Mafia Mask 611

Chapter 611: Plans in Motion

Lila’s POV

I wandered through every room of our penthouse safe house, but Daniel was nowhere to be found. Despite it being Saturday morning and him not having any precinct duties, he’d vanished before I’d even opened my eyes. Not even a hastily scribbled note to indicate where Martinez family business had taken him this time.

When I stepped into the living area, I spotted Sybilla on the secured balcony, her encrypted phone pressed against her ear, speaking in the hushed tones that meant Thorne family intelligence work. The moment she noticed me, she quickly wrapped up her conversation. All this secrecy was making me suspicious. I was certain it connected to whatever Daniel had been keeping from me about the ongoing power struggles between our families. Though I’d promised to trust him despite the dangerous world we navigated, my curiosity was reaching unbearable levels.

"Let’s skip the part where you pretend you weren’t discussing classified family business," I said, approaching her directly. "Look, I gave your brother my vote of confidence despite knowing what the Martinez name means in this city, but that doesn’t mean I’m not dying to know what’s happening. Come on, Sybilla, what’s Daniel hiding from the Sullivan heiress this time?"

"Oh, Lila," Sybilla sighed, her eyes widening with the same wariness I’d seen in every mafia princess who’d learned to guard family secrets. "If you truly gave him that vote of confidence, then you should wait for him to tell you himself. Or maybe he never will - you know how the old guard operates."

"He wouldn’t dare keep me in the dark forever," I complained, already contemplating more desperate measures. The Sullivan family hadn’t built their art laundering empire by accepting ignorance. "Please, Sybilla, just tell me!"

"I can’t, Lila. It’s not my secret to reveal." She was right, of course, but at that moment, I didn’t particularly care about underground codes of honor.

"Either you tell me, or I’ll tell Daniel about you and Xavier," I threatened, watching shock register on her face. Even escaped mafia daughters had vulnerabilities.

"You promised me..." she began accusingly, but then her expression shifted as she narrowed her eyes with the calculating look that ran in the Martinez bloodline. "Wait, I know what you're doing. You're bluffing. You could never betray me like that."

She had me figured out, but I wasn't ready to admit defeat. "Are you willing to take that chance?"

"Lila," she said softly, "my father always says a person's essence never changes, even in our world of shifting allegiances. If you understand someone's core, you can predict their character even when bullets are flying. And your essence is purer than fresh spring water. You don't break promises, you don't betray trust, you're incapable of wishing harm on anyone, and the most obvious thing - you can't lie to save your life! So yes, I'm calling your bluff." Sybilla laughed triumphantly, seeing right through me with the shrewd intelligence that had helped her escape an arranged marriage to a rival family's heir. She was absolutely right; I would never reveal her secret, even under duress.

"I don't like you very much right now," I pouted, crossing my arms. She erupted in laughter and pulled me into a hug.

"See? You can't even lie convincingly!" I couldn't help joining in her laughter as I hugged her back. "Now, let's have breakfast. Daniel sent word through secure channels that he'll be handling Martinez business all day, so I've planned something special for us."

"What kind of special?" *freewebnovel.com*

"A luxurious spa day with the girls - away from surveillance and family politics!"

"The girls?" My excitement grew. "Ivy, Gemma, and Zoe?" We hadn't all gotten together since the Thorne wedding, when the various family alliances had made social gatherings complicated.

"The very same."

Just as Sybilla finished speaking, the reinforced doorbell chimed. I opened it to find our building's vetted delivery person holding an enormous bouquet of pink lisianthus - the flowers Daniel had been sending me since our very first encounter at that Thorne family crisis. After thanking him and running the

standard security check, I brought the bouquet inside, searching for the card while Sybilla danced around me impatiently.

I read aloud: "You rocked my world and turned everything upside down. Now you are my world!"

"Oh my goodness!" Sybilla clapped delightedly. "My big brute of a brother is actually romantic! Who knew someone raised in Martinez tradition could write poetry?"

The doorbell rang again, and I answered with a smile so wide it made my cheeks ache. Zoe stood there, her practiced eye automatically scanning our security setup before taking in my expression.

"Well, look at this! The inspector clearly knows what he's doing," she teased, stepping inside with the fluid grace of someone trained in both intelligence gathering and high society etiquette. "So, ladies, is there coffee in this fortress? I came for breakfast before our spa adventure."

"Of course, Zoe. Come in," Sybilla ushered her inside while I engaged the advanced lock system.

After placing my flowers in water, we gathered in the kitchen that doubled as our secure meeting space. "Excited about our girls' day?" Zoe asked, sipping from her mug while instinctively checking the room for listening devices.

"Absolutely! I love that spa - it's one of the few places where family politics can't reach us," Sybilla replied enthusiastically.

"Me too," I agreed, taking a bite of my toast spread with imported apricot jam. The taste immediately transported me back to that morning when Daniel had playfully spread jam across my skin, murmuring about how sweet his Sullivan princess tasted, and I couldn't help but sigh.

"My goodness, are you sighing for the inspector or for that toast, little heiress?" Zoe teased with the familiarity that came from surviving underground politics together.

"This one sighs for my brother constantly," Sybilla added, making me laugh despite myself.

"Who would have thought, huh, little Lila? The inspector has you completely smitten. I still remember Ivy's wedding - him working his charm while you were all shy and nervous about fraternizing with law enforcement." Zoe's comment made me reminisce. Though it seemed like ages ago, I could still feel the emotions he'd stirred in me that day, the electricity of our first kiss amid all that family tension.

"Daniel is just...incredible," I sighed dreamily, causing Zoe to laugh again.

