

Exposed to the CEO Behind the Mafia Mask

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 A Dangerous Truth and Desperate Shelter

Ivy's POV

"I can't believe you still have this," I said, accepting the bottle of expensive perfume from Zoe's hands. It was the same intoxicating scent I'd worn to the underground auction several weeks ago.

"Of course I kept it. You smelled lethal that night." Zoe collapsed onto my narrow bed. "And clearly, Mr. Mystery Man with the scars thought so too."

I groaned, burying my face in my pillow. "Stop mentioning him."

"Why? He gave you the most incredible night of your life!" Zoe nudged me playfully.

"And possibly left me with a deadly disease," I muttered, sitting up. "My doctor's appointment is in an hour."

Zoe's teasing smile vanished. "Hey, don't spiral into worst-case scenarios. You're probably fine."

"Probably isn't good enough," I countered. "What kind of rational person has unprotected sex with a dangerous stranger? I've never done anything so reckless before."

"The kind who needed to break free after being betrayed by her boyfriend of four years with her own cousin," Zoe replied fiercely. "Besides, I'm coming with you to the appointment."

"You don't need to do that."

"Shut up. I'm going." She squeezed my hand. "That's what best friends do."

Several weeks after my doctor's visit, I sat in the same sterile examination room with Zoe beside me, waiting for my test results. My leg bounced nervously as I checked my watch for the fifth time in minutes.

"Relax," Zoe whispered. "Whatever it is, we'll handle it."

Before I could respond, Dr. Taylor walked in with a folder in hand and an unreadable expression.

"Ivy," she greeted me warmly, settling across from us. "How are you feeling today?"

"Terrified," I admitted. "Just tell me directly—do I have something?"

Dr. Taylor smiled reassuringly. "Your STD panel came back completely negative. You're perfectly healthy."

Relief flooded through me. I hadn't realized how tense I'd been until that moment. "Thank God."

"However," she continued, her tone shifting slightly, "we did discover something else in your bloodwork."

My stomach plummeted. "What is it?"

"Congratulations, Ivy. You're pregnant."

The words struck me like a physical blow. The room seemed to spin as blood drained from my face.

"That's impossible," I whispered, though I knew it wasn't. "We only... it was just once."

"That's all it takes," Dr. Taylor said gently. "Based on your hormone levels, I'd estimate you're about five weeks along."

Zoe gripped my hand so tightly it hurt. "Are you certain?" she asked the doctor.

Dr. Taylor nodded. "The blood test is extremely accurate. We can perform an ultrasound today if you'd like confirmation."

My mind raced frantically. Pregnant. With a stranger's baby. A man whose name I didn't know. A man with those unforgettable ice-blue eyes and that distinctive scar who had vanished into the shadows.

"My parents are going to disown me," I choked out, tears welling up. "I'm only twenty-three. I'm still in school."

"Breathe, Ivy," Dr. Taylor instructed calmly. "You have options, and you have time to consider them all."

"I can't have a baby," I whispered, panic rising in my chest. "I don't even know who the father is. How am I supposed to explain this to anyone?"

Zoe wrapped an arm around me. "One step at a time, Ivy."

Dr. Taylor spent the next thirty minutes walking me through my choices. Termination. Adoption. Keeping the baby. Each possibility made my head spin more violently than the last.

"Whatever you decide, don't face it alone," Dr. Taylor advised as our appointment concluded. "Talk to your family, your friends. Get support."

I nodded numbly, still in shock as Zoe guided me from the office.

"Eat something," Zoe urged, pushing a plate of fries toward me in the diner where we'd met Finn after my appointment. "For the baby."

"The baby," I repeated, the words still foreign on my tongue. "I'm having a baby."

Finn reached across the table and squeezed my hand. "We're here for you, Ivy. Whatever you need."

I looked between them, these two people who had stood by me through everything. "I don't know what to do."

"What does your instinct tell you?" Zoe asked softly.

I placed a hand on my still-flat stomach. Despite the terror coursing through me, I couldn't imagine ending the pregnancy. "I think... I think I want to keep it."

Tears spilled down my cheeks as I spoke the words aloud for the first time. "But I'm so frightened."

"You'd be insane not to be," Finn said. "But you're not alone in this."

