Mafia Mask 73

Chapter 73 Floral Bombardment

Ivy's POV

Monday morning hit like a punch to the gut after an emotionally exhausting weekend spent deliberating whether to give Caleb another chance. My body felt weighted down as I made my way through the Thorne compound, still wrestling with my decision. The girls had been crystal clear during our Sunday gathering at Zoe's safehouse - he needed to grovel more before I allowed him back into my good graces. Make him sweat, they insisted. Make him understand the magnitude of what he had done.

The compound buzzed with its usual Monday morning intensity as I settled into my position at the financial operations center. Despite everything happening in my personal life, I genuinely appreciated this work. The environment was professional yet flexible, the team dynamics felt natural, and the responsibilities never left me feeling drained. The only shadow hanging over it all was the bitter realization that my hard-earned accounting degree was essentially meaningless here. All those sleepless nights studying, all that debt, all those dreams of building a legitimate career in finance - now just expensive decorations gathering dust in my apartment.

The melancholy crept in as I powered up my secure terminal, but I pushed it aside quickly. Max needed stability, and wallowing in self-pity wouldn't keep us safe or secure his future. Sometimes being a mother in this world meant swallowing your pride and making practical choices over passionate ones.

An ornate coffee service appeared on my desk with a delicate clink, pulling me from my thoughts. Ruby stood beside me wearing that radiant smile that could brighten the entire operations floor.

"Ivy, seriously, do you have any shame about being this stunning?" Her exaggerated complaint made me laugh despite my mood. "Half the soldiers in this compound practically stumble over themselves whenever you walk by. Even my brother keeps asking about you, and honestly, if I didn't know you were completely gone over Caleb, I would be arranging introductions right now."

"Please, Ruby. They're just curious about the newest addition to the inner circle." I took a grateful sip of the espresso, letting the warmth spread through me. "But enough about me - tell me about your mysterious admirer from yesterday. Did you get a proper look when he drove you home?"

Her expression shifted to something between dreamy and frustrated. "Oh honey, that man is pure temptation wrapped in a perfectly tailored suit and dangerous confidence. But after you girls filled my head with all those warnings about players in this life, I'm too terrified to make a move." She collapsed into her chair dramatically, chin propped on her palm like a lovesick teenager.

"Good morning, my dedicated associates!" Mr. Jenkins's authoritative voice cut through our conversation as he approached with his usual Monday briefcase and that commanding presence that reminded everyone why Caleb trusted him in this position.

"Morning, Mr. Jenkins," we responded automatically.

His expression grew slightly apologetic as he focused on me. "Ivy, I know this is terrible timing, but I need to ask a significant favor. I know you have that medical appointment this afternoon, but our afternoon contact just called desperately requesting to push their meeting to late afternoon. I tried everything to reschedule for tomorrow, but they're leaving the city tonight." He looked genuinely pained to be asking. "This is the Sullivan territory negotiation - you know how crucial this expansion is for our operations."

The disappointment stung for a moment, but his obvious discomfort made the decision easy. "Absolutely no problem, Mr. Jenkins. I'll call my physician right now and reschedule. Let's secure this territory properly."

Relief flooded his features immediately. "You're invaluable, Ivy. Take whatever afternoon you need when you reschedule, and I'll make sure you receive additional compensation for today."

As he headed back toward his corner office, I pulled out my secure phone and dialed the familiar number. The receptionist's voice came through crisp and professional.

"Dr. Fletcher's practice, this is Sarah speaking."

"Hi Sarah, it's Ivy Brooks. How has your morning been treating you?"

"Oh Ivy, perfect timing actually. I was just reviewing your file to confirm today's appointment."

"That’s actually why I’m calling. I need to reschedule if that’s possible. Family business emergency."

"Not a problem at all, dear. Actually, this works out perfectly - I have another patient who has been desperately trying to move up their appointment." I could hear papers rustling as she spoke. "Let me check my calendar and see what options we have for you."

While Sarah searched for available slots, a commotion near the compound entrance caught my attention. Two delivery specialists struggled through the security checkpoint carrying what could only be described as botanical masterpieces. The larger arrangement was an explosion of vibrant tulips that immediately made my stomach drop. I knew exactly who had orchestrated that particular flower choice.

The entire operations floor seemed to freeze as conversations died and heads turned to track the procession. Whispers started rippling through the workstations like wildfire, everyone speculating about the intended recipient. I wanted nothing more than to disappear under my desk and avoid the inevitable circus.