"He is. Just like Jude and Xavier, but the girls still broke their hearts," Zoe lamented. "I still haven't gotten over those breakups."

"Me neither," I agreed. "Nora wasn't really surprising; there were warning signs about her loyalty."

"True. But Ruby - I still don't understand her. She seemed crazy about Xavier..."

"I talked with her recently," I shared carefully, knowing family business required discretion. "She said he's the most incredible man she's ever met, but they wanted different things from this life. Once she realized that, she knew he wasn't right for her, despite how amazing he is. But something feels off about the whole situation."

"Do you think they might get back together?" Sybilla asked, suddenly tense in the way that suggested Thorne family interests.

"I'm not sure," Zoe replied. "I suspect Nora influenced that breakup somehow - you know how she operates. If that's true, Ruby might end up regretting it, hopefully not when it's too late."

"Xavier suffered terribly, just like Jude," I said softly, thinking of how brutal heartbreak could be in our world of arranged marriages and strategic alliances.

"Speaking of Jude," Zoe turned to Sybilla with a sly smile that meant intelligence had been gathered, "I hear he's not suffering anymore. Is that right, Sybilla?"

"Jude is...adjusting to civilian life," Sybilla said carefully, mid-bite of her sandwich.

"Adjusting? That's all you have to say?" Zoe studied her with trained interrogation skills. "Nothing else to share with your fellow refugees from family politics?"

"About what?" Sybilla looked genuinely confused, though I caught the slight tension in her shoulders.

"Don't play innocent. You two are inseparable lately - my sources see you everywhere together. What's going on between the Martinez exile and the Thorne soldier?"

"Not you too!" Sybilla groaned. "Nothing's happening. We're just good friends navigating life outside family expectations. Everyone else in our circle is coupled up, so we do civilian activities together."

"Right, 'civilian activities' - like you constantly staying at his secured apartment? Jude is gorgeous, battle-tested, and completely devoted. You expect us to believe nothing's happened?"

"He is all those things, but we're truly just friends," Sybilla insisted with decreasing conviction.

"So you wouldn't mind if I found him a nice girl from outside the families?" Zoe challenged with predatory precision.

"Another woman?" Sybilla paused, taking a long sip of coffee while her knuckles went white around the mug. "No. No. I mean...no, I wouldn't mind at all."

"That's quite a few 'nos' for such a short answer," Zoe laughed knowingly.

After finishing breakfast, we headed to the exclusive spa where Ivy and Gemma were already waiting in the VIP section reserved for family members. Zoe had arranged an extravagant package for us - manicures, pedicures, massages, and even some specialized treatments I'd never heard of. The sheer comprehensiveness made me pause. It felt like preparation for something monumentally important.

I watched the girls chatting animatedly, sharing secret smiles and meaningful looks, and the pieces suddenly clicked together - the morning flowers, Sybilla orchestrating this gathering, this elaborate spa preparation - all of it had a purpose that went beyond simple friendship. I just couldn't figure out what Daniel was planning.

Chapter 612: Breathtaking Surprise Awaits

Lila’s POV

The hours melted away in a whirlwind of exclusive treatments at the most elite spa in the city, one that catered exclusively to the wives and daughters of prominent families. My head was spinning from the luxury and endless pampering Zoe had orchestrated with military precision. She commanded every detail using that mysterious leather-bound planner I’d never seen before, directing our private suite of aestheticians like a seasoned operation leader.

Being surrounded by my closest allies again filled me with pure joy. It had been far too long since we’d gathered like this in complete safety.

Ivy regaled us with chaotic tales of Max managing their quadruplets while overseeing Thorne family business, turning their fortified mansion into organized chaos. Gemma seemed blissfully content describing Kit’s first attempts at calling "mama" throughout their secured compound, though she mentioned Dominic was already strategizing for baby number two. Zoe remained hopelessly devoted to her principled Finn, sighing dreamily just as I did whenever I spoke about my detective. Meanwhile, Sybilla dramatically complained that Xavier’s calculated intensity was going to drive her to madness.

As our spa retreat wound down, the final indulgence awaited—a luxurious rose petal soak in the private hot tub with imported aromatic salts that probably cost more than most people’s monthly salary. I initially thought Zoe had gone overboard including this treatment, but she insisted it was absolutely essential for what lay ahead. Since it was already arranged and paid for, I decided to surrender to the pampering.

I was floating in absolute bliss, eyes closed while classical music played softly through hidden speakers, when I heard my friends calling for me. Opening my eyes, I found them standing poolside looking absolutely breathtaking—professionally made up, hair styled to perfection, and dressed for what was clearly a significant occasion. I narrowed my eyes with growing suspicion.

"What exactly is happening here?" I asked without budging from my comfortable position in the therapeutic waters.

"It means tonight is going to be absolutely spectacular, Tiny Cipher!" Zoe's voice bubbled with the kind of excitement that made me smile despite my growing confusion about their secretive behavior.

"Spectacular in what way, Zoe?" I laughed at her barely contained enthusiasm.

"Just incredible beyond words! Now get out of that tub because the styling team is waiting to transform you. And there's an absolutely stunning dress with your name literally on it." Zoe continued issuing directions like she was following some predetermined master plan.

"And where exactly are we heading tonight?" I questioned, noting their exchanged glances.

"To meet our men," she replied while extending a plush Egyptian cotton robe toward me.

