Mