Mafia Mask 37

Chapter 37 Ice Blue Eyes

Ivy's POV

I stirred awake to Caleb's lips trailing fire across my skin, morning sunlight filtering through the bulletproof windows of his penthouse that we'd forgotten to shutter. Sleep had been impossible last night. After losing ourselves in each other again in the silk sheets of his fortress-like bedroom, and then once more under the rainfall shower in his marble bathroom, we finally made our way to the armored dining room for breakfast.

I called the safe house to check on Max. Zoe's voice was steady and reassuring as she reported everything was secure. Max had been perfect, she said, though I could hear him chattering happily in the background, protected behind reinforced walls and armed guards.

After breakfast, we returned to the mountain of encrypted ledgers and territory maps that had been waiting on Caleb's mahogany conference table. Time seemed to slip away as we worked side by side, reviewing shipping routes and money laundering operations, our hands brushing occasionally as we reached for the same blood-stained document. By the time we finished cataloging the latest shipment manifests, the afternoon sun was already casting long shadows across the floor through the reinforced glass.

"Ivy, we need to talk." Caleb's voice carried the weight of a man accustomed to life-and-death decisions. His expression was serious, almost vulnerable beneath the cold authority he wore like armor. "I need to make sure we understand each other completely. What happened between us, what's happening right now, it's not casual for me. I want you in my life, in my bed, in every corner of my empire. And I want to be part of yours and Max's lives too. I need you to know that we're not just having an arrangement here. We're together. Really together."

His words sent dangerous warmth spreading through my chest. This powerful, ruthless man who commanded fear from hardened criminals looked almost nervous as he waited for my response. I couldn't help but smile at how endearing he was beneath the killer's facade.

I stood up and walked over to where he sat in his throne-like leather chair, my pulse quickening with each step. "Well, if we're officially together now," I said, settling myself across his lap with my legs on

either side of his powerful frame, "then I can do this." I leaned down and captured his mouth with mine, pouring all my feelings into a slow, deliberate kiss that made his breath hitch against my lips.

When we finally broke apart, his ice-blue eyes were practically glowing. That devastating smile of his spread across his scarred face as he pulled me closer, his tattooed arms wrapping around me possessively. "Definitely together," he murmured against my lips before claiming my mouth again.

We talked through the logistics, the concerns, the hopes. Caleb was adamant that he didn't want to hide our relationship from the family soldiers. I voiced my worries about Max, about moving too fast in this dangerous world, about the complications this could bring from rival families. He listened to every concern, addressing each one with patience and understanding that made my heart flutter despite the violence that surrounded us.

"I want to meet him properly," Caleb said, his voice soft but determined. "I want to spend time with both of you, see how we fit together as more than just the two of us."

And so we traveled to my modest safe house, my stomach doing nervous flips the entire armored drive through gang territory.

I pushed open the reinforced front door to find Max and Zoe sprawled on the living room floor, surrounded by crayons and paper. Art supplies were scattered everywhere, and both of them had colored pencil marks on their hands, looking perfectly peaceful despite the armed security stationed outside.

"Did anyone in this house even notice I was gone?" I called out playfully, setting my purse down beside the concealed weapons cabinet.

Max's head shot up, his face lighting up like Christmas morning. "Mommy!" He scrambled to his feet and ran straight into my arms. I scooped him up, covering his chubby cheeks with kisses while he giggled, my heart swelling with fierce protectiveness.

"Sweetheart, I want you to meet someone very important," I said, turning so he could see Caleb standing behind me like a dark guardian angel. "This is Caleb."

Max studied Caleb with the serious concentration only a young child could muster, completely unafraid of the imposing figure before him. Then his face broke into one of his brilliant smiles. But it was Caleb's reaction that caught me off guard. He stood frozen, staring at my son like he'd witnessed a miracle.

"Caleb?" I prompted gently, concerned by his strange expression.

"His eyes," he whispered, his voice filled with wonder and something deeper. "They're exactly like mine."

I looked between them and felt my breath catch. "I know. That same rare ice-blue shade. Beautiful, isn't it?"

Before I could process what was happening, Max was reaching his little arms toward Caleb, demanding to be held. Caleb took him carefully, as if handling precious cargo, and I watched in amazement as they seemed to connect instantly. Within minutes, they were sitting on the floor together, building block towers and chattering like old conspirators.

Zoe appeared at my elbow, her voice low and knowing. "Now I understand why that hospital security guard assumed he was Max's father. The resemblance is actually unsettling."

I glanced over at them again, really looking this time. She was right. Beyond the eyes, there was something about the shape of Max's face when he concentrated, the way he tilted his head when he was thinking. It was startling how much they looked alike, like a smaller version of the dangerous man who now held him.

But people had look-alikes all the time, right? It was just one of those strange coincidences. I pushed the odd feeling aside and joined them on the floor.

The afternoon melted into evening as we played games, built elaborate cities from blocks, and listened to Max's endless stream of stories about his toys. Caleb was wonderful with him, patient and engaged in a way that made my chest tight with unexpected emotion. During dinner, he helped Max cut his food and wiped his face without being asked, natural as breathing for a man I'd only ever seen wielding deadly authority.

When Max’s eyelids started drooping over his dinner plate, I scooped him up for bedtime. As I tucked him in behind the safe room’s reinforced door, he sleepily asked, "Is Caleb coming back tomorrow, Mommy?"

"Would you like him to?" I asked, smoothing his hair.

"Uh-huh. He’s really nice. And he builds really good towers."

When I returned to the living room, I found Zoe and Caleb deep in conversation, both of them laughing at something she’d said. The easy way they got along made something settle peacefully in my chest despite the dangerous world swirling around us.

After Zoe said her goodbyes and activated the external security system, Caleb pulled me onto his lap, his hands spanning my waist with possessive strength.

"See? Your son likes me," he said with obvious satisfaction.

"Max likes everyone," I teased. "He’s never met a stranger."

"No, he really likes me," Caleb insisted, and I had to admit he was right. The connection between them had been immediate and genuine. "I’d love to stay here with you tonight, but I think it might confuse Max. I don’t want to complicate things for him, and you’ve been away from him enough because of family business."

His consideration for my son made my heart squeeze with dangerous affection. "Thank you for understanding. We’ll have plenty of nights."

"Many nights," he agreed, pressing kisses along my neck that made me shiver. "You’re exhausted, love. We worked hard today, and you barely slept last night. You need rest. I’ll pick you up tomorrow."

"You don’t have to do that, Caleb," I sighed, melting into his dangerous embrace.

"Don’t rob me of the pleasure of spending every possible moment with you," he murmured, brushing his lips against the corner of my mouth.

"Okay then. I’ll be ready."

After a lingering goodbye kiss that left me breathless and wanting, he headed back to his fortress. I was still touching my lips when I turned around to find Zoe standing in the doorway, grinning like a cat who’d discovered cream.

"Couch. Now. I want every single detail," she commanded, pointing dramatically at the sofa.

We settled in for a long conversation in the safety of the reinforced walls. I told her everything about the past day, about how incredible Caleb was beneath his ruthless exterior, about how right everything felt despite the danger. Zoe listened with the enthusiasm of the best friend she was, hugging me tight when I finished.

"You deserve this happiness, Ivy. You deserve someone who looks at you the way he does, even in this crazy world we’re living in."

I went to bed that night feeling like I was finally living instead of just surviving.