

Exposed to the CEO Behind the Mafia Mask

Chapter 6: Chapter 6 A Dangerous Obsession

Caleb's POV

I hurled my phone onto the Chicago hotel bed and stared out at the city sprawling below my penthouse suite. The morning sun cast blood-red shadows across the skyline, but I barely registered the view. My mind was consumed by that phone call from yesterday.

Who the fuck was this woman? And why couldn't I stop thinking about her voice?

I ran a hand through my hair, irritated by my own distraction. I had a criminal empire to run, territories to protect, and enemies to crush. Yet here I was, obsessing over my new assistant whom I'd never even laid eyes on.

"Get your head in the game, Thorne," I growled at my reflection.

The memory of her calm, unflinching voice challenging my authority made my blood burn with something I couldn't quite name. Most people pissed themselves when I used that tone. She hadn't even hesitated. Instead, she'd faced me down with steel-wrapped professionalism that had caught me completely off guard.

And I'd hung up on her like some punk kid having a tantrum.

I snatched my phone again and speed-dialed Heidi.

"Good morning, Mr. Thorne," Heidi's familiar voice answered on the first ring.

"Morning, Heidi. How's the new blood working out?" I tried to sound casual, but my jaw was clenched tight.

"Ms. Brooks is exceeding expectations," she replied, and I could hear the satisfaction in her voice. "Sharp as a blade. Already mastered our security protocols."

"Ms. Brooks," I repeated, finally having a surname to attach to the voice that had been haunting me. "Refresh my memory—where did you find her?"

"She came highly recommended by both Dominic Frost and Robert Miller."

That stopped me cold. Dominic was my trusted capo—he didn't recommend anyone lightly. And Robert Miller was one of our most important money-laundering contacts. If both men vouched for her, she must be either exceptional or extremely dangerous.

"And she has no previous experience in our... line of work?"

"None whatsoever," Heidi confirmed. "But sometimes raw instinct trumps experience. You should have seen how she handled your intimidation attempt yesterday."

I scowled. "I wasn't trying to intimidate her."

"Of course not," Heidi replied, her tone making it clear she saw right through my bullshit. "You always threaten strange women answering your private line."

"I don't threaten," I lied through my teeth.

Heidi's laugh was knowing and dangerous. "I've worked for the Thorne family since before you could walk, Caleb. You most certainly do threaten. But Ms. Brooks didn't even blink."

That fact both infuriated and intrigued me. "Send me her file. Everything."

"Checking up on my recruitment decisions?" she challenged.

"Just curious," I replied too quickly, my voice rougher than intended.

"Curiosity about staff? That's unprecedented for you."

I could feel my temper rising. "Just fucking send it, Heidi."

"Yes, Don," she replied, using my formal title with just enough mockery to remind me she'd known me since I was in diapers. "Anything else?"

"That's all," I snapped and ended the call.

Minutes later, my encrypted email chimed. I opened Ivy Brooks's dossier immediately, scanning it with predatory focus. Business certification with honors. Previous employment managing books for small operations. Clean background check—no criminal connections, no debts to dangerous people. But no photo. Every file I'd ever seen included surveillance photos.

"What do you look like, Ivy Brooks?" I murmured, scrolling through the document again, searching for any detail that might explain why she had gotten under my skin so thoroughly.

My phone buzzed with a call from Xavier Black, my underboss and the closest thing I had to a brother.

"You ready for the Palmer meeting?" he asked without preamble.

"Born ready," I replied, forcing thoughts of my mysterious new assistant aside. "Meet you downstairs in twenty."

The meeting with the Russian arms dealer dragged on for hours. Palmer was smart but paranoid, and by the time we finished negotiating terms for our latest shipment, the sun was setting over Chicago.

"That was a fucking nightmare," Xavier commented as we walked back to our armored SUV. "But worth it. Palmer's merchandise will give us the firepower to crush Roman's operations once and for all."

"That traitorous bastard can rot in hell," I replied, thinking of my ambitious underboss with murderous rage. "His attempts to undermine my authority won't go unpunished much longer."

"Speaking of which," Xavier said, glancing at me sideways, "heard anything from his psychotic daughter lately?"

I scowled at the mention of Yara Rossi. "Thankfully, no. Though I'm sure she'll slither out of whatever rock she's hiding under soon, still delusional about us having any kind of future together."

"She's relentless, I'll give her that," Xavier laughed darkly.

Back in my suite, I checked my secure communications. Most were routine territory reports, easily delegated to my lieutenants. But one message caught my attention—from .

My finger hovered over it for a long moment before clicking.

Mr. Thorne,

Attached please find the comprehensive analysis of the Wong shipping contracts you referenced yesterday. I've taken the initiative to include comparative data from our previous negotiations with similar operations, as well as a detailed breakdown of potential profit margins based on three different arrangement scenarios.

The meeting has been rescheduled as requested, and all relevant materials have been uploaded to your secure tablet for review during your flight tomorrow.

Please advise if you require any additional intelligence.

Respectfully,

Ivy Brooks

Executive Assistant to Caleb Thorne

Thorne Group

I stared at the message, genuinely stunned. I hadn't actually requested this analysis—I'd just mentioned the Wong contracts to test her reaction. Not only had she taken the initiative to prepare it, but she'd gone far beyond what any assistant had ever done for me, providing strategic insights I hadn't even considered.

Opening the encrypted attachment confirmed my assessment. The work was flawless—meticulously organized, strategically sound, and dangerously insightful. This wasn't just competence; this was the kind of brilliance that could make someone invaluable.

Or extremely threatening.

And she'd accomplished it all on her first fucking day.

I leaned back in my chair, my fingers drumming against the mahogany desk with predatory rhythm. Who exactly was Ivy Brooks? And why was every instinct I possessed screaming at me to find out?

My phone buzzed with a text from Dominic.

How's the Chicago operation? Still planning to fly back Friday?

I hesitated, then replied: Change of plans. Returning tomorrow. Business here is concluded.

Dominic's response was immediate: Since when do you cut territory visits short? Got some unfinished business waiting at home?

Just eager to get back to headquarters, I typed back, not entirely understanding my own urgency.

Sure. Whatever you say, came his skeptical reply.

I ignored his follow-up message and opened my travel itinerary. If I took the dawn flight, I could be back at Thorne Group by tomorrow afternoon. Just in time to catch the enigmatic Ms. Brooks before she disappeared into the night.

I made the arrangements, then sent a brief message to Heidi informing her of my changed plans. I didn't mention I'd be coming to the office unannounced. Let that be a surprise.

Walking to the floor-to-ceiling windows, I gazed down at the city lights below—a kingdom of shadows and secrets that bent to my will. This obsession was irrational. I was the head of one of the most powerful crime families on the East Coast. I made life-and-death decisions without hesitation. Yet here I was, rearranging my entire schedule just to meet a woman whose voice had somehow gotten past every defense I'd built.

"This is just business," I told myself, watching my reflection in the dark glass. "I need to know who's handling my most sensitive operations."

But even as I said it, I knew it was a lie. There was something about Ivy Brooks that called to the predator in me. Something in the steel beneath her velvet voice, the precision of her mind, the way she'd faced down my aggression without flinching.

I smiled to myself as I prepared for tomorrow's return—a smile that had made grown men weep. Tomorrow, I'd finally meet the woman behind the voice. And maybe, just maybe, I'd test her limits. See what kind of fire burned beneath that professional facade.

After all, if she was going to survive in my world, she needed to prove she could handle the monster everyone whispered I was.

The anticipation was already making my blood sing with dangerous hunger.

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