threats that come with being connected to our world now."

He was right. I'd initially dismissed Nick's threats as the ravings of a bitter ex, but now that he'd discovered our safe house location, the danger felt uncomfortably real. This wasn't just some disgruntled ex anymore - this was family betrayal at the highest levels of organized crime.

Throughout the morning at Caleb's legitimate investment firm, my headache persisted, making me increasingly irritable as I processed offshore accounts and shell company transfers. By lunchtime, I opted to order in rather than venture outside where rival families or Marcus's associates might be waiting. While waiting for delivery under the watchful eyes of building security, I seized the opportunity to call my mother.

"Gemma, where on earth have you been?" She answered with maternal exasperation that cut through all the violence and danger to remind me I was still someone's little girl.

"Mom, I'm sorry. Things have been... complicated in ways I can't fully explain."

"Zander mentioned you were considering reconciliation with Dominic. What happened? And why do I keep seeing black SUVs in our neighborhood?"

I smiled despite myself. "Zander has quite the loose lips for someone who works around dangerous people, doesn't he?"

"He was simply easing a worried mother's mind when my daughter wouldn't return my calls and strange men in expensive suits started asking questions about our family."

"Well, Mom, Dominic and I are back together," I confessed, leaving out the part about midnight raids and blood oaths.

"Finally, some good news! I've always liked that young man, Gemma. He clearly adores you, even if his business associates are rather intimidating."

"He wants to meet with you and Ryder tonight. Security briefing disguised as dinner. Can we arrange something?"

"Dinner at my house. I'll expect both of you and whatever protection detail he thinks we need. Should I invite Zander?"

"Absolutely! I'd love for him and Dominic to meet properly, away from all the territorial politics."

After chatting a while longer about recipes and normal family things that felt like a fantasy now, I hung up and immediately texted Dominic about dinner plans. Before I could even set my phone down, it rang with an unfamiliar number. Against my better judgment and all my street-smart instincts, I answered.

"Gemma, how wonderful to hear your voice after all this time." The voice sent an icy tremor down my spine like a knife blade against bone.

"Well, the feeling isn't mutual, Marcus," I replied coldly, my free hand instinctively moving toward the weapon Dominic had insisted I carry.

"Now, darling, don’t be hostile toward family," His laugh dripped with the kind of condescension that got people buried in concrete foundations.

"What do you want, you twisted bastard?" My patience was nonexistent when dealing with the man who’d tried to destroy everything Dominic and I had built.

"You know precisely what I want from my son’s little street princess."

"You’re delusional if you think I’ll ever be in the same room as you voluntarily. Stop calling me or face Thorne family consequences."

"Just one dinner, and I’ll leave you alone, Gemma. Refuse, and things get very unpleasant for everyone you care about."

"You’ll leave me alone regardless because Dominic will put a bullet in your skull if you don’t. I’m not having dinner with you, now or ever."

I disconnected, hand trembling with fury rather than fear. Moments later, a text arrived: "Don’t choose to take the hard way, little girl."

The message echoed in my mind like a death threat drummed out in Morse code. Needing distance from the phone that had become a weapon pointed at my peace of mind, I shoved it into a drawer and tried to focus on laundering money through legitimate investment portfolios. That’s when Lila appeared at my desk like an angel of mercy, offering a welcome distraction from thoughts of family warfare.

"Gemma, coffee break?" Her expressive eyes held a mixture of hope and concern that reminded me normal people still existed in this world.

"For you, always time," I saved my document full of numbers that funded everything from territory expansion to witness elimination, and followed her to the break room.

"Brought cookies from that bakery you love!" Lila held up a paper bag, eliciting my first genuine smile since Marcus’s voice had poisoned my morning.

"Right now, I might love you more than Dominic," I teased, making her laugh in a way that felt like sunshine breaking through storm clouds.

We settled with large cappuccinos and began sampling the decadent treats that cost more than some people made in a day but seemed almost reasonable when your boyfriend controlled the city's underground economy. The first bite of chocolate with dulce de leche melting against honey and walnut was transcendent - exactly the comfort I needed to forget about blood feuds and family betrayals.