After being pampered and polished by what felt like an army of beauty professionals who clearly came with the highest recommendations, Zoe presented me with an elegant garment bag, designer shoe box, and exquisite lingerie set. Everything was rendered in the most delicate shade of blush pink. A small handwritten card tucked discretely into the shoe box read:

"Pink is definitely our signature color. It was the shade you wore that first evening, when you claimed my heart forever."

Daniel had orchestrated every single detail with his characteristic thoroughness. The pink matched perfectly with those rare lisianthus flowers he regularly had delivered from the most exclusive florist in the city. The lingerie was absolutely breathtaking—a cropped bra adorned with hand-sewn lace flower appliqués extending gracefully to the delicate straps. The coordinating panties were so exquisitely delicate I feared they might disintegrate with anything less than the gentlest handling. The designer sandals featured impossibly elegant sky-high heels with a slender strap across the toes and two thin leather straps that crossed and fastened precisely at the ankle.

But the dress—the dress was truly a masterpiece of couture craftsmanship. The fitted bodice was constructed of lustrous satin with a sweetheart neckline, overlaid with layers of tulle that created romantic puffed sleeves and matching satin cuffs. The voluminous skirt was an architectural wonder of movement and grace, with structured satin underneath and two carefully engineered layers of tulle providing both ethereal lightness and dramatic fullness. The back cascaded slightly longer while the front playfully ended just above the knees.

When I finished dressing and examined myself in the full-length mirror, I felt completely transformed. I understood now why Zoe had insisted on having my hair pinned elegantly to one side with a vintage crystal clip, with the remaining length falling in perfectly styled waves reminiscent of classic Hollywood glamour. The entire look was absolutely flawless. I turned to face my waiting friends, who immediately erupted in enthusiastic applause and playful whistles of approval.

"How do I look?" I joked, performing an exaggerated curtsy and spinning to make the voluminous skirt flare dramatically around me.

"Oh, Tiny Cipher, you're absolute perfection incarnate!" Zoe embraced me tightly, appearing genuinely emotional. "I'm so incredibly proud to have helped you emerge from that horrible cocoon of unflattering bangs!" I couldn't suppress my laughter. "Now we absolutely must go, we're running behind schedule."

"Certainly, we'll depart—right after you tell me what's actually happening tonight," I declared, settling determinedly into a nearby velvet armchair.

"No, Tiny Cipher, please don't do this to us. Don't sabotage the entire evening. Come on!" Zoe protested with genuine desperation.

"I'm not leaving this room until someone explains what's really going on. I thought Daniel only shared his classified plans with Sybilla, but clearly all of you are privy to his arrangements." I crossed my arms with absolute resolve.

"Fine! I'll tell you everything. Your detective is completely head-over-heels in love and has arranged an intimate surprise dinner—a romantic evening designed just for the two of you." Zoe explained, though her story felt deliberately incomplete.

"Just the two of us?" She nodded emphatically. "Then why are the four of you dressed like you're attending some high-society gala?" I gestured toward their obviously expensive evening attire.

"Us?" Zoe glanced down at her own designer dress as if noticing it for the first time. "We..."

"We’re meeting our husbands and boyfriends at the Thorne family’s private club after we escort you to Daniel’s surprise location," Ivy jumped in smoothly to rescue Zoe from her obvious fabrication.

"I see. And what about Sybilla’s plans? Your couples’ evening doesn’t explain why she’s dressed for a formal occasion too," I pressed, noting their increasingly nervous glances.

"Oh, I’m joining their group thing with Jude," Sybilla improvised quickly. "That friends-with-benefits arrangement, you understand."

"Are you finally making things official?" Gemma exclaimed with sudden genuine excitement.

"Gemma!" Sybilla scolded sharply, confirming my growing suspicion that they were concealing something significant.

"You’re all absolutely terrible liars," I concluded with an amused smile. "Let’s go see what my brilliant detective has planned for tonight." I retrieved the elegant evening clutch Zoe had provided and headed confidently toward the exit.

As our luxury sedan cruised smoothly through the city’s illuminated streets, I fidgeted with mounting anticipation in the leather backseat. Occasionally, Zoe’s eyes would meet mine in the rearview mirror, accompanied by that same knowing smile. Eventually, I began recognizing our route—we were definitely heading somewhere familiar in the exclusive residential district.

"Zoe, why are we heading toward Ivy and Gemma’s secured neighborhood?" I asked, though my racing heart already suspected Daniel’s surprise involved that particular house we had toured together.

"Because that’s exactly where your detective awaits you, Tiny Cipher," Zoe replied with deliberate simplicity.

We entered the heavily guarded gated community, and Zoe drove directly toward that house. My heartbeat quickened dramatically—had Daniel actually purchased it? That would certainly explain their elaborate secrecy. He must have noticed how completely I’d fallen in love with the property during our private viewing.

Zoe used a security remote to open the electronic gate, drove forward through the manicured grounds, and parked directly in front of the impressive house.

"Go ahead, Tiny Cipher. Your detective is waiting for you by the pool area," Zoe instructed, watching me intently through the mirror.

"Aren't you coming with me?" I asked with sudden hesitation.

"What? Absolutely not, we're meeting everyone at the Thorne club!" Zoe replied as if I'd suggested something completely absurd.

I stepped out of the vehicle feeling strangely nervous about what awaited me inside. Walking purposefully to the front entrance, I discovered the door was unlocked. I stepped carefully inside, closed the door securely behind me, and only then allowed myself to truly absorb the interior of the house—and froze completely at the breathtaking sight that greeted me.

Chapter 613: Palace Revealed

Lila's POV

My breath caught as I stepped through the mahogany doors. The entire estate was illuminated just as it had been during our first viewing, but the transformation was nothing short of miraculous. What had once been an empty fortress had become a palatial home worthy of underground royalty. I stood frozen at the entrance, absorbing every luxurious detail of the interior.

