Mafia Mask 41

Chapter 41 Seeds of Doubt

Caleb's POV

I sat shrouded in darkness within my penthouse, unable to face the master bedroom where Ivy and I had shared that night of raw passion. The memory felt like poison coursing through my veins now, knowing it had all been an elaborate con. The agony of her betrayal was consuming me from the inside out.

Years had passed since that night my parents were blown apart by a car bomb, since I swore off any vulnerability after losing everything that mattered. I had constructed impenetrable walls around what remained of my soul, yet somehow Ivy had infiltrated every defense without permission. She simply appeared in my world like smoke and claimed ownership of every dark corner of my being. Now I understood she was the serpent who had struck at my most exposed moment.

This morning I had been living in paradise. Then the family hacker's encrypted call destroyed everything. When he insisted that only Xavier, Heidi, and I should meet because he knew the source of our security breach, Ivy's involvement never crossed my mind. The revelation struck like a sniper's bullet to the chest.

Reading those intercepted communications felt like being crushed beneath an armored vehicle. The first message might have been explainable, something I could have allowed her to justify. But the second transmission revealed the calculated precision of her seduction. She had choreographed every caress, every kiss, every moment of feigned intimacy purely to manipulate me. The realization left me hemorrhaging internally.

I had banished her from my family and my territory. She had betrayed me in the most unforgivable way conceivable. Yet why did this hollow emptiness feel more unbearable than the rage? Why had I fallen for a woman who was nothing but illusion and deception? How had I been idiotic enough to dismantle every safeguard and offer her my heart on a silver platter?

I fled the compound immediately after she stormed out in fury. My private penthouse was the only sanctuary where I could process this devastation without interference. Xavier and Heidi would have suffocated me with their analysis and strategic planning. For the first time since assuming control of the family, I powered down all communication devices completely. The security system remained armed,

but I ignored every attempt at contact. I needed to sit with this torment and let it burn through me like acid.

Then harsh fluorescent lights flooded the space and I heard my consigliere's familiar voice cutting through the blackness.

"Did you forget we maintain master keys to every property?"

Xavier settled onto the leather couch beside me while Heidi positioned herself directly in my line of sight. I shot them both lethal glares that would have sent most soldiers scrambling, but Heidi remained completely unmoved.

"Your intimidation tactics hold no power over me, boy. You've had sufficient time to rage and wallow in solitude. Now you're going to listen to what we have to say, and you're going to do it without interruption."

Her tone carried the same authority she had wielded when lecturing me as a child under her late husband's guidance. But I had zero intention of discussing Ivy with anyone. When I opened my mouth to object, Xavier displayed zip ties and a taser with complete seriousness.

"If you won't cooperate voluntarily, we'll make you cooperate by force. But regardless, you're going to hear our assessment."

"You honestly believe I'm going to let you use your interrogation equipment on me?" I asked with revulsion.

"You don't have a choice in this matter. Now close your mouth and listen carefully." Xavier's tone brooked absolutely no argument. "Heidi and I spent the afternoon analyzing this intelligence breach, and we've concluded that Ivy leaking family operations makes zero strategic sense. She underwent comprehensive background screening by both you and Heidi before joining our organization. The entire money laundering restructuring was her innovation. She personally vouched for Scott, who has served my bloodline and yours with unwavering loyalty for many years. His reputation is beyond question. We interrogated him extensively, and he would stake his life on Ivy's innocence. She's been framed, Caleb. We need to consider alternative scenarios."

"What exactly are you proposing? That someone infiltrated the command center and transmitted intelligence from her secure terminal just to frame her? Even though I had restricted all access protocols before those communications were sent? You can’t be that naive," I said with bitter contempt.

"No, Caleb. I’m suggesting the actual traitor is someone else with executive clearance," Xavier replied with infinite patience.

"Xavier, everyone in that inner circle has served the family for many years. Your theory is impossible," I snapped.

"Is it truly impossible, Caleb? This organization has been hemorrhaging resources for months and we only detected it recently. Don’t you think it’s equally plausible that someone has been embedded within our inner circle for years without detection?" Xavier pressed his argument until I was forced to consider it seriously. "Listen, my initial reaction was to eliminate Ivy immediately. But when I confronted her with those transmissions, what I observed in her eyes was complete shock, not guilt. She was wounded, enraged, and devastated, but not guilty of the accusations we leveled against her."

I exhaled heavily, reluctantly processing his logic. Nothing about this breach made tactical sense. Then Heidi spoke with calm determination.

"Son, Xavier and I have initiated our own investigation. I couldn’t live with myself if we destroyed an innocent woman’s life without examining every angle. Surveillance equipment was installed today, though the camera in Ivy’s office experienced technical difficulties. The footage is being analyzed and our hacker is attempting data recovery. But we’ve also implemented a more direct strategy."

I studied her with growing suspicion. "What kind of strategy, Heidi?"

"We’re testing every member of the executive council individually, including Jude. We began with Monica this afternoon. Since Jude was handling business in the docks, we asked her to deliver some documents to Xavier’s office. While she was present, we deliberately mentioned that we would be auditing last year’s financial records. We already possess copies of everything, but if any documents vanish overnight, we’ll know she transmitted the intelligence. Scott and his crew are conducting the verification as we speak."

"Monica? Heidi, you’re wasting valuable time. You know her service record," I protested.

"It’s significantly easier to condemn Ivy than acknowledge we’ve been played for fools by someone we’ve trusted implicitly for years," Xavier said wearily. "But the reality is that people within this family have been stealing from our operations systematically. Ivy identified that pattern today, and she was absolutely correct. We need to investigate thoroughly, boss. Keep your mind open to other possibilities."

I sighed in exhaustion. "Fine. Investigate completely and bring me irrefutable proof," I conceded.

"Caleb, there’s one additional matter," Xavier added. "I have connections in the Metropolitan Police Department. I asked him to run a comprehensive background investigation on Ivy so we can understand exactly who she really is."

The request seemed extreme, but the damage was already inflicted. I simply nodded my agreement.