"Mmm, Lila, your timing is impeccable," I murmured between appreciative sips of coffee that probably came from beans grown on cartel-controlled plantations.

"When don't we need something sweet to balance out life's bitter moments?" She grinned. "How are things going with all the excitement lately?"

"Good. I'm happy, truly. Dominic is incredible, and being without him was torture worse than anything his enemies could devise. I love him so much it scares me sometimes."

"I'm thrilled for you! He's wonderful in that dangerous, protective way, and you deserve that kind of fierce devotion."

"What about you and Daniel? Have you worked through those insecurities about dating someone in law enforcement?"

Lila's smile faltered slightly. "Things are... complicated when your boyfriend works cases that intersect with organized crime. But Gemma, I'm completely in love with him. It's like my soul recognized his the moment we met, despite all the danger that surrounds his work. The thought of losing him devastates me more than the fear."

"You've got it bad for that badge-wearing heartbreaker," I observed with knowing sympathy. "If that's how deeply you feel, then fight for it. Don't give up just because his job puts him in Thorne family territory sometimes. You saw how miserable I was without Dominic."

"He’s been acting strangely though. I know he loves me - he shows it in ways that make me feel protected and cherished - but something’s off, like he’s carrying secrets heavier than usual."

"If you’re certain of his love, talk to him directly. Living in doubt and insecurity will only drive you crazy, especially when there are real dangers to worry about instead of imagined ones."

"That’s just it - I don’t want to seem immature or clingy over every little thing when he’s dealing with serious criminal cases."

"Communication prevents misunderstandings, Lila. Don’t let your imagination run wild with possibilities when the truth might be something completely different and manageable."

"Yeah..." She sighed, absently stirring her coffee, her thoughts clearly elsewhere as the weight of loving someone who walked between legitimate law enforcement and the criminal underworld settled over her like a familiar burden.

Chapter 319: Families Become One

Dominic’s POV

I pulled up outside the Thorne Corporation building, watching as Gemma emerged flanked by two armed soldiers from Caleb’s personal guard. My chest tightened at the sight of her - she moved with the deadly grace of someone who’d learned to navigate our world, her spine straight and steps confident like a queen surveying her domain.

The moment our eyes met, her face transformed with genuine joy. She dismissed the guards with a professional nod and ran toward me, launching herself into my arms. The familiar weight of her against my chest felt like sanctuary in a world built on violence.

"I missed you," she whispered against my ear, her breath sending fire through my veins.

"Me too, Songbird." I pressed a hungry kiss to her lips before helping her into the passenger seat of my armored vehicle.

The drive to her mother's house was filled with easy conversation, laughter cutting through the tension that always simmered beneath the surface in our line of work. I couldn't help but notice how her posture shifted as I parked outside the modest home - her shoulders tensing, expression becoming guarded.

"What's troubling you, Songbird?" I asked, placing my scarred hand on her knee and squeezing gently.

She exhaled slowly. "My mother is going to want to interrogate me about everything."

"She'll understand," I reassured her. "Though Vincenzo will put a hit on me when he discovers we visited your mother without bringing him along." That earned me her musical laugh, dissolving the tension.

"Those two have formed quite the alliance," she agreed. My nephew possessed the rare gift of charming even the most hardened soldiers in our organization.

When we rang the doorbell, Ryder answered with the warm smile of a man who'd found unexpected happiness later in life.

"There you are!" He pulled us both into an embrace. "How are my favorite young people?"

"Good, Ryder, thank you," Gemma replied as we crossed the threshold.

He gestured toward the back of the house. "Come, we're gathered in the kitchen. Willow decided to prepare grilled fish for everyone."

The sound of genuine laughter reached us before we entered the backyard. Nothing could have prepared me for the sight that greeted us - Willow, Gerard, Carmen, and Vincenzo all seated around the table, with my nephew regaling them with some tale while they hung on his every word.

Gemma's face lit up with delight. "Well, this is certainly a surprise!"