A watery laugh escaped me. "You guys are my anchors, you know that? Will you..." I hesitated, then pushed forward. "Will you be the baby's godparents?"

Zoe's eyes widened before she burst into tears and threw her arms around me. "Yes! Absolutely yes!"

Finn smiled, his own eyes suspiciously bright. "We'd be honored."

For the first time since hearing the news, I felt a glimmer of hope. Maybe, just maybe, we could survive this.

That night, I sat on my parents' worn couch, hands trembling as I waited for them to join me. Zoe sat beside me, a solid wall of support.

"What's this about, sweetheart?" my mother asked as she and my father settled across from us. "You sounded distressed on the phone."

I took a deep breath, fighting back tears. "Mom, Dad... I have something to tell you."

The concern in their eyes only made this more difficult. My father leaned forward. "Whatever it is, you can tell us."

"I'm pregnant," I blurted out, the words hanging heavy in the suddenly silent room.

My mother's hand flew to her mouth. My father went completely still.

"It happened at that underground auction," I continued, words tumbling out. "I was reckless and stupid, and I don't even know his name. I'm so, so sorry to disappoint you both."

My mother recovered first. "Oh, Ivy," she whispered, her eyes filling with tears.

"How could you be so irresponsible?" My father's voice was tight with disappointment and fear. "We raised you better than this. Do you understand how dangerous those people are?"

Each word was like a blade to my heart. "I know," I whispered, tears streaming down my face. "I screwed up."

"What are you planning to do?" my mother asked carefully.

"I want to keep it," I said quietly. "I know it won't be easy, but this baby is part of me, and I already love it."

My father stood abruptly and walked to the window, his back to us. The silence stretched painfully.

"Dad, please say something," I begged.

He turned slowly, and I braced myself for his anger. Instead, I saw his eyes were wet with tears.

"You'll stay here," he said firmly. "We'll convert the back room into a nursery."

"What?" I gasped.

"You heard me." He crossed the room and knelt before me, taking my hands in his weathered ones. "You're our daughter, Ivy. This isn't how we imagined things would happen, but that baby is our grandchild. We're not going to throw you out on these streets."

Fresh tears spilled down my cheeks. "I thought you'd be furious."

"We're disappointed," my mother admitted, moving to sit beside me. "And terrified. But we love you, and we'll help you through this."

"You need to finish your degree," my father insisted. "That's non-negotiable. That baby will need a mother who can provide for it in this world."

"I will," I promised. "I'll work harder than ever."

My father pulled me into a fierce hug. "I know you will, sweetheart. You've always made us proud, even when you make dangerous mistakes."

As my parents embraced me, with Zoe smiling tearfully from the side, I felt the crushing weight of fear begin to lift. With this much love surrounding us, maybe my baby and I could survive after all.

The months that followed weren't easy. Word spread quickly through our neighborhood, and the whispers followed me everywhere. Brodie and Tiffany were the worst, spreading vicious rumors about who the father might be and what kind of man I'd been with.

But for every cruel word, there was a moment of grace. I managed to complete my financial certification through night courses. Zoe and Finn came to every doctor's appointment. My parents transformed their small back room into a makeshift nursery painted in soft yellows and greens.

When my son was born on a cold autumn morning, the first thing everyone noticed was his eyes—an extraordinary ice-blue that immediately transported me back to that night at the underground auction. I named him Max Thomas, after my grandfather and father.

As I held my perfect baby boy, surrounded by my parents, Zoe, and Finn, I knew that despite the unconventional beginning, we were going to be okay.

The next three years flew by in a blur of sleepless nights, diaper changes, and studying during nap times. My parents were my salvation, watching Max while I attended classes and worked part-time managing books for local businesses that didn't ask too many questions about their cash flow. Zoe and Finn doted on their godson, spoiling him with love and too many toys despite our limited means.

Despite the challenges, I completed my certification on time, standing proudly with three-year-old Max perched on my hip as I received my financial credentials. As I held that certificate, I made a silent promise to my beautiful boy with those striking eyes—he would never want for anything, not if I had anything to say about it.

But I knew that to keep that promise, we'd need to find our way into a safer world—one where a single mother with financial skills might actually have a chance at building something better.

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