Mafia Mask 46

Chapter 46 Seeking Forgiveness

Caleb's POV

I returned to my private office in the Thorne tower feeling like a caged predator whose prey had slipped through bloodied claws. Every muscle in my body coiled with the desperate urge to hunt down Ivy and throw myself at her feet, begging for absolution. But I couldn't simply storm into neutral territory like some unhinged animal. She was working under Dominic Frost's protection now, and barging into his establishment would only deepen her hatred for me.

Yet waiting until the sun set over the city felt like torture designed in hell's deepest circles. The mahogany-paneled walls of my domain seemed to compress around me, suffocating me with each tick of the antique clock. I made my choice and grabbed my suit jacket, informing my underboss that I was done conducting family business for the day. Every nerve in my body screamed as I looked at the spot where that serpent Monica once sat, wanting nothing more than to drag her corpse from the morgue and destroy it again for what she'd done to my woman.

The drive through the city's neutral district was a haze of racing thoughts and pounding blood. My knuckles turned bone-white as I gripped the leather steering wheel of my armored sedan. I would approach Dominic diplomatically, find a way to speak with Ivy without humiliating her in front of civilians who knew nothing of our world's brutal realities.

Frost's receptionist glanced up with practiced professionalism, though I caught the flicker of recognition in her eyes when I appeared unannounced in the middle of the afternoon. Even in the neutral zone, my reputation preceded me like the shadow of death itself.

"Good afternoon, Don Thorne. How may I assist you today?"

Before I could respond, a voice sharp enough to slice through steel made my blood freeze in my veins.

"I'll handle this, Mia. Don Thorne is here to see me." Zoe's tone carried the weight of a loaded gun, and I could feel her emerald eyes boring holes through my skull.

I turned to face the lioness guarding her cub, forcing my voice to remain steady despite the rage I knew she harbored for me. "Good afternoon, Miss Miller. I trust you're well today?"

She offered no courtesy in return. Instead, she gestured toward her temporary office with the cold efficiency of an executioner leading a condemned man to the scaffold.

"Follow me. I'll see if Mr. Frost has time for scum like you."

The moment we crossed beyond Mia's line of sight, Zoe spun around and thrust her finger toward my face like a blade, her voice dropping to a whisper that promised violence.

"Listen very carefully, Thorne. Don't you dare think about destroying my friend again. My boss won't fire her, and if you continue this pathetic crusade to ruin Ivy's livelihood, my father's legal team will bury your syndicate in federal investigations. And trust me, they've brought down bigger fish than you."

This was precisely what I didn't need. Ivy's fierce guardian standing between us like a protective wolf, ready to tear out my throat at the first sign of aggression. I forced myself to breathe deeply, keeping my voice level and controlled despite the beast clawing at my chest.

"Zoe, I'm not here to harm Ivy. I need to speak with her, but I thought it appropriate to go through Dominic first out of respect for neutral territory."

Her eyes blazed with pure loathing, and I realized that in her mind, I was already the villain who couldn't be redeemed.

"Caleb, stay the hell away from Ivy. You've already destroyed her spirit. What more could you possibly want from her? I won't stand by and watch you break her again."

"Zoe, I was a complete bastard, and I need her forgiveness. We discovered the truth about what really happened. I was wrong about Ivy, and I want to bring her back to where she belongs."

"Well, this should be fascinating." Dominic's voice cut through our confrontation, and I knew my day was about to become infinitely worse. "I'd love to hear about whatever stupidity you inflicted on Ivy,

Caleb. Let me tell you, I barely know the woman, but her credentials are impeccable. I assume you did the same thorough background investigation when you brought her into your organization, so I'm confused about what could have gone so catastrophically wrong."

Dominic stood with his hands casually pocketed, studying me like I was a specimen under laboratory glass. "Let's discuss this in my office. Zoe, you're joining us."

We filed into Dominic's sanctuary, and I felt like I was facing a tribunal of judgment. Zoe's gaze could have melted titanium, and Dominic, who had known me since we were young soldiers in our respective families, looked at me with disappointment that cut deeper than any knife.

"So, Caleb, I've known you for most of our lives, and you've never been unjust to anyone under your protection. What the hell happened?" Dominic asked, settling behind his mahogany desk.

"You don't know the specifics?" I asked, glancing at Zoe.

"No, I don't. Ivy maintains strict professionalism regarding personal matters. She only mentioned that you accused her of embezzling syndicate funds, which she didn't do, and I believe her completely. As for Zoe, the only information she's provided is that you're a soulless monster, an idiot, and a fool. Which I'm also inclined to believe." Dominic's mouth curved in a humorless smile.

I knew Zoe's opinion of me had plummeted to subterranean depths, but I couldn't fault her for that protective instinct. I also knew she would fight with lethal force to keep me away from her friend because I had already caused irreparable damage.

I pressed my palms against my face and forced myself to explain the entire nightmare, including our recent discovery about who had actually planted those incriminating digital trails on Ivy's computer systems.

"That's the complete truth. When we found those financial transfers, all evidence pointed directly to Ivy's guilt. It seemed like the only logical conclusion given the circumstances. The setup was masterfully orchestrated, and only today did I receive confirmation that it wasn't Ivy but Monica who sold out my family."

Zoe’s bitter laughter filled the room as she spoke with cutting mockery.

"Oh, so the almighty Don was absolutely certain there was no other explanation and that Ivy was the only person capable of betraying his precious syndicate. He needed concrete proof of her innocence instead of simply trusting the woman he claimed to love. You’re such a monster, Caleb! You have no comprehension of how much damage you’ve inflicted on my friend. You need to disappear from her life permanently."

"Easy, Zoe. Men are naturally idiots." Dominic attempted to mediate. "But you really did behave like a savage toward Ivy. Look, Caleb, this woman arrived here completely shattered, like a porcelain doll that had been thrown against concrete. Those bright, vibrant eyes I remembered from our first meeting are completely extinguished now. She’s wounded and suffering profoundly. You had barely begun your relationship, from what I understand, and you didn’t even grant her the opportunity to defend herself."

"It’s much worse than that, boss. He threatened Ivy, told her she’d only find work in the gutter, that he’d ensure she never worked in this city again, and countless other vicious things."

Dominic stared at me in shock as Zoe recounted every brutal detail of my confrontation with Ivy. She spoke as if she had witnessed every cruel word I had hurled at the woman I loved more than my own life.

"Caleb, the only reason I’m not putting a bullet in your skull right now is because you’re my oldest friend and I know you’re not usually such a heartless savage. But what you did was incredibly cruel and unforgivable." Dominic’s voice carried the weight of profound disappointment. "Honestly, I think you should forget about Ivy. She’ll never forgive you for this."

"But I have to try, Dominic!" The words emerged broken, and I felt tears burning behind my eyes. "Please help me. I can’t lose her."

Dominic studied me for a long moment, as if he could see the desperation devouring me from within. He shook his head and looked at Zoe.

"You’re protecting your friend, and I respect that loyalty. But he’s also my friend, and he’s being genuine right now, believe me." Dominic said to Zoe. "I think we should allow them to speak here in my office because he won’t stop until he talks to her. This way, if he behaves like a savage again, I’ll put a bullet in

him myself, and you can comfort Ivy immediately. Let her decide if she wants to hear what he has to say, Zoe."

"Fine, better here than at her apartment where Max might witness this disaster." Zoe huffed and rolled her eyes in resignation. "But if you hurt her again, I'll castrate you with my bare hands and feed your remains to the sharks!"

"I'll summon Ivy up here now." Dominic said, clearly amused by Zoe's threat.