"Auntie Gemma!" Carmen leaped from her chair and rushed to Gemma.

"My favorite little dancer, I've missed you terribly!" Gemma knelt to embrace her, and something in my chest shifted watching them together.

Willow approached me with the warm smile that had initially surprised me in someone connected to our world. "I hope you don't mind that I extended an invitation to your sister's household, Dominic."

"On the contrary, Willow, it brings me great pleasure," I replied, folding her into a respectful hug.

"I called Vincenzo directly, knowing he and Carmen would want to join us for dinner, so I invited Nadia and Gerard as well. I'm thoroughly charmed by your family," she explained.

"They are remarkable people indeed," I agreed, watching our two families blend as if they'd known each other for decades rather than months.

Gerard raised his wine glass when he spotted me. "Dominic! Finally, our substitute parents have returned to us."

"Already scheming to take advantage?" I asked with mock suspicion.

He laughed heartily. "Naturally. Nadia has been wanting to take that trip to Sicily."

"Dominic, I heard you had the pleasure of meeting my son Zander," Ryder said, clapping me on the shoulder.

Zander appeared beside his father, grinning with the confidence of someone who knew he was well-protected. "And I heard you rushed back from a business operation because jealousy got the better of you."

"I won't deny it, Zander. After Vincenzo informed me you were one of the rare perfect gentlemen in this city, I expedited my return," I confessed, noting Gemma's confused expression.

Vincenzo eagerly launched into his tale of how he'd manipulated me into cutting short my trip to Chicago, spinning an elaborate story about Gemma and Zander that had everyone roaring with laughter. Dinner unfolded with the kind of easy camaraderie I'd never expected to experience. Watching our families merge so naturally filled me with a contentment I hadn't known was possible.

"I'm so happy for you, brother," Nadia whispered, touching my arm. "They're extraordinary people."

"I share that happiness, sister," I replied, kissing her cheek.

The pleasant atmosphere couldn't last indefinitely. There were serious matters that demanded immediate attention.

"Dominic, Gemma mentioned you needed to discuss something important with us," Willow broached the subject during a natural lull in conversation.

"Yes, Willow, and unfortunately it concerns a rather unpleasant situation." The mood sobered as all eyes turned to me.

"What kind of situation, Dominic?" Ryder asked, his expression growing serious.

I explained the escalating threats Gemma had been receiving from her unstable ex-boyfriend and the comprehensive security protocols we'd implemented. I detailed how Nick had managed to locate both her apartment and workplace despite our precautions. Concern darkened every face around the table.

"Gemma, why did you conceal this from us?" Willow demanded, her voice carrying both anger and deep worry.

"Mom, you had just decided to move in with Ryder. If I had told you, you would have sacrificed your own happiness, and that wasn't acceptable to me," Gemma explained, her voice steady and resolute.

"But Gemma—" Willow began to protest.

"Mom, I’m a grown woman. You cannot shield me from every danger in this world," Gemma interrupted with quiet authority.

I stepped forward to address her mother’s concerns. "Willow, I need you to understand that Gemma’s safety is my highest priority. She’s decided to move into my compound, where I’ve enhanced security protocols and assigned a dedicated protection detail for whenever she leaves the premises."

"You two are moving in together?" Willow’s eyes narrowed with parental scrutiny.

"Willow, I love Gemma with everything I am. She’s the woman I intend to spend my life with. We’re going to live together, and once we’ve eliminated these current threats, I plan to make her my wife." I met her gaze directly, wanting her to understand the absolute depth of my commitment.

"Son, I don’t concern myself with paperwork or ceremonies," Willow clarified. "I was simply surprised given that you two spent months apart."

"All the more reason why I’m never allowing that separation to happen again," I vowed, earning an approving smile from Willow.

She turned to her daughter. "Are you truly happy, Gemma?"

"Completely, Mom," Gemma replied, her radiant smile capable of illuminating the darkest corners of our violent world.

"Then let’s open another bottle of wine!" Ryder rose to retrieve additional bottles.

