Mafia Mask 52

Chapter 52 On Bended Knee

Caleb's POV

I remained frozen in the sterile conference room of Thorne Syndicate headquarters, staring at the reinforced steel door Ivy had just fled through after our explosive kiss. My lips still burned from the contact, and I could taste the sweetness she had left behind. The confusion in my mind slowly cleared as Xavier and Dominic entered, their heavy boots echoing against the marble floors.

That kiss had changed everything. The way she had melted against me, the soft gasp that escaped her lips, the trembling in her body when I pulled her close. Her walls had crumbled for those precious seconds, revealing the truth she desperately tried to hide from the most dangerous man in the city.

"Ivy ran out of here like the warehouse was about to explode, Caleb," Dominic observed, settling into the leather chair across from my mahogany desk.

"She loves me," I said, unable to suppress the predatory smile spreading across my scarred face. "She's furious and wounded, but she loves me."

"Okay, Romeo, but what exactly happened in here?" Xavier's curiosity was written all over his battle-hardened features.

"We kissed. Christ, what a kiss it was. She can deny it all she wants, but I felt her surrender. I'm never giving up on her," I declared to my lieutenants with newfound determination.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent calling Ivy repeatedly from my encrypted phone. Each call was rejected with increasing speed until finally, her phone went straight to voicemail. But if she thought she could escape the most powerful don in North America that easily, she was mistaken.

I left the fortress-like headquarters with one destination in mind - her apartment in the neutral zone. We were going to have this conversation whether she wanted to or not. I would station armed guards outside her building if necessary, shouting her name until she agreed to listen. She needed to release all that anger and pain so we could move forward in this blood-soaked world we inhabited.

Remembering Max’s fascination with construction projects during our previous encounters, I made a detour to the upscale district and purchased an enormous architectural building set from the finest toy boutique in the city. That incredible kid had captured my heart from our first meeting. His intelligence and infectious energy had made our time together unforgettable. I had promised to return and play with him again, and I intended to keep that promise.

Walking past an exclusive European chocolate shop, inspiration struck. I went inside and selected their most expensive gift collection, hoping the sweet gesture might soften Ivy’s resolve against the monster she thought I was.

At her building, I approached the front security desk with my packages and explained my situation to the guard. I told him plainly that if Ivy refused to see me, I would spend the night in the street calling her name until she relented, and he knew better than to test a Thorne’s patience.

The elderly security officer studied me with amused eyes and chuckled. "You really stepped in it this time, didn’t you, Don Thorne?"

"You have absolutely no idea."

"Mind if this old timer gives you some advice?"

"Please do."

"Apologize with the same intensity you messed up with. Don’t give up easily. Ivy is special, worth every effort you can make." He squeezed my shoulder before calling up to her apartment, delivering my message with barely contained laughter. "You can go up now. Fair warning though, she’s spitting mad."

"I’ll take your advice to heart. Maybe these chocolates will help tame the beast."

His laughter followed me to the elevators. Standing outside her door, a ridiculous but perfect idea formed in my mind. The guard was right - I needed to match my apology to my stupidity. I had been a complete fool, so I would be a complete fool begging for her forgiveness.

I pressed the doorbell and immediately dropped to my knees, arranging my face into the most pathetic expression I could manage while holding the chocolate bag in front of me like a shield.

When the door swung open, Zoe's delighted laughter rang out from inside the apartment, followed by Ivy's exasperated voice.

"Oh my God, Caleb! Stop being ridiculous!" She snatched the chocolate bag from my hands, examined my pitiful expression, and rolled her eyes dramatically. "I'm keeping the chocolates, but don't think this changes anything."

She spun around and walked back into the apartment, leaving the door open behind her. Before I could rise from my knees, Max's excited shout reached my ears as he launched himself into my arms. The impact of his small body nearly knocked me over, but I caught him, my heart swelling with an overwhelming rush of protective affection.

How was it possible to love a child this much after only meeting him twice? But of course it made perfect sense - he was Ivy's son, part of the woman I loved more than the empire I'd built with blood and fear.

"Max, my little soldier, I missed you so much! How have you been?" I asked, completely absorbed in this beautiful boy.

"I'm great, Caleb! What about you?" He gazed up at me with those enormous eyes that mirrored my own ice-blue color, his angelic face beaming with pure joy. "Did you come to play with me?"