"What has Daniel orchestrated?" I whispered to myself, my gaze sweeping across the magnificent space.

The metamorphosis was extraordinary. This was no longer merely a beautiful safe house—it radiated warmth and sophistication, a true sanctuary befitting a mafia family's private retreat. I could envision generations of our bloodline filling these rooms with tradition and power.

I drifted through the space, my fingertips grazing imported furniture and priceless artwork, marveling at each carefully chosen element. The décor spoke of old money and established influence—the kind that ran deeper than street-level operations. Eventually, I reached the French doors leading to the pool terrace. Unlike the brilliantly illuminated interior, the grounds remained cloaked in darkness. Before

stepping outside, I glanced back at the warm glow of our future home, puzzled by the stark contrast. When I turned toward the terrace again, floodlights suddenly blazed to life, revealing not Daniel, but a gathering of faces that represented the most powerful networks in our world.

I gasped, recognizing the assembled crowd immediately. Both our families stood before me—the Sullivan dynasty and Martinez empire—alongside trusted associates from the police department and Thorne Group, even MP had made the journey. Most intriguingly, Xavier appeared on a tablet screen suspended around Sybilla's neck, something that would require explanation later. Everyone regarded me with knowing smiles, yet Daniel remained conspicuously absent.

Beckett approached, his eyes glistening with emotion as he kissed my cheek. His presence confirmed that Daniel had not only acquired this stronghold but had orchestrated this gathering of our most trusted allies and blood relatives.

"Sister, you're absolutely radiant tonight. Just like your mother," he said, his voice thick with meaning. I understood then why he appeared so moved—memories of Alice, the only woman who had ever commanded his complete respect, were surfacing. He reached into his jacket and withdrew a velvet case, opening it with reverence.

"Tonight holds extraordinary significance. Our father commissioned this collection for Alice alongside the engagement ring he bestowed upon her. He passed that ring to me—I trust you approve, since Alice cherished Katarina as her own blood. But these earrings and necklace were crafted exclusively for you. May I have the honor of placing them on you?"

Tears spilled down my cheeks without warning. The prospect of wearing something that had belonged to my true mother—the woman who had carried the Sullivan legacy and loved me fiercely during our brief time together—overwhelmed my composure.

I had always comprehended that a matriarch's devotion runs deeper than any other bond in our world. Though Claire had stolen my opportunity to experience that love directly, I found comfort in Beckett's accounts of how completely Alice had adored me and dreamed of our future together.

With practiced hands, Beckett secured the necklace around my throat before assisting with the earrings. The set was platinum adorned with flawless teardrop diamonds. Each earring featured a modest stone at the lobe, with an intricate platinum filigree cascading downward to cradle increasingly substantial teardrops.

The artistry was breathtaking—elegant yet commanding, unlike any jewelry I had ever possessed. The necklace complemented the earrings flawlessly, its focal point resembling twin earrings united as one, with a single elongated teardrop pendant that evoked a crystallized tear tracing down porcelain skin. The entire collection was simply magnificent.

"It's absolutely flawless," I breathed. Beckett kissed my forehead once more and extended his arm, which I accepted, still bewildered by the evening's elaborate orchestration.

As we moved toward the crowd, they separated to form a pathway of honor. Only then did I locate Daniel. He waited on a raised platform where a vocalist and musicians performed subtle, atmospheric melodies. He appeared devastatingly sophisticated in a charcoal suit without a tie, displaying that dangerous smile that never failed to accelerate my pulse.

"Daniel," Beckett announced with gravity, "she represents our family's most precious asset. I know you will defend her with everything you possess. Ensure her happiness." He placed my hand in Daniel's, leaving me utterly mystified about the proceedings.

"You have my sacred oath," Daniel pledged with matching solemnity. Then, his intense gaze found mine. "God, little one, you are the most exquisite woman in existence." He pressed his lips behind my ear, his palm sliding possessively along my waist.

"Daniel, what's transpiring here? Did you purchase this estate? Is that the reason for all the secrecy? Is this celebration to announce the acquisition?" I asked with mounting anxiety.

"Patience, little one," he replied with that enigmatic smile before addressing our distinguished guests. I studied him, noting he appeared even more apprehensive than I felt. "Family and allies, thank you for joining us this evening. I hope this will mark the beginning of countless gatherings we'll host within these walls. Recently, my extraordinary woman expressed the desire for a larger residence to unite family and trusted associates regularly." He turned back to me. "Your desire, little one, is my absolute priority. I selected this fortress deliberately, seeking a place that reflects the same brilliance you bring to my world. This estate possesses numerous entrances and windows that welcome natural light. I wanted our allies nearby, as these relationships are like blood bonds, and many already maintain territories in this district. I wanted our home to make your eyes sparkle as though you were witnessing paradise itself—precisely the expression I captured when we first toured these grounds."

Fresh tears traced down my cheeks. Daniel possessed such an extraordinary talent for grand gestures, always considering the most intimate details and surprising me in the most emotionally devastating ways.

"This estate is perfection, Daniel. So magnificent. It’s a sanctuary I’ll never want to abandon," I confessed.

He smiled at my declaration and addressed everyone once more. "Excellent. Because you’re not leaving. This is where, little one, we’re going to establish our empire together."

Daniel beamed at me as thunderous applause erupted around us.

So that was his master plan. Daniel had acquired the estate and seized this opportunity to announce it to everyone through this lavish celebration. He knew I had fallen completely in love with this fortress and had orchestrated everything so I couldn’t possibly refuse this breathtaking stronghold.