Zander leaned toward me conspiratorially. "You need to teach me your secret for making a woman act as lovestruck as Pretty One here."

Gemma responded by throwing a dinner roll at him.

"That was pure fortune, Zander," I winked at Gemma. "But what’s this ’Pretty One’ business?"

"It’s a nickname I gave Gemma when we first met. I was an immature teenager and called her Pretty One. She got furious, so naturally I kept using it just to irritate her." Zander ducked another projectile from Gemma’s direction.

"You two are definitely family," I observed with amusement.

By evening’s end, Willow and Ryder had politely declined my offer of personal security, insisting they preferred to handle matters themselves. Before our departure, Vincenzo and Zander had already planned an expedition to some burger establishment, enthusiastically including Gemma and me in their arrangements.

"Dominic, we need to arrange for you to introduce us to your mother," Willow said as we prepared our farewells.

"We’ll coordinate something within the week if your schedules permit," I offered.

"Just inform us of the timing," Ryder agreed immediately.

Driving away from that warm gathering, I experienced a profound sense of peace I hadn’t felt in years. Glancing at Gemma beside me, I saw the same contentment reflected in her relaxed posture and gentle smile. She was perfection itself, and I was completely, irrevocably hers. Our families had blended beautifully, creating bonds that would strengthen our families. Now we simply needed those two deranged individuals to leave us in peace so we could build the life we’d fought so hard to claim.

Chapter 320: Dangerous Ultimatum

Marcus’s POV

My life has descended into absolute chaos! I had to flee Port Serenity after those whores filed complaints about our private sessions. My contacts in the organization informed me that both federal agents and rival family enforcers had tracked down my location. Time was running dangerously short.

I expected that ungrateful boy Dominic to smooth my transition and provide the resources I demanded. Europe called to me as sanctuary—several countries there maintain no extradition treaties and ignore American judicial orders. However, European exile requires substantial capital, demanding significantly more funds than I currently possessed. I also needed immediate access to the family's private aircraft should emergency departure become necessary. But the insolent whelp chose to play hardball instead, refusing every reasonable request. That worthless Nadia offered no assistance whatsoever.

As if my situation wasn't precarious enough, two women filed reports against me here after all this time, claiming they never signed our mutual agreements. I spent an extended period locked in a fetid cell at some decrepit police station, treated like common street trash rather than Thorne family blood.

Fortunately, I maintain connections with an exceptional criminal defense attorney, Kellen Curtis. Upon contacting him immediately, he leveraged his considerable influence and secured my temporary release. However, he warned me bluntly that circumstances were deteriorating rapidly, and he couldn't guarantee my freedom much longer without significant legal fees.

I confronted that pathetic fool Philip, but he merely laughed dismissively at my predicament. Approaching that ridiculous Bee proved impossible with her constant entourage of armed security personnel surrounding her. That left Dominic's spoiled brat as my only viable option for family assistance. To compound my humiliation further, he completely ceased depositing my monthly allowance without warning.

Who does this arrogant child think he is, defying his own father? I was forced to borrow emergency funds from Kellen Curtis, who aided me once again—the most degrading experience of my entire existence. All because Dominic's offspring deliberately withheld my rightful inheritance and openly defied my direct orders. When exactly did he stop desperately seeking my approval? This pathetic rebellion won't stand, boy. It absolutely will not stand.

I resolved to remain positioned outside this corporate building until Dominic's fool emerged, and he better appear carrying substantial cash. If he continued refusing my reasonable demands, I would target that worthless Nadia. I maintained my concealed position since the brat had me barred from entering the company headquarters—the very building that once belonged to my father.

Some time passed without any sign of him appearing. Likely he wouldn't emerge until the lunch hour arrived. Finally, there he appeared, walking without apparent concern through the plaza. Sometimes I seriously contemplated ending his miserable life permanently. With no legitimate heirs, half his considerable estate would rightfully become mine as his surviving parent—I remained the legal inheritor alongside that ridiculous Bee. His personal wealth had expanded dramatically following his maternal

grandfather’s recent death. Perhaps I should genuinely consider that permanent solution. After all, I gave him life; I certainly possessed the right to reclaim it. The thought brought genuine pleasure to my face—indeed, such a satisfying possibility deserved serious consideration.