"Absolutely I did. I promised you I would, remember? And look what I brought you." I handed him the wrapped gift, watching his face light up.

"Is this really for me?" he asked, his eyes sparkling with excitement that made my chest tight with emotion.

"Of course it's for you. Should we open it together?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" he shouted, bouncing with anticipation. "Come on, Caleb, come inside!"

I stood up and entered the apartment, closing the door behind me as Max dragged me forward.

"That's playing dirty, Caleb!" Zoe called out, laughing so hard she could barely speak.

Max was already on the floor tearing at the wrapping paper, and I joined him there, sitting cross-legged near Ivy's legs as she settled onto the couch with her chocolates. I glanced up at her sideways and noticed the soft expression on her face as she watched her son's happiness unfold.

"Look, Aunt Zoe, it's a huge architectural set!" Max exclaimed, holding up pieces of his new construction toy for her to see.

"Sweetie, what do we say when someone gives us a present?" Ivy gently reminded him.

He abandoned the box with Zoe and ran straight to me with his arms wide open, throwing himself into my lap and wrapping his little arms around my neck.

"Thank you so much, Caleb! I love it! But I love that you're here even more!" Max whispered against my shoulder.

Holding this precious child, feeling his unconditional affection wash over me, I found myself completely overwhelmed. Tears spilled down my cheeks before I could stop them. This kid had inherited his mother's devastating ability to shatter my emotional walls with a single gesture. Zoe watched me with a knowing smile.

"Can we build something now, Caleb?" Max asked when he finally pulled back from our embrace.

"If your mommy says it's okay," I replied, wiping my face quickly.

"You can play after we eat dinner. I'll set an extra place at the table," Ivy announced, rising from the couch. I caught her hand before she could walk away.

"Are you inviting me to stay for dinner?" I asked, hope creeping into my voice.

"Looks like my son already did," she replied, meeting my eyes briefly before heading toward the kitchen.

Once she left the room, Zoe leaned forward and studied my face intently, as if searching for something specific.

"You genuinely care about Max," she said finally.

"More than I could ever put into words," I answered with complete honesty.

Dinner was magical. Max entertained us with endless stories and observations that had us all laughing until our sides hurt. He was truly an extraordinary child. Afterward, we sprawled on the living room carpet building elaborate structures with his new set. Those hours with him washed away all the stress and tension from running the most feared criminal organization on the East Coast, filling me with renewed energy and purpose.

When bedtime arrived, Max hugged me tightly before Zoe took him to brush his teeth. Ivy sat down across from me and spoke for the first time all evening.

"Thank you for what you did for my son today. He was genuinely happy."

"I could do this every single day," I said, making sure she understood exactly what I was offering.

"Don't use my son as a weapon, Caleb," she warned, her voice sharp.

"I would never do that. Max is incredible, Ivy. He's completely captivated me. I didn't bring him presents or play with him to manipulate you into forgiving me. I'll earn your forgiveness a different way," I said with absolute conviction.

"You’re so confident that I’ll forgive you. Actually, you’re always confident about everything," she said, sadness creeping into her voice.

I moved from the carpet to kneel directly in front of her, taking her clasped hands in mine and pressing gentle kisses to her knuckles before speaking.

"I’ll spend the rest of my life earning your forgiveness if that’s what it takes. But I know what you feel when you’re in my arms. I felt it today when we kissed. Your heart beats in rhythm with mine, Ivy."

I traced the curve of her cheek with my fingertips and watched her eyes flutter closed as she sighed. Moving closer, I kept my gaze locked on hers.

"I love you, Ivy, and I refuse to give up. I’ll crawl on my hands and knees, I’ll beg until my voice gives out, but I won’t walk away from us."

I pressed a tender kiss to her lips, kissed her hands once more, and whispered against her ear.

"Please come to the family gathering tomorrow. Forgive me, I’m begging you to forgive me."

"You didn’t trust me, Caleb. You wouldn’t even listen to my explanation. You didn’t give me the benefit of the doubt. You attacked me viciously, humiliated me, and threw me out of your territory. So you should move on with your life and leave me alone. I won’t come back to you."

Her words hit me like physical blows, shattering my heart into countless fragments. I stood up and left without another word, the pain so intense I could barely breathe. Outside her building, I pulled out my encrypted phone and called Xavier.

When I arrived at his safehouse, Dominic was already waiting. My lieutenants listened as I poured out my heart, then drank with me long into the night.