Chapter 614: She Said Yes

Lila’s POV

I surrendered to the overwhelming emotion surging through me as Daniel finalized the purchase of our sanctuary. This fortress would shield us from the brutal realities of our families’ empires, where we could build something pure together. But Daniel had orchestrated far more than a simple real estate acquisition. What unfolded next left me completely breathless.

"Tiny one," he said, his dark eyes radiating the kind of warmth reserved only for me, "I remember every word you spoke during our first walk through this house. This is the most binding vow I can offer that my devotion isn’t some fleeting infatuation. I love you in this moment, I’ll love you when dawn breaks tomorrow, and I’ll love you every day my heart continues beating in this treacherous world. This house symbolizes our joint future, where we’ll share our existence forever, because I place absolute faith in you and the love you harbor for me. Do you place that same faith in me, little one?"

My pulse thundered in my ears as Daniel lowered himself to one knee on the marble floor of our future home. His hand disappeared into his tailored jacket, emerging with a small velvet box that seemed to hold our entire destiny. When he opened it, I gasped at the breathtaking sight of an exquisite platinum ring featuring two interwoven bands—one polished to mirror perfection and one encrusted with

brilliant diamonds—crowned by a flawless center stone that captured the chandelier light like captured starfire. My trembling hand flew instinctively to cover my mouth.

"Lila," he continued, his voice remaining steady despite the raw emotion blazing in his eyes, "I've been completely yours since that first moment I glimpsed you in Thorne's lobby, when you didn't even realize I existed. You granted me no choice in the matter; you simply seized possession of my heart, and I can scarcely recall what breathing felt like before you invaded my world. I want our destinies permanently fused, intertwined like these platinum bands. I want us to forge our future as one entity, to have you beside me every evening when I return from the precinct and to know with absolute certainty I'll awaken with you every morning for all my remaining days. I want to banish every shadow of fear from your life forever and ensure you never doubt that you are treasured beyond measure. Tiny one, will you become my wife?"

His proposal encompassed everything my guarded heart had secretly craved. He offered every possible reassurance to make me feel secure in this dangerous world we inhabited, to prove his love possessed the same unshakeable foundation as mine, though I had never provided him any guarantee beyond my whispered confessions. This powerful man kneeling before me was offering his entire existence to me in this sacred moment.

"I love you, Daniel, with a ferocity I never believed myself capable of," I replied, my voice trembling with the magnitude of emotion coursing through me. "You are my anchor, my salvation. Each day spent in your protection makes me stronger and more complete. I've belonged to you since that first encounter in Thorne's corporate tower, not realizing you had already claimed me as yours. Yes, I'll marry you, and I'll choose you again every single day for all our remaining years. Yes, Daniel, I trust you with my life, my heart, and my future."

He remained on one knee, gazing up at me with the kind of adoration that made my chest tighten with overwhelming gratitude. As I spoke my acceptance, I watched tears escape his eyes and trace silver paths down his sculpted cheeks, illuminating his radiant smile. He lifted the ring from its velvet sanctuary and slid it onto my finger with reverent care. Rising to his full imposing height, he encircled my waist with his strong arm and kissed me with such exquisite tenderness, as if I were crafted from the finest crystal. His kiss carried promises of unwavering love, protection, and devotion. I barely registered the reactions of our family members surrounding us; in that transcendent moment, we existed as the only souls in the universe.

When he finally drew back, his thumb traced my cheekbone with infinite gentleness before he turned toward our assembled guests from both our families' empires.

"She accepted!" he announced with a smile that could have powered the entire estate, and everyone erupted in thunderous applause.

In the moments that followed, we found ourselves surrounded by well-wishers from both the Martinez and Thorne organizations. Perhaps the most unexpected congratulations came from Xavier, who materialized on a screen suspended around Sybilla's neck like some futuristic pendant.

"Tiny Lila, Daniel, I sincerely apologize for my physical absence, but nothing could prevent me from witnessing this moment. Fortunately, my capable assistant agreed to serve as my technological vessel. Though I must admit I find it rather amusing that instead of positioning me on some dignified pedestal, she's wearing me like jewelry," Xavier chuckled warmly. I glanced at Sybilla with genuine confusion.

"This arrangement allows you complete visual access to the entire celebration, boss. You're not confined to a single vantage point," Sybilla explained with professional efficiency.

"You're executing this flawlessly! My gratitude! But Daniel, I'm genuinely surprised your sister hasn't made an appearance. I've conversed with your parents, but where might your sister be hiding?" Xavier inquired with innocent curiosity.

"My sister, Xavier?" Daniel asked, his expression displaying visible bewilderment. I shot him a desperate pleading look, silently begging him to protect our secret. "She must be concealed somewhere around the property. You understand she avoids large social gatherings."

"Still maintaining her reclusive tendencies? Remarkable!" Xavier laughed heartily. "Well, I'll leave you both to mingle with your guests. I believe my assistant is preparing to dance with me momentarily." He grinned while Sybilla mouthed a silent expression of gratitude in our direction.

Daniel guided me into the house's interior. Once we achieved privacy, he fixed me with a serious expression. The deception told to Xavier clearly troubled his conscience.

"We'll address the Xavier situation tomorrow," was his only comment before pulling me into his protective embrace. "Come here! I've been desperate to hold you properly, but I refused to disturb your perfect appearance."

"I wouldn’t mind being disheveled," I whispered against his ear with soft laughter.

