Mafia Mask 53

Chapter 53 Something in the Glass

Caleb's POV

My skull felt like someone had taken a sledgehammer to it. The throbbing in my head made me want to disappear into the darkness of my private office and never emerge. This was exactly why I avoided drowning my sorrows in whiskey, especially not the way our crew had done last night. We'd acted like a bunch of street soldiers trying to forget their first kill.

Each of us had our demons to chase away with alcohol. So we'd gathered in the family's private club like wounded men from a botched hit and gotten completely wasted. Now I was paying the price for my weakness, feeling like a bullet to the brain would be merciful compared to this agony.

Xavier stumbled through my office door, leaning heavily on Heidi for support. She guided him to the leather couch beside me, and our family's trusted housekeeper Katelyn followed behind carrying a silver tray. She took one look at us and couldn't suppress her amusement at seeing two of the most feared men in the city reduced to this pathetic state.

"Look at you two! What a sight you are, bosses. You're grown men who run half this city, not college boys at their first taste of bootleg whiskey." Her laughter echoed through the bulletproof office as she shook her head at our miserable condition. "Miss Heidi, I better fetch some buckets in case these tough guys need to lose what's left in their stomachs."

Heidi couldn't contain her giggles at seeing two dangerous mafia soldiers brought low by their own excess. Xavier and I exchanged glances, both of us defeated by our own stupidity and the women who saw right through our fearsome reputations.

"The only reason you still work for this family, Katelyn, is because you take care of us better than our own mothers did, and Heidi's already threatening to abandon us to our misery." I managed to say, watching Katelyn grin at me from the reinforced doorway.

"Now open your hands like good little crime bosses. Time to cure this hangover with something stronger than regret. You're supposed to be running the most powerful syndicate on the East Coast. What kind of

example are you setting for the soldiers?" Heidi scolded us like we were misbehaving children instead of men who could order executions with a snap of our fingers.

"She'll never forgive me for what happened, Heidi." I groaned, accepting the bitter medicine she pressed into my palm.

"She won't forgive me either, and that gorgeous woman I've been courting for weeks completely shut down every advance I made." Xavier whimpered from his corner of the couch like a kicked dog rather than a feared enforcer.

Heidi pressed glasses of orange juice mixed with her hangover remedy into our trembling hands and raised an eyebrow with the authority of someone who'd been managing mafia households for decades.

"And you honestly believed getting completely drunk on expensive whiskey would win Ivy's forgiveness or help you charm anyone with half a brain?"

"Maybe they'll take pity on two pathetic crime lords." Xavier said with the kind of hope that would get him laughed out of any respectable family meeting.

"Only if they've completely lost their minds!" Heidi declared, clearly enjoying our suffering more than she should. "I heard Dominic's in the same condition as you two idiots. Did he have his own reasons to drink away his troubles, or was he just following his bosses' lead into stupidity?"

"How did you find out about our disgraceful evening?" Xavier asked, squinting at her through bloodshot eyes that had stared down rival family members without flinching.

"Zoe called me with all the details," Heidi replied with the satisfaction of someone who had sources throughout the organization. "And she shared some other interesting information too, Caleb."

"I'm living in my own personal hell right now, Heidi." I said, putting on the most pitiful expression a don could manage without losing all respect.

"Here we go, gentlemen, one bucket each for our esteemed leaders. If you make a mess on the floors I just had cleaned, you'll be scrubbing them yourselves, family hierarchy be damned." Katelyn placed two waste baskets beside us, each lined with fresh garbage bags. Despite my suffering, I felt grateful for these two women who dared to treat us like human beings instead of the monsters the city feared.

By the time Xavier and I recovered enough to function like proper mafia executives, the entire day had slipped away like smoke from a rival's burning warehouse. We decided to head back to the compound since Heidi's celebration was scheduled for after our legitimate business hours. Xavier and I had promised to take her to dinner at the family's private restaurant, keeping the real party a complete surprise from our most trusted advisor.

I tried calling Ivy repeatedly throughout the day, but every call went straight to voicemail until her inbox was completely full of my increasingly desperate messages.

That evening, we collected Heidi from her apartment in the family compound and brought her to our headquarters under the pretense of retrieving some forgotten documents. We had a private ballroom on the sixth floor, my mother's brilliant idea for hosting events with allied families and business associates. When we entered, Heidi's face lit up with genuine shock. She truly hadn't suspected anything despite her usual sharp instincts.

The room was filled with soldiers, associates, allied family members, and trusted friends. Everyone had gathered to celebrate and honor Heidi Quinn for being such an exceptional member of our organization and surrogate mother to our crew.

Xavier and I were engaged in conversation with Jude and his wife, a couple whose love and humor always entertained us during these rare peaceful moments, when I glanced over Jude's shoulder and my mood immediately turned murderous.

"Jude, how many guests was Rossi allowed to bring to this family gathering?" I asked, my jaw clenching with the kind of tension that preceded violence.

"Same as everyone else, Caleb. Each person could bring one guest. Why do you ask?" Jude looked confused by the sudden shift in my demeanor.

"Because that insufferable daughter of his is here with him," Xavier replied, his irritation matching mine as his hand instinctively moved toward his concealed weapon. "We'll have to endure her presence tonight without spilling blood on Heidi's celebration."

"I cannot stand that spoiled princess," Nora said, her face twisting with the kind of disgust reserved for traitors and informants.

Rossi approached our group with his insufferable daughter trailing behind him like a shadow. Her presence immediately poisoned the atmosphere of what should have been a joyful family celebration.

"Caleb, with so many important family allies here tonight, why are you wasting time with a couple of low-ranking soldiers and some random woman?" Yara said, her gaze sweeping dismissively over Xavier, Jude, and Nora as if they weren't respected members of our organization.

"The only insignificant and random person here is you, Yara Rossi!" I shot back, having zero patience for her arrogance toward my family.

"Show some respect to my daughter, Caleb. She's simply stating the obvious hierarchy," Rossi quickly defended his precious princess, clearly forgetting his place in our organization.

"Show respect to my crew, Rossi!" I warned, my anger rising to dangerous levels that had ended conversations permanently in the past. "And where's your wife? This isn't some debutante cotillion," I said with biting sarcasm that could cut glass.

"Patricia wasn't feeling well tonight, and Yara graciously agreed to accompany me. She also wanted to bid farewell to Heidi before her retirement," Rossi replied as if his daughter was beloved by everyone in the organization. The truth was that Heidi despised her and always had, even when Yara was just a child. Each day, I found myself tolerating Rossi less and questioning his loyalty more.

"How convenient for all of us!" Xavier couldn't restrain himself any longer. His tolerance for those two had reached its limit months ago. We were already considering removing Rossi from his position, but the ongoing financial audit forced us to wait. "If you'll excuse me, I have actual family business to attend to."

Xavier, Jude, and Nora walked away together toward more pleasant company. I had no intention of remaining with these parasites either. I simply turned my back and moved through the crowd, greeting loyal family members and stopping for brief conversations with several trusted allies and business partners.

Eventually, I stepped out onto the private balcony, which was mercifully empty and cooled by a gentle breeze that helped clear my still-aching head. A server approached offering whiskey from his tray, our finest imported stock. I accepted the glass and drank while gazing out at the city lights that represented our territory and influence. When I returned to the ballroom, nausea hit me suddenly and everything began spinning violently, as if someone had slipped something stronger than alcohol into my system. But I hadn't consumed that much tonight, though perhaps my body hadn't fully recovered from last night's excess. The room spun around me dangerously, like the world was tilting off its axis. I needed to find Xavier immediately and get back to the compound before this got worse.