Mafia Mask 77

Chapter 77 Network of Betrayal

Caleb's POV

Katelyn's revelations hit me like a freight train loaded with concrete, but the old woman wasn't finished unloading her cargo. Each piece of intelligence that spilled from her lips made my blood run colder as I realized how thoroughly the betrayal had infected my organization, festering like a cancer right under my nose.

"Those private investigators you've been hiring to track down that mysterious woman from the underground auction," she said, her voice dropping to the conspiratorial whisper she'd perfected over decades of navigating family politics. I nodded grimly, my jaw clenching until I could hear my teeth grinding. "I grew suspicious when I noticed them huddled in corners with Monica every time they visited the compound. The most recent one really caught my attention when I spotted him at a little bistro, several blocks from headquarters, deep in conversation with Rossi and Monica."

My hands balled into fists as she continued her damning testimony.

"The owner is an old family friend who owes us protection money, so I drop by regularly for intelligence gathering. I overheard Rossi praising the investigator's exceptional work, saying he was extremely pleased with the results they'd obtained. But that same afternoon, I heard you telling Xavier that the man had come up empty-handed, claiming it was impossible to locate the woman. How could Rossi be satisfied if nothing had been discovered?"

The implications crashed over me like a tidal wave of betrayal. Katelyn wasn't just observant - she was a walking intelligence network who'd been quietly cataloging every suspicious interaction within my family's operations. This debriefing was going to consume the entire night at this rate. I needed fresh air and had to let Ivy know I wouldn't be returning to her safe house tonight.

"Give me a moment," I said, stepping toward the garden to make the encrypted call.

"Mr. Thorne, I'm in a generous mood today. You should take full advantage," Ivy's playful voice managed to cut through the chaos swirling in my head like a blade through silk.

"My beautiful angel," I started, my voice catching slightly on the endearment. I cleared my throat, fighting back the emotion threatening to crack my composed facade. "I won't be able to see you tonight."

"Is everything under control, Caleb?" The genuine concern threading through her voice made my chest tighten with protective instincts.

"It will be. But there's a mountain of intelligence to process, and most of it blindsided me completely."

"Handle your family business. We'll talk when you're ready."

After we disconnected, I turned to find Xavier standing behind me like a shadow. His hand landed firmly on my shoulder with the weight of decades of loyalty.

"We're going to weather this storm together," he said with the fierce determination that had made him my most trusted consigliere. "If we have to burn down half the city to get justice, that's exactly what we'll do."

I nodded, drawing strength from his unwavering support as we headed back inside to face the revelations.

Katelyn had transformed into a one-woman intelligence briefing, her memory sharp as a stiletto blade. Every scrap of overheard conversation, every suspicious glance she'd witnessed and filed away in her mental archives was now pouring out in a torrent of crucial information. She rattled off names like she was reading from a comprehensive dossier - coffee shop owners, cleaning crews, secretaries, various soldiers and associates - categorizing each person as either trustworthy family or compromised liability. The loyal ones would become our informants. The traitors would quietly disappear from our payroll and possibly from existence.

For hours, Katelyn unfolded betrayal after betrayal like the world's most shocking criminal conspiracy. Her memory was frighteningly precise, and she knew every single person in my organization better than I'd ever imagined possible, cataloguing their loyalties, weaknesses, and potential for treachery.

"Since I'm spilling all the family secrets tonight," she said with a mischievous glint in her weathered eyes, "Mr. Scott, stop wasting precious time. Heidi has feelings for you too, and has for quite some time. I know you care about her."

Even romantic entanglements? Katelyn's network of observation extended to matters of the heart within our ranks? Heidi had never given the slightest indication of her feelings beyond professional respect. Scott looked caught between elation and complete bewilderment while Xavier and I exchanged amused glances. Ever since his wife was killed in a rival family's retaliation strike, Scott had been transparent about his feelings for Heidi, but she'd remained professionally distant, maintaining the widow's code of the old country.

When Katelyn finally exhausted her vault of secrets, she looked drained, and the rest of us sat in stunned silence. This woman had somehow discovered that our long-married Accounting Director was conducting a torrid affair with a young junior accountant. According to Katelyn, it was the scandal that could bring down reputations if it reached the wrong ears.

Xavier arranged for his most trusted driver to escort Katelyn home safely through the dangerous streets. We agreed she would continue serving as our eyes and ears, providing Sasha with comprehensive daily intelligence reports. I insisted on a substantial raise and a loyalty bonus, despite her protests that she was helping from the heart and wanted no compensation. Her dedication to family deserved recognition, whether she wanted payment or not.

Once she left under armed escort, we spent the remainder of the night strategizing our response to each piece of intelligence she'd provided. Scott pointed out that Katelyn had essentially handed us a roadmap to victory - she'd identified our enemies and told us exactly where to find them skulking in the shadows. We worked until dawn painted the sky blood red, and by the time we finished, exhaustion had settled deep in my bones like lead. I managed a few hours of sleep in one of Xavier's heavily fortified guest rooms before dragging myself to the compound.

The following day was brutal. Fatigue clouded my thoughts like smoke, and a persistent headache pounded behind my temples like artillery fire. By late afternoon, I'd retreated to the leather couch in my office and swallowed a painkiller, desperate for relief. I leaned back, closing my eyes for just a moment, and consciousness slipped away.

My encrypted phone's shrill ringtone jolted me awake like a fire alarm. Dominic's name flashed on the armored screen.

"Please tell me Ivy didn’t dump you again and you’re not drowning your sorrows in a bottle of whiskey," he said with his typical sarcasm cutting through the static.

"Nothing that dramatic. I was up all night handling family business. What’s the situation? Is Ivy secure?" I asked, instantly alert and reaching for my shoulder holster.

"What do I look like, a professional bodyguard service?"

"Lately? Pretty much - you’re watching over my woman," I replied, unable to suppress a grin despite the circumstances.

"Fair point, can’t argue with that logic. Meet me at the shopping center where Gemma works, and make it fast. The ladies are planning a shopping expedition for some dangerously attractive dresses. I’ve already coordinated with the other soldiers, just need you to loop in Xavier. But we need to be in position before they arrive."

"Consider it handled. Xavier just walked through my door," I said as Xavier approached my desk with his usual predatory grace.

An hour later, we converged at the mall, ready for whatever the evening would bring in this war of shadows and silk.