"Tiny one, you know I couldn’t care less if our entire extended family witnesses you looking thoroughly ravaged," he teased with that devastating smile.

"You’re such an exhibitionist," I said, melting into his embrace. "You truly caught me completely off guard today."

"Did it please you? No, don’t respond yet. Examine everything thoroughly first, then provide your verdict. If anything fails to meet your approval, we can modify it all," Daniel spoke with rapid enthusiasm, like an eager child seeking validation.

"I adore it! And this house—it’s absolutely magnificent. I love every decorative choice," I said, gazing around enchanted at the living room’s sophisticated blend of classical and modern elements.

"Come!" He seized my hand and led me through our future home. "I hope your appreciation continues throughout the tour."

We explored the entire house once again. The decor proved breathtaking—luminous spaces that merged timeless elegance with contemporary sophistication and impeccable taste. I cherished every carefully chosen detail. Yet I noticed we bypassed the master bedroom as he guided me back downstairs.

"Port’t you finished decorating the bedroom?" I asked, puzzled since every other room appeared complete.

"Yes, I have," he smiled with mysterious intention. "But I’ve prepared a very special surprise there exclusively for you. You’ll discover it after our celebration concludes. Now, tell me honestly what you think of everything else."

"It’s absolute perfection, as if someone possessed the ability to read my deepest desires. How did you accomplish all this?"

"Let’s simply say someone did indeed read your mind on my behalf," he replied enigmatically. Seeing my surprised expression, he confessed, "Katarina provided invaluable assistance and completed everything in record time. When we encountered uncertainty about specific choices, she devised clever ways to consult you, using the pretext that she was decorating the Thorne estate for upcoming events."

I marveled that they had orchestrated this elaborate deception without raising my suspicions. We returned to the garden to enjoy the celebration with our extended families and allies, but I couldn’t suppress my curiosity about what intimate surprise awaited in our private sanctuary.

Chapter 615: After the Proposal

Daniel’s POV

The Don’s Proposal

I couldn’t suppress the satisfaction spreading across my face as I watched Lila dancing with Sybilla, Sloane, and Jude. The proposal had executed flawlessly. I’d spent weeks orchestrating every detail of this surprise, coordinating with my contacts across the five families to ensure tonight would be perfect for my little one. After my disastrous political marriage to Sasha years ago, I’d sworn off the institution entirely. "One marriage, one grave" had become my personal creed. I believed love was just propaganda fed to the masses by Hollywood romantics, mainly because I’d never experienced anything beyond calculated alliances and territorial arrangements.

Then Lila crashed into my world during that Thorne family crisis and turned everything upside down. She made me realize that what I’d shared with Sasha had been nothing more than a cold business merger orchestrated by our fathers. Real love, the kind that makes your blood burn and your chest tighten with possession, had been foreign to me until Lila entered my life.

It struck without warning. One day I was the ruthless inspector who played both sides of the law, and the next I was completely ensnared in her spell. I think I fell irrevocably the first time I held her trembling form in my arms during that hostage situation. No, even before that, when I first spotted her working behind that desk at Thorne Corp, not knowing she was Sullivan family royalty. That thing the old-timers say about destined bloodlines recognizing each other across enemy territory? That’s exactly what I felt with my little one.

Everyone in my inner circle noticed the transformation before I acknowledged it myself. I became someone I barely recognized: protective beyond reason, constantly planning elaborate surprises for the woman who'd stolen my heart from a family known for never yielding ground.

When I'd married Sasha, my father had orchestrated everything through back-room deals and judicial bribes, including selecting the penthouse we'd occupy as husband and wife. I'd simply appeared at designated locations at appointed times, like a soldier following orders. I felt no nervousness or anticipation, it was merely another strategic move in the Martinez family's expansion plans. But with Lila, everything was different.

I planned each detail personally, calling in favors from contacts in both legitimate businesses and underground networks. From the moment I spotted her during that Thorne emergency, I knew she was extraordinary, though I couldn't have predicted she'd become the woman who would completely reshape my understanding of power and vulnerability. Lila worked her way into my heavily guarded heart so thoroughly that I now feel I need her more than I need the respect that keeps me alive in this world.

We've survived numerous battles during our relationship, each crisis only proving she's the right woman to stand beside me in this dangerous life. If our connection wasn't genuine, we wouldn't have weathered the storms that come with loving someone from a rival family. During every threatening moment, she maintained faith in us, trusted me even when circumstances made that seem impossible for someone in her position.

The day I finally reconciled with my parents after exposing their judicial corruption was when I decided to make Lila my wife. I already knew I loved her more than territory or power, but I realized that simply living together in my secured building wasn't enough anymore. I needed to show every family in the city that she was mine and I was hers. I wanted her to carry the Martinez name, to wear a ring that would signal my protection to anyone who might consider harming her. I wanted to call her my wife.

When I informed my parents about my intention to propose, my mother immediately became emotional. She surprised me by sending over her own mother's engagement ring, my grandmother's precious heirloom that she'd guarded with such devotion. My grandparents are all deceased now, but I remember how fiercely they loved each other and protected our family legacy. My father had given his mother's wedding band to my brother when he'd proposed to Sloane. But when I'd married Sasha, my mother had commissioned a new ring from our jewelry contact, and I hadn't questioned the slight. This time, she gave me her mother's ring, saying they were all certain I'd found my true match. Placing my grandmother's ring on my little one's finger filled my chest with overwhelming possessiveness.

"Earth to Inspector!" Zoe slid into the seat beside me, breaking my reverie.

