Mafia Mask 48

Chapter 48 War Council

Caleb’s POV

My hands trembled as Dominic pressed a crystal tumbler filled with amber whiskey into my palm. The Don of the Thorne Syndicate reduced to a shaking mess - if my enemies could see me now, they’d think twice about their respect for my reputation.

"Drink this. It will steady your nerves." Dominic’s voice carried the weight of years of brotherhood as he reached for his encrypted phone. "Jenkins, cancel all of Caleb’s meetings for today. Family business takes priority. Thank you."

The line went dead with a sharp click. Dominic settled into the leather chair across from me in his private office, his own glass catching the afternoon light streaming through bulletproof windows. We drank in silence until the alcohol burned away enough of my shock to find my voice.

"I destroyed everything, Dominic." The words felt like broken glass in my throat. "The one woman who could have been my salvation, and I drove her straight into enemy territory. She looks at me now like I’m the monster everyone says I am."

Dominic’s calculating eyes never left mine as he took another measured sip. "Since when does Caleb Thorne surrender after one setback? That’s not the Don I’ve served alongside for many years."

I stared at him like he had lost his mind. He clearly didn’t understand the depth of Ivy’s disgust with me, the way her green eyes had turned to ice when she walked away.

"Xavier and I are getting you properly drunk tonight at my safe house," Dominic announced, standing with the fluid grace of a predator. "Hand over your keys. You’re in no condition to drive."

Before I could protest, he was already speed-dialing Xavier’s secure line. Within minutes, we were in my armored SUV with Dominic behind the wheel, heading toward his fortified brownstone in the financial district. Xavier’s black motorcycle was already parked outside when we arrived, flanked by two of his security detail.

"Cristo, Caleb, you look like death warmed over," Xavier said, his usual easy smile replaced by the sharp concern of a battle-tested consigliere.

"Ivy apparently tore him apart," Dominic replied with dark amusement. I shot them both a withering look that would have sent lesser men scrambling for cover. "Let's get inside. I need the full story."

Dominic's soundproof war room became our council chamber. Top-shelf whiskey, imported beer, and Cuban cigars spread across the mahogany table as my two most trusted lieutenants cornered me for details. The room where we'd planned countless territorial expansions and elimination orders now witnessed my complete emotional breakdown.

I laid it all bare. Every harsh word I had spoken to Ivy, every moment of her mounting fury, the way she had looked at me with such complete disappointment before walking away. The guilt was eating me alive from the inside out, leaving me hollow and desperate in ways that years of mafia warfare never could.

"What exactly do you want from Ivy?" Dominic asked, his lawyer's instincts cutting straight through my defenses like a blade.

"She's everything to me, Dominic." The confession poured out of me like blood from a wound. "After Penelope vanished, I thought the part of me capable of love had died. No woman could even make me feel human again. Then Ivy walked into my territory with her sharp tongue and those curves that should be illegal, carrying herself like a queen despite having nothing. Suddenly I remembered what it felt like to be alive instead of just surviving. Without her, I'm just another monster running on violence and vengeance."

Xavier leaned forward, his expression grave. "You're in deep trouble, my friend. The worst part is, I should have stopped you from going nuclear on her, but I got caught up watching you chase her like a man possessed. Ivy isn't some mafia princess who will forgive and forget because you buy her diamonds. She survived years in the worst neighborhoods, refused protection from everyone including her child's father. She might be hurting, but she won't let you destroy her again."

"You think I don't know that?" The words came out harsher than I intended, carrying the edge that made grown men flinch. "I was a complete bastard to her, accused her of betraying everything I've built. Now I'm paying the price. She'll never forgive me, and I'll spend the rest of my life empty without her."

Dominic's laughter was sharp and unexpected. "Madonna mia, Caleb, when did you become such a pathetic defeatist? We've been soldiers together since we were teenagers running numbers in Little Italy. You've always been ruthless, always passionate, but you've never been a coward who gives up after the first failure."

"Dominic's absolutely right," Xavier added, pointing his beer bottle at me for emphasis. "Even when Penelope disappeared without a trace, you didn't surrender. You made all of us crazy with your obsession to find her. You hired multiple private investigators and only stopped last year when the final one told you she was probably dead."

"I was barely surviving then, just going through the motions of being Don. Then Ivy brought me back to life with her fire and her refusal to bow down to my authority. And I had to ruin it all, didn't I?" The bitterness in my voice surprised even me.

"You screwed up spectacularly, and Zoe wants to put a bullet in your skull for it," Dominic said with genuine amusement. "That little spitfire has quite the protective streak when it comes to her best friend. But here's the thing - Ivy is in pain, and if she's in pain, it means she has feelings for you. Are you really going to give up without fighting for her like the soldier I know you to be?"

The truth hit me like a physical blow. I had been wallowing in self-pity instead of fighting for the woman I loved with the same ruthlessness I brought to territorial wars. That was about to change immediately.

"You're absolutely right, I'm being a pathetic excuse for a Don." Energy began flowing back into my veins as a plan started forming, the strategic mind that had expanded our territory by forty percent clicking into gear. "I'll do whatever it takes to earn her forgiveness, even if it takes years and costs me everything I've built. But she won't even look at me right now. I need a battle plan, and you two are going to help me wage this war."

"Now that's the Caleb Thorne we follow into hell," Dominic raised his bottle in salute.

We spent the rest of the evening plotting the campaign to reclaim my queen.