

Exposed to the CEO Behind the Mafia Mask

Chapter 9: Chapter 9 A Dangerous Recognition

Ivy's POV

I smoothed down the emerald green dress as I stepped out of the elevator, the silk whispering against my skin like a promise of power. The fabric hugged my curves with predatory precision, making me feel like I could conquer kingdoms. This morning, I'd spent extra time on my makeup and hair, transforming myself into someone who could face down the devil himself.

"Ivy, you look absolutely lethal!" Heidi exclaimed as I walked into the office.

Her warm smile calmed some of my nerves. "Thank you. I figured I should look my best to meet the Don."

"Well, that dress is certainly sending the right message," she said with a knowing glint in her eyes. "Mr. Thorne called. His private jet landed early, but he's stopping at his penthouse first. He should be here before lunch."

I nodded, my stomach tightening with anticipation and dread. "I'll make sure everything is prepared."

"Including his chamomile tea?" Heidi asked with a dangerous smile.

"Especially the tea," I replied, matching her intensity.

The morning flew by as Heidi showed me the encrypted filing system and introduced me to other staff members—all of whom spoke in coded language about "territories," "collections," and "family business." By lunchtime, I felt more at ease navigating this world of shadows and secrets.

"Would you like to join me for lunch in the executive dining room?" Heidi asked. "I had the kitchen prepare extra."

"I'd be honored," I replied, grateful for her mentorship.

Over lunch, Heidi shared carefully edited stories about her time working for the Thorne family.

"Caleb's father was a formidable man," she said, her eyes distant with memory and something that looked like fear. "Ruthless when crossed, but loyal to those who served him well. He built this empire from nothing." Her expression darkened dangerously.

"When he and his wife were murdered in that car bombing five years ago, it nearly broke Caleb completely."

"Murdered?" I whispered, my blood turning cold.

Heidi nodded grimly. "A rival family's attempt to seize our territory. They underestimated what Caleb would become in response." She looked at me intently. "Just remember, beneath that controlled exterior is a man who's watched his world burn. Sometimes his violence is the only language he trusts."

After lunch, Heidi left for a "family matter," leaving me alone in the eerily quiet office. I used the time to organize Caleb's schedule, noting meetings with names I suspected weren't found in any legitimate business directory.

I was bending down to retrieve a classified file from the bottom drawer when I heard a low, appreciative whistle. Standing up quickly, I turned to find two impossibly dangerous-looking men watching me with predatory interest.

"Well, well," said the taller of the two, a lethal smile spreading across his face. He had smooth dark skin, a shaved head that emphasized his sharp cheekbones, and eyes that held secrets. "You must be the new blood who went to war with the boss."

My cheeks burned with heat. "I—"

"I'm Xavier Black, consigliere and best friend to the beast beside me," he continued, extending a hand adorned with expensive rings that probably concealed weapons. "And you're the legendary Ivy Brooks."

I shook his hand, noting the calluses that spoke of violence, while managing a smile despite my terror. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Black."

"Xavier, please," he insisted before gesturing to his companion. "And this terrifying specimen is Caleb Thorne, your new Don."

My heart stopped completely as my gaze shifted to the other man. Caleb Thorne was even more imposing in person than my darkest nightmares had conjured. Tall, with broad shoulders encased in a suit that probably cost more than my annual salary, he radiated lethal authority. His jawline was carved from granite, and his expression was cold enough to freeze blood.

But it was his eyes that made the world tilt sideways around me. They were an extraordinary ice-blue—the exact same impossible shade as my son's. The same eyes that had haunted my dreams for three years. The same eyes I saw every morning in Max's perfect face.

"Miss Brooks," he said, his deep voice sending recognition crashing through me like a tsunami.

I forced myself to extend my trembling hand. "Mr. Thorne, it's... a pleasure to finally meet you."

When our hands touched, electricity shot through me like lightning striking the same place twice. His grip was firm, warm, and devastatingly familiar. Our eyes locked, and for a heart-stopping moment, I saw a flicker of something in those ice-blue depths—confusion, recognition, impossible possibility.

Caleb's brow furrowed dangerously, as if he felt the same devastating familiarity. He held my hand longer than professional courtesy demanded, his thumb brushing against my knuckles in a gesture that sent memories crashing through me.

A scarred eyebrow. Ice-blue eyes. Strong hands that had once lifted me against a wall...

"We'll be in my office," he said roughly, his voice darker than before. "Bring the chamomile tea in fifteen minutes."

With that command, he strode past me into his office, leaving me standing there with my world collapsing around me. Xavier gave me a knowing look and a dangerous wink before following his boss.

I collapsed into my chair, my legs unable to support the weight of this revelation. My mind was reeling with impossible truths.

Ice-blue eyes. The rarest eye color in existence.

Max's eyes. The eyes of the masked stranger from the underground auction. The man who had possessed me completely in a shadowy hallway three years ago.

It couldn't be possible. It had to be the cruelest coincidence in history. There was no way my new boss—the ruthless head of a criminal empire—could be—

The elevator chimed ominously, interrupting my spiral into madness. A devastatingly beautiful woman with platinum blonde hair and a designer outfit that screamed money and murder swept through the doors, heading straight for Caleb's office like a missile seeking its target.

"Miss, stop!" I called, standing on unsteady legs. "You can't enter without clearance."

She ignored me completely, pushing past as if I were nothing more than furniture.

"Caleb!" she purred as she flung open his office door without permission. "We need to talk about our arrangement immediately."

I stood frozen in the aftermath, torn between professional duty and the earth-shattering realization that my boss—the cold, lethal man who had just walked past me—might be the father of my child.

The father who had no idea his son existed.

The father who could destroy us both with a single word.

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