I was still watching Lila laugh, that same delightful sound I'd heard over the phone when I first encountered her at Thorne Corp, the one that had immediately stirred something dangerous inside me.

"Hey, Zoe," I replied, unable to contain my satisfaction. "Everything went perfectly, didn't it?"

"Of course it did, I coordinated the security!" Zoe, never one for modesty, grinned back.

"I appreciate that," I said, squeezing her hand gratefully. Whenever I wanted to surprise my little one, Zoe was my first call. She had exceptional talent for organizing spectacular events while maintaining the discretion our world required.

"Don't mention it. When Finn finally considers proposing to me, you two better help him create something equally impressive!"

Zoe sighed, and I wondered when Finn would finally make his move after being together for so long.

"Now, about the wedding," she continued. "We need to start planning. Have you selected a date?"

"Slow down! I just proposed tonight," I laughed at her eagerness. "We haven't discussed timing yet, but I hope it's soon."

"Don't pull a Thorne and schedule everything so quickly, that's way too rushed!" she cautioned.

"That wedding was unforgettable though. That's where I first met my little one and gave her our first kiss."

"Good grief, you're disgustingly romantic!" Zoe laughed, and I joined her.

Our conversation was interrupted when my sister approached with Xavier's face displayed on some device around her neck. The entire setup looked ridiculous.

"Magnificent celebration, my friend, but I'm signing off," Xavier said, as if he were actually present.

"Hope you'll make it to the wedding. When are you returning to the city?" I asked.

"Still uncertain. But if I can't attend personally, my assistant will lend me her neck again. Knowing how quickly you people schedule these family celebrations, I'll need to stay prepared."

"Well, I want you as my best man. After all, I met my little one thanks to your Thorne connection."

"That changes everything! I'd be honored. Just pair me with an attractive bridesmaid. Maybe I'll get as fortunate as you did!"

"Sorry, but you'll be paired with my sister, Sybilla," I emphasized, watching my sister grow visibly uncomfortable.

"The recluse who hides from everyone? Remember the last wedding? She vanished the entire time."

Xavier laughed while Sybilla pouted.

"Come on, find me someone appealing?" he pleaded.

"Xavier, all my groomsmen are paired with bridesmaids they're involved with. My sister is the only exception, just like you. So be a good friend, and she'll be a good sister. You'll spend my entire wedding together, ensuring she doesn't disappear or eat things that trigger her allergies. Her allergies haven't changed, and neither has her appetite." I spoke seriously while he chuckled.

"Excellent, I'm the wedding babysitter!" Xavier joked, and I noticed Sybilla's eyes glistening with unshed tears. "Fine, I'll make the sacrifice for you."

After saying goodbye to Xavier, I turned to Sybilla, who disconnected the device, looking furious.

"If you'd just resolved this misunderstanding, you wouldn't have had to endure that nonsense," I told her firmly. This charade of keeping Xavier in the dark had continued long enough. "I've remained silent only because Lila requested it, but you need to tell him the truth."

"Daniel, stay out of it," Sybilla huffed. "Find another bridesmaid for your precious friend. I decline the position. I won't be in your wedding."

"Inspector, if Sybilla isn't a bridesmaid, Lila might call off the whole wedding," Zoe warned, having observed everything.

"Oh, Sybilla will be a bridesmaid alright, standing right next to Xavier, even if I have to handcuff them together and station one of my officers nearby with a weapon during the ceremony." I stared at my sister seriously. She wasn't going to sabotage my plans. She merely huffed, turned away, and stormed off.

"I'm documenting this," Zoe said, reaching for her notebook. "Looks like we've identified our first wedding crisis."

Chapter 616: Wedding Night Sanctuary

Lila's POV

The wedding celebration had finally wound down as our mafia family allies and associates said their farewells, leaving just Daniel and me alone in the heavily secured estate that would now be our sanctuary. My curiosity about the bedroom surprise he had mentioned earlier mixed with my desire to finally have my powerful husband all to myself, away from the watchful eyes of the underworld elite.

"Everyone's been taken care of," Daniel announced, activating the mansion's security system before walking toward me with the predatory grace that made him so feared in both law enforcement and criminal circles. "Sybilla and Zoe handled the arrangements flawlessly."

"How will they manage housing so many family members and associates?" I wondered aloud, knowing how particular mafia hierarchy could be about accommodations.

Daniel’s strong hands found my waist as he explained, "They won’t need to worry. Your brother and Katarina are staying with Zoe, who’s absolutely delighted to host the Sullivan family heirs. Gregory and Sloane had planned on a hotel, but Jude convinced them to stay at his estate—they bonded over some lucrative money laundering opportunities through his art galleries. So Sybilla only has your parents to manage, which is hardly challenging since your father is completely charmed by her diplomatic skills with Martinez family politics."

As he spoke, his lips found the sensitive spot on my neck, planting feather-light kisses that made my skin tingle with the same intensity I felt whenever he displayed his authority in the underworld.

"I love when you do that," I sighed, tilting my head back instinctively to give my dangerous husband better access.

"I thought you loved everything I do to this delectable body that belongs to me," he teased, his breath warm against my skin, reminding me of the possessive nature that made him such a formidable force in our world.

"I do, but these neck kisses... they make me feel like your precious treasure." My words earned me a gentle nip that sent shivers down my spine.

"Careful now," he murmured against my throat. "Your father might not appreciate seeing my mark on the Sullivan family princess tomorrow."

I laughed softly, remembering how I secretly treasured carrying visible evidence of his passion—little reminders that I belonged to the most powerful man in the city’s law enforcement and underground alliance.

