Mafia Mask 59

Chapter 59 Sweet Manipulation

Caleb's POV

I arrived at Thorne Group headquarters before dawn, the weight of the family's betrayal heavy on my shoulders. The financial audit results lay spread across my mahogany desk like evidence of a cancer that had been eating away at our empire. Roman Rossi's name appeared repeatedly in the forged transaction records, his treachery now undeniable. The old bastard had been bleeding our South American weapons shipments dry for months.

I powered down my encrypted laptop and locked it in the reinforced vault behind my father's portrait, along with every document that could expose our money laundering operations. Trust had become a luxury I couldn't afford in this family. I reset the vault's combination once again, ensuring that only I could access the evidence that would soon destroy Roman's branch of our syndicate completely.

The morning dragged as I handled routine family business. When Xavier knocked, suggesting we grab lunch at our usual spot, I felt that familiar ache in my chest. Before leaving my office, I pulled out my phone and typed a message to the woman who had become my obsession, my weakness, my everything.

"I fell asleep tasting your kiss, dreamed of you all night, and now my heart burns with longing. I love you, Ivy. Please forgive me."

I hit send and pocketed the phone, following my consigliere toward the elevator. The familiar weight of her rejection sat heavy on my shoulders, but surrender wasn't in my nature. As we passed through the lobby security checkpoint, strong arms suddenly wrapped around me from behind.

My body recoiled violently. This wasn't Ivy's touch. I yanked those unwelcome hands away and spun around, fury blazing through my veins like molten steel.

"What the hell do you want now?" I snarled at Yara, my patience completely shattered.

"Don’t be cruel to me, Caleb. I’ve been trying to see you for days, but your soldiers keep blocking me. Fix this immediately." Her voice carried that entitled whine that made my trigger finger itch.

Xavier tried to escape the incoming drama, but I grabbed his arm and forced him to stay. I needed a witness for whatever insanity was about to unfold.

"You’re banned from this building," I stated coldly, my voice carrying the authority of a man who had ordered executions before breakfast. "The charity gala was different because your father could bring family, but that was the last time you’ll ever set foot in here."

"You cannot treat me this way, Caleb!" Yara’s voice rose to a shriek that echoed through the marble lobby. "You used me and now you’re discarding me like some common whore. I won’t stand for this humiliation!"

She began sobbing theatrically, her performance worthy of a soap opera. My jaw clenched as I grabbed her elbow and dragged her to a corner, away from the growing crowd of my soldiers and legitimate employees.

"Stop this pathetic display right now," I hissed, my voice deadly quiet in the way that had made grown men piss themselves. "If anything happened between us, you orchestrated it while I was blackout drunk after my parents’ funeral. If anyone was violated that night, it was me."

"I love you desperately, Caleb! I would take a bullet for you!" Her mascara ran in dark streams down her surgically enhanced cheeks. "You have to see that we’re perfect together. Our families were meant to unite!"

"I hate you," I said, each word deliberate and cutting as a blade between the ribs. "I’ve always despised you, and there will never be anything between us. Get that through your delusional skull."

"Your parents wanted us together," she whispered, playing her final, desperate card. "It was their greatest dream to see our families united through marriage."

The mention of my murdered parents ignited a rage so fierce I saw red. How dare this spoiled brat use their memory to manipulate me? My finger shot out, pointing directly at her tear-stained face.

"Never mention my parents again! You're not worthy to speak their names!" My voice shook with barely controlled fury. "Get out of my sight, get out of my life, and forget I exist. Xavier, we're leaving."

I turned my back on her wailing form and strode toward the exit, Xavier hurrying to keep pace with my long strides.

"That woman is completely unhinged," Xavier muttered, and I couldn't disagree.

During lunch at our secure restaurant, we discussed the audit findings over grilled salmon and wine. The evidence against Roman was mounting like a body count, and soon I'd have enough to bury him and his entire treacherous bloodline.

"I should have put a bullet in Roman's skull the moment I took over the family," I admitted, stabbing my fish more aggressively than necessary.

"Patience, Don. Wait until the audit concludes. Something tells me Roman isn't the only snake hiding in our garden."

After lunch, we passed a bakery where a decadent chocolate cake sat displayed in the window. I snapped a photo and sent it to Ivy with the caption: "Chocolate cake means nothing without you."

Back in my office, restlessness consumed me. Ivy had changed me fundamentally, awakened something I'd never known existed. Since watching Heidi disappear into that neutral zone, my resolve had crystallized into steel. I wouldn't rest until she was mine again.

I opened a delivery app and ordered a slice of chocolate cake with cappuccino sent to Ivy's new workplace. Then inspiration struck. I needed an ally in this war for Ivy's heart. I ordered a cappuccino and chocolate croissant for Zoe, her fiercely protective best friend who currently viewed me as the devil incarnate.

I attached carefully crafted notes to each order. Ivy's declared my love and begged forgiveness. Zoe's apologized for hurting her friend and expressed my sincere regret. Strategy was everything in family wars and matters of the heart.

Later that afternoon, my secure phone rang.

"Dominic’s calling, boss," Monica announced through the intercom, her treacherous voice grating against my nerves like sandpaper.

"Put him through."

"You’re playing a dangerous game with my girls," Dominic’s amused voice filled the line.

"I don’t know what you’re talking about," I replied innocently, though my heart hammered with anticipation.

"Zoe and Ivy are in our break room right now, sharing the cappuccinos and desserts you sent, debating whether you’re genuinely sorry or just another manipulative bastard," Dominic chuckled. "They’re impressed by your audacity."

"First, they’re not your girls," I warned, my voice hardening with territorial menace. "Stay away from Ivy, Dominic. Second, I’m courting my woman and winning over her best friend. Simple strategy."

"Brilliant move, Thorne. Softening up Zoe so she’ll advocate for you. No wonder you rule the underworld."

"Since you called, I need a favor."

"Don’t drag me into your romantic disaster. My girls are thriving here, and I enjoy their company too much."

"Your girls just helped me secure a million-dollar contract, so you owe me. What do you want, Dominic?"

Dominic sighed dramatically. "What’s the favor?"

"Zoe’s phone number."

"She’ll murder me if she discovers I gave it to you. That woman terrifies me sometimes. I swear she thinks she runs this place."

"She doesn’t need to know."

"Fine. Write this down."