Mafia Mask 44

Chapter 44 Fresh Start Ahead

Ivy's POV

The morning sun streamed through my apartment windows as we prepared to leave for what could be my salvation or my doom. My stomach churned with nervous energy as I dressed carefully, knowing this meeting with Mr. Frost would determine whether I could survive in this unforgiving underworld. When we arrived at the imposing glass building that served as a front for one of the city's most sophisticated money laundering operations, Mr. Frost summoned us to his office immediately.

"Ivy, how are you holding up after that nightmare with Thorne? I had a long conversation with Xavier yesterday, and he painted a very clear picture of what really happened. It sounds like Caleb made some incredibly poor decisions with those fabricated documents." His weathered face showed genuine concern as he poured himself a glass of whiskey despite the early hour.

I straightened my shoulders, meeting his calculating gaze directly. "Mr. Frost, I can't speak to the motivations behind the frame job, but I want you to know that I never betrayed the Thorne organization or stole a single dollar from their operations."

The words came out steadier than I felt inside. Part of me expected him to politely show me the door, to distance his operation from the scandal that had destroyed my position in the most powerful crime family on the East Coast.

"Ivy, I never doubted your integrity for a second. I've maintained business relationships with the Miller family for decades, and they would never stake their reputation on someone they weren't absolutely certain about. When Robert Miller tells me you're one of the most principled money handlers he's ever encountered, I believe him without question." Dominic Frost's warm smile eased some of the tension in my chest. "I wish I could offer you something comparable to your previous role managing Thorne's offshore accounts, but I do have an opening in our financial restructuring department. The compensation is competitive, and given your background in creative accounting, you'll find the work manageable. If you're interested, the position is yours."

Relief flooded through me so intensely I nearly trembled. This opportunity was exactly what I needed to rebuild my life in the criminal underworld without having to leave the city or my son.

Zoe guided me through the paperwork process, then introduced me to my new supervisor. As I settled into this unexpected second chance, I made a mental note to find the perfect gift for Zoe. Her unwavering support had been my lifeline through this nightmare.

"Miss Ivy, our financial restructuring department operates with a relaxed but results-driven philosophy. Clean money generation is our primary focus, so we measure success through efficiency rather than rigid protocols," Mr. Jenkins explained as we toured the sophisticated office space. "We function as a cohesive unit, supporting each other to achieve optimal outcomes. That's why we designed this open floor plan with individual workstations that still encourage collaboration when we need to coordinate complex transactions."

"That sounds ideal, sir. Having a supportive team environment is crucial when handling sensitive financial matters. I'm confident I'll integrate well with this approach."

"I can already tell you're going to fit in perfectly. You have exactly the right mindset for our operations. Fair warning though, this department runs on caffeine and adrenaline. You'll constantly have colleagues offering to bring you coffee or inviting you to join them for strategy sessions over espresso." His eyes twinkled with amusement as he shared this insight.

"Are you telling me I've found the perfect workplace for a recovering Thorne operative?" I teased, earning a hearty laugh from him.

We spent additional time discussing expectations and the intricate procedures required for legitimizing questionable income streams. He assigned my initial portfolio of shell companies and provided a detailed list of financial restructuring tasks to complete by the following day. After introducing me to the team, he finally showed me to my workstation.

The professional warmth of my new colleagues immediately struck me. Everyone seemed genuinely pleased to welcome me, though I detected the underlying wariness that came with working in criminal finance. Once Mr. Jenkins returned to his office, I sat down and began organizing my work. Within minutes, someone interrupted my concentration.

"Well hello there, gorgeous! You've already collected about fifteen admirers just on this floor alone, and half of them are wondering if you're as dangerous as the rumors suggest."

I looked up to find a young woman with vibrant red hair, sparkling green eyes, and adorable freckles scattered across her round face. She extended a steaming coffee mug toward me with a conspiratorial grin, but her eyes held the shrewd intelligence common to those who survived in this business.

"That's incredibly sweet of you to say, but I'm certain every single man on this floor is completely captivated by you. You're absolutely stunning," I replied honestly, accepting the coffee gratefully while noting the expensive watch and designer accessories that indicated her true earning potential.

"Oh please, that's ridiculous! I'm hardly the type these money launderers usually go for. Most of them prefer the ice queen aesthetic," she said, tossing her gorgeous hair over her shoulder with practiced nonchalance. "I'm Ruby, by the way. Welcome to the cleanest dirty money operation in the city."

I shook her offered hand warmly. Her workstation was positioned right next to mine, and we chatted easily for several minutes about the intricacies of financial restructuring. Ruby possessed infectious energy and a razor-sharp mind for complex transactions, constantly making observations that had me both laughing and mentally taking notes. She introduced me to two men working nearby and several other colleagues who specialized in various aspects of legitimizing criminal proceeds.

"Don't worry about memorizing everyone's expertise immediately, Ivy. You'll get to know the whole operation gradually," she said as she settled back into her workspace.

The day passed remarkably quickly. Despite the department's intense pace and the underlying tension that came with handling millions in questionable funds, the atmosphere remained professionally friendly. I felt genuinely comfortable there, engaging in conversations with numerous people who all seemed determined to make me feel welcome while subtly assessing my capabilities.

When the workday ended, Ruby walked out with me, sharing stories about her lawyer mother who defended white-collar criminals, her father who had married what she described as a complete nightmare, and her older brother who had partnered with a friend to open an upscale nightclub that served as a meeting place for various criminal organizations.

"Ivy, we absolutely must plan a night out there soon! The place has incredible atmosphere, and you'd be amazed at the networking opportunities," Ruby said with obvious excitement.

"That does sound intriguing! Let me discuss it with Zoe. Her boyfriend arrives this weekend, so maybe we could plan something for next week?" I agreed, mostly to avoid disappointing her, though I had little desire to socialize in criminal circles.

"Perfect! Talk to them about it, and I'll ask my brother to reserve a VIP booth just for us."

We continued chatting until Zoe joined our conversation, immediately expressing enthusiasm about the nightclub idea. After exchanging goodbyes, we headed home together. The day had been surprisingly positive, keeping my mind occupied and distracted from darker thoughts. But despite this professional success, my heart remained shattered. That night, after taking care of my son and completing my evening routine, I cried myself to sleep once again.