"That laugh," he said, studying my face with those penetrating dark eyes that could intimidate hardened criminals. "I remember the first time I heard it—in Caleb’s office during that crisis meeting. You hadn’t even noticed me yet, but I was already captivated, staring at you like some lovesick fool instead of focusing on Thorne family business."

"Just like how I stared at you during that first encounter at the precinct," I confessed. "I kept thinking no man could naturally possess such commanding presence—you had to be some kind of avenging angel walking among us mortals, dispensing justice with those incredible hands."

His eyes darkened with the familiar intensity that made both allies and enemies tremble. "You know what it does to me when you describe me that way."

His fingertips traced my cheek with surprising gentleness for hands that had subdued countless criminals, then tucked a stray lock of hair behind my ear. "Sometimes I wonder if I deserve to have claimed something so pure, Lila, but I love you beyond reason or law."

"I'm not certain if you deserve me either, Inspector Martinez," I replied with a playful smile that I knew drove him wild, "but fortunately for you, my heart chose the most dangerous man it could find."

He studied my face with narrowed eyes, reading me the way he analyzed suspects. "Have you been drinking?"

"Just one glass of wine, the champagne toast, and a tequila shot with Sybilla," I admitted.

"So my little wildcat is feeling bold tonight? Perfect timing." His smile widened as he recognized the confident gleam in my eyes that alcohol always seemed to enhance. "I should definitely take full advantage."

In one fluid motion that showcased the physical power that made him legendary in both his professional and criminal worlds, Daniel swept me into his arms and carried me upstairs. When we reached our bedroom door, he asked me to turn the handle.

The sight that greeted me stole my breath completely. The bedroom was nothing short of magnificent—worthy of the most powerful crime family matriarch. A massive bed dominated the space, featuring an intricately carved white wooden headboard with delicate floral patterns that spoke of old-world European craftsmanship. The bed was dressed in pristine white linens imported from Italy, a plush comforter, and an abundance of pillows that looked impossibly luxurious.

A sumptuous white rug extended from beneath the bed, soft enough to sink into like clouds. Sheer white curtains cascaded from ceiling to floor, intertwined with strings of crystal spheres that caught and scattered light across the room like diamonds, creating an otherworldly elegance throughout the space that rivaled any crime boss's private quarters.

Golden-hued lamps cast warm ambiance over the white furniture, each piece elegantly carved and positioned to maximize both comfort and the kind of spaciousness that spoke of serious wealth. The nightstands, tall dresser, and sofa all coordinated perfectly in the style befitting our elevated status. But what caught my attention was the familiar armchair from our old apartment—the only piece with color, featuring rich mahogany legs and sand-colored upholstery that somehow complemented the room's aesthetic flawlessly, especially against the sand-toned window treatments.

Pink lysianthus flowers were artfully arranged throughout the room, looking like precious artwork. Near the seating area, a bottle of wine, two crystal glasses, and Belgian chocolates awaited us on polished side tables.

I walked around speechlessly, absorbing every exquisite detail that demonstrated the resources at our disposal, before turning to Daniel with emotion overwhelming me.

"Do you approve?" he asked, looking uncharacteristically uncertain despite being a man who commanded respect from the most dangerous elements of society.

I responded by running to him and jumping into his powerful arms. "It's absolutely perfect!"

He kissed me thoroughly, claiming me with the intensity of a man who had fought the entire underworld to possess me, before setting me down and walking to the armchair. "I couldn't part with this chair," he explained, running his hands along its arms. "Katarina insisted it wouldn't match the sophisticated aesthetic, but I overruled her decision. What do you think?"

"I adore this armchair," I said sincerely, earning one of his rare genuine smiles.

He poured himself a glass of wine and pressed a button on a remote control. Music filled the room—our playlist, the one he had created for our first night together when he claimed me completely. He took a slow sip while his predatory gaze roamed over me possessively.

"I personally selected this dress for you," he said, his voice dropping to that commanding tone that made powerful men submit. "Spent hours imagining exactly how I would remove it piece by piece. But I've decided I won't be taking it off tonight."

"No?" I asked, playing the innocent game we both enjoyed.

"No. You'll be removing it for me." He settled comfortably into the armchair like a crime lord awaiting private entertainment, radiating the kind of authority that made lesser men fear for their lives.

"But it's such an exquisite dress. I'd hate to remove something so beautiful," I teased.

"If you want to wear it again, I suggest you take it off yourself with great care," he warned, his tone carrying the weight of absolute command. "Otherwise, I'll tear it into shreds without a moment's hesitation."

"What a challenging decision," I pretended to deliberate. "Should I preserve the dress, or should I let you destroy it in your passion? Both options sound incredibly tempting."

"You have only moments to decide," he announced, his eyes darkening with the intensity that made him legendary. "One..." I bit my lip, savoring his impatience. "Two..."

"I'll take it off! You can destroy something else later," I conceded with a mischievous smile that I knew would drive him to the edge of control.

"Good girl. Begin the show." His commanding tone sent liquid heat coursing through my veins.

Turning my back to him, I slowly lowered the zipper, making a deliberate performance of it. When I faced him again, I began removing the dress with calculated sensuality, first slipping off the sleeves before allowing the bodice to fall to my waist. With my back to him once more, I swayed my hips as I pushed the dress down, bending over completely as it pooled at my feet like silk water. I made an elaborate show of retrieving it, giving him an unobstructed view of exactly what he had claimed as his own.

"You wicked little temptress," he growled, desire thick in his voice like smoke.

Pleased with his reaction, I deliberately dropped the dress again, just for the pleasure of bending over once more and watching his control fracture.