"Ivy Brooks?" The first delivery specialist stopped directly in front of my workstation, hefting the massive tulip arrangement.

Sarah’s voice continued in my ear, but I needed to end this spectacle immediately. "Sarah, can I call you back in just a few minutes?"

"Of course, sweetheart. I’ll keep my schedule flexible."

I ended the call and looked up at the delivery specialist who was waiting patiently with his floral burden. "That would be me."

"Excellent. Where would you like this beauty?" He was already positioning it on my desk before I could respond. "Mind signing here for confirmation?"

I scribbled my signature while he shook his head in amazement. "Lady, I’ve been doing deliveries to this part of town for many years, and this is honestly one of the most impressive arrangements I’ve ever handled. Either this guy is trying to win your heart, or he messed up royally and is begging forgiveness. Either way, he must be crazy about you."

Despite my embarrassment, his observation made me smile genuinely. After he left, I stared at the floral monument that had completely conquered my workspace. When I glanced over, Ruby looked equally shell-shocked, her own desk now dominated by an equally impressive arrangement.

"Can you actually believe Xavier sent me this thing?" she said, her voice filled with disbelief. "Ivy, this arrangement is literally taller than I am. How am I supposed to transport this home without drawing every rival family's attention?"

"I'm wondering the exact same thing," I replied, shaking my head.

My secure line rang, and Zoe's excited voice practically burst through the speaker.

"Ivy, you will never believe what just happened. My soldier sent me the most enormous flower arrangement I've ever seen in my life!"

A suspicious pattern was emerging. "Finn sent you flowers too?"

"Wait, what do you mean too?" Confusion replaced excitement in her voice.

"Hold on a second." I snapped a photo of my floral takeover and sent it to her, then gestured for Ruby to do the same. "Check your messages right now."

"Oh my God, those calculating bastards! I should have known Finn was in on their little coordinated campaign. Do you think Gemma and Nora got hit too? I'm messaging the group chat immediately."

She hung up abruptly, and within minutes our secure group chat exploded with photos. Every single one of us had received these ridiculously oversized arrangements at our respective locations within the compound. The men had clearly orchestrated this operation down to the last detail.

The arrangements were impossible to ignore, turning each of us into reluctant celebrities throughout the territory. The constant stares and whispered comments grew increasingly irritating as the day progressed. Would it have killed them to send normal, reasonably-sized bouquets like civilized people?

By late afternoon, we had all reached the same conclusion - our men would have to personally escort us home. There was absolutely no way to transport these botanical disasters without drawing unwanted attention from rival families, and leaving them behind would only fuel more compound gossip.

I dialed Caleb's secure number, and he answered before the first ring finished.

"My love, you have no idea how incredible it feels to hear your voice." I could hear Xavier's voice in the background, clearly taking Ruby's similar call.

"Caleb, have you completely lost your mind? Did you really think sending an entire flower market to the compound was appropriate? This thing has consumed my entire workstation."

"My angel, I simply wanted to spoil you properly." His tone was so casual, as if overwhelming our territory with flowers was perfectly reasonable behavior.

"Caleb, this arrangement weighs more than my tactical gear. How exactly did you expect me to transport this home? Ruby and I have become the compound entertainment for the entire day." His low chuckle only irritated me further.

"Well, now everyone in our territory knows you have a devoted man. Don't worry about transportation - I'll pick you up personally and escort you home. Plus, I get to spend some time with Max. I've really been missing that little guy."

The mention of my son softened my annoyance considerably, but I caught an important detail that needed addressing.

"And who exactly gave you permission to call yourself my man?"

"Oh Ivy, you've been mine since the very first time you heard my voice, even when you had no idea who I was." His words brought back memories of those early days working in the compound, when he was handling territory disputes and would call looking for Heidi for intelligence updates.

"Don’t you think that’s a bit presumptuous?"

"Not even slightly, my love. You belong to me just as completely as I belong to you. Even while you’re angry with me, that fundamental truth hasn’t changed. I love you, Ivy, and you will forgive me eventually - it’s simply a matter of time. But you’re still mine, and for now, that makes me your man."

"My God, your arrogance is absolutely incredible." I could practically hear his satisfied smile through the phone.

"My angel, I would love nothing more than to talk with you all day, but I have territory meetings that cannot wait. I’ll be there to pick you up this evening, love. I’m missing you more than you can possibly imagine."

The line went dead, leaving me staring at my phone screen with what I knew was a ridiculous smile spreading across my face.