I observed him entering an upscale restaurant—my perfect opportunity to approach privately. I strode purposefully inside the establishment. The venue was adequate, though hardly exceptional by Thorne family standards. Spotting him seated alone at a secluded back table, I approached directly. He remained so thoroughly engrossed in his phone that he only registered my unwelcome presence when I seated myself confidently opposite him.

"What are you doing here, Marcus?" His eyes immediately flashed with unmistakable anger. I’ve always delighted in provoking this weak child since his earliest years. Previously, he demonstrated an almost pathetic desperation to earn my grudging approval.

"Well, I came to enjoy lunch with my beloved son," I responded with a calculated smile and raised my hand authoritatively. "Waiter, bring your finest bottle of wine immediately, and for appetizers, the salmon and gruyere bruschetta, followed by fresh cod with cream sauce. I’ll select appropriate dessert later."

"He won’t be having anything," Dominic stated coldly to the approaching server. "He’s leaving right now."

"Ah, Dominic, cease this childish behavior immediately! It’s merely lunch between family, and we desperately need to discuss business," I replied, feeling mounting irritation at his continued defiance.

"I have absolutely nothing to discuss with you," Dominic addressed the confused waiter directly. "This gentleman won’t be dining with us. I’ll summon you when needed," he commanded with natural authority. "What exactly do you want, Marcus?"

"Son, we must reach a reasonable understanding immediately. I’m experiencing serious difficulties and require immediate assistance from you and your mother. Additionally, you’ve completely suspended my financial support without explanation," I stated directly, dispensing with pleasantries.

"You’re having problems," he chuckled with obvious sarcasm. "Your personal problems aren’t my concern, nor my mother’s responsibility."

"Listen here carefully, boy—I'm still your father!"

"How conveniently selective! Marcus, we've already established you were merely the sperm donor, so don't pretend familial significance now."

"If that's your disrespectful attitude..." I regarded the ungrateful fool across from me with pure disgust. He embodied nothing but weakness, always had, burdened with those ridiculous principles his mother foolishly instilled. "Here's the current situation, sonny. I need substantial money and guaranteed access to the family aircraft. You'll courteously fulfill my reasonable requests and finally be rid of me permanently."

"I won't provide either resource, Marcus. It's past time you faced the consequences of your consistently despicable behavior."

"You should demonstrate considerably more gratitude, boy. Without me, you'd have no family company to manage."

"Actually, the company belonged entirely to your father originally. You merely occupied valuable space while exploiting female employees for personal pleasure. You never actually worked, Marcus—you merely pretended while indulging in constant parties and women."

"Show proper respect, you insolent brat!" My patience was rapidly diminishing, yet he maintained perfect composure, radiating uncharacteristic superiority. This was completely unprecedented; typically I could provoke him effortlessly, but today he displayed remarkable confidence I'd never witnessed.

"You never earned genuine respect from anyone. But tell me honestly, why this desperate insistence on having the aircraft at your immediate disposal?"

"That's absolutely none of your concern! What matters is you'll comply with my demands immediately. Otherwise, I'll target that attractive piece you're seriously involved with, Gemma. I'll take her completely from you, and when I'm finished with her, she'll be unrecognizably broken. And naturally, I'll also pursue your precious little sister and further shatter her already fragile mind." I held two powerful advantages over him; he would yield eventually, I remained absolutely certain.

"Don’t even attempt approaching either of them!" Genuine anger flashed dangerously in his eyes. "I’ll destroy you completely before you touch them!"

Dominic stood abruptly, preparing to exit the restaurant entirely. He remained completely unyielding, which genuinely baffled me; never before had convincing him to acquiesce proven so impossibly challenging. As he deliberately distanced himself from our table, I raised my voice to ensure he heard clearly.

"Don’t delay too long making your decision, sonny. My patience with your continued defiance grows dangerously thin."