Mafia Mask 47

Chapter 47 Too Late for Sorry

Ivy’s POV

"Miss Ivy, Mr. Frost needs you in his private office immediately," Jenkins announced, appearing beside my dealer station like a nervous shadow. "Leave your chips and head upstairs now. Did you finish processing those high-roller credit transfers I assigned this morning?"

I glanced up at my floor supervisor, taking in his compact frame and wire-rimmed glasses that made his eyes appear owlish behind the lenses. Despite his anxious demeanor, Jenkins had proven surprisingly kindhearted since my arrival at The Darkstone, constantly humming jazz standards that drifted across our dimly lit casino floor.

The underground establishment buzzed with constant energy around me. Dozens of gaming tables formed strategic clusters throughout the expansive basement space, while Jenkins’s glass-walled surveillance office overlooked everything like a watchtower. Slot machines chimed incessantly while patrons placed bets and shared whispered conversations. The controlled chaos felt invigorating after extended uncertainty in neutral territory, and I had already begun forming cautious alliances with my fellow dealers. But Jenkins’s urgent summons sent ice through my veins.

"Everything’s documented and verified," I confirmed, sliding the completed transaction logs across my station. "The offshore accounts are balanced by family codes. Do you need me to explain any specific wire transfers?"

"Not now, kid. The big boss upstairs is waiting, and he sounded pretty insistent about seeing you right away," Jenkins replied, practically shooing me toward the hidden elevator behind the bar. "If I have questions about your work, we’ll handle them later. But seriously, don’t keep Mr. Frost waiting."

My legs felt leaden as I made my way to the concealed lift. The polished bronze doors reflected my anxious expression while soft piano music drifted from hidden speakers. I forced myself to breathe deeply, counting each inhalation as floors ticked by. Whatever Mr. Frost wanted to discuss, I would handle it professionally.

The executive secretary offered a reassuring smile when I approached her mahogany desk outside the penthouse office. "Go right in, dear. Mr. Frost is expecting you."

I knocked twice before entering, my voice steady despite the butterflies attacking my stomach. "You wanted to see me, sir? How can I assist you today?"

The sight that greeted me nearly knocked me backward. Mr. Frost sat behind his imposing desk, but he wasn't alone. Zoe occupied one of the leather chairs facing him, her expression unreadable. And there, looking haggard and desperate, sat Caleb Thorne.

My blood turned to ice water. This had to be about my banishment from Thorne territory. Caleb had probably convinced Mr. Frost that harboring me was a mistake, that I was some kind of family spy who couldn't be trusted. My vision blurred as tears threatened to spill.

"Ivy, please come sit down," Mr. Frost said gently. "Thorne requested this meeting to speak with you. I wanted to make sure you were comfortable with that arrangement."

I stared at Caleb, confusion replacing my initial panic. What could he possibly want now? Hadn't the public humiliation and exile been sufficient revenge?

"Mr. Frost, if this conversation doesn't relate to my position here, I have nothing to discuss with Don Thorne," I stated firmly, fighting to keep my voice from cracking.

"Your performance has been exemplary, Ivy. Jenkins speaks very highly of your money handling skills, and I'm confident I made the right decision offering you sanctuary," Mr. Frost assured me. "This meeting concerns what transpired in Thorne territory."

I glanced at Zoe, who watched me with obvious concern. When I turned back to Caleb, his appearance shocked me. Deep shadows ringed his eyes, and his usually impeccable appearance seemed disheveled. His shoulders slumped as if carrying an invisible weight. Despite everything, my heart clenched seeing him like this.

"Unless Don Thorne brought enforcers to drag me back for execution, we have nothing to discuss. May I please return to my tables?" I asked, hearing Caleb release a shaky breath.

"I came to apologize, Ivy. Please, just hear me out. I made a terrible mistake," Caleb said, his voice rough with exhaustion as he scrubbed his hands over his face.

Zoe approached me, speaking in low tones. "Listen, if it were my choice, this bastard wouldn't get within a mile of you. But he's been persistent, and it's better to handle this here than have him showing up at your apartment with Max around."

She was absolutely right. I couldn't risk this mafia drama affecting my son.

"Fine, Don Thorne. I'll listen to what you have to say, but only after my shift ends," I conceded.

"Ivy, as both your employer and your protector, let me suggest you handle this now," Mr. Frost interjected kindly. "Use my office for privacy. Zoe and I will be in the conference room if you need backup. I've already made it clear to Thorne that you're not facing this alone."

I exhaled slowly and nodded. Better to endure this conversation now than dread it all evening. After Mr. Frost and Zoe left, the office felt suffocatingly quiet. My pulse hammered as Caleb and I faced each other across the vast space. Despite the pain he'd caused, my traitorous heart still responded to his presence.

He moved toward me, and I immediately stepped backward. I couldn't allow him to touch me, knowing my resolve would crumble instantly.

"Ivy, please don't retreat from me. Let me come closer," Caleb pleaded, genuine anguish in his voice.

"Sit down, Don Thorne. You wanted to talk, so talk. But keep your distance," I replied coldly.

We settled into chairs on opposite sides of Mr. Frost's coffee table. Caleb's face showed clear signs of suffering, but I couldn't let that affect me. He probably missed having a convenient scapegoat more than he missed me.

Caleb began explaining everything they had uncovered about the family betrayal. He revealed that Monica had orchestrated the entire setup, that she was the actual mole feeding information to rival families. The security team had to maintain the charade of suspecting me while they traced her contacts and gathered evidence.

I wasn't particularly surprised by Monica's treachery. She had always been opportunistic, inserting herself into family business and conversations where she didn't belong.

"Ivy, I'm begging for your forgiveness. I was an idiot who acted on pure emotion instead of logic. I was cruel and unfair to you. I'm so sorry, Ivy. When I saw those fabricated money transfer records, I felt betrayed and refused to listen to reason. I didn't give you any chance to defend yourself. Please forgive me," Caleb said, his voice breaking.

But forgiveness wasn't something I could simply grant on demand. The wounds were too deep, too fresh.

"Don Thorne, you had me dragged from your territory like a common traitor. You screamed accusations at me, called me names I won't repeat. You refused to hear my side of the story, wouldn't even let me speak in my own defense. You told me I belonged in the gutter with the other rats," I said, tears streaming down my cheeks despite my efforts to stay strong. "Do you honestly believe a simple apology erases all of that? That asking for forgiveness makes everything disappear? It doesn't work that way. You shattered my heart in ways I never thought possible."

He reached toward me, and I flinched away from his touch.

"Please don't touch me," I whispered, squeezing my eyes shut.

"Ivy, please give me one chance to make this right. We can rebuild what we had," he begged.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that, Don Thorne. I was publicly humiliated, degraded, and cast out. I can't simply forget that happened. I appreciate you coming here to clear my name, and I'm genuinely glad you're making progress in your internal investigation. But that's all I can offer you."

I stood abruptly and walked out, heading straight for the conference room. The moment I entered, sobs wracked my body as prolonged suppressed pain finally erupted. Zoe immediately wrapped me in her arms while Mr. Frost placed a comforting hand on my shoulder.

"Take the rest of the night off, both of you. I'll explain everything to Jenkins. You have my full protection, Ivy," he said before quietly leaving us alone.

I clung to my friend as the tears continued falling, washing away the last remnants of hope I'd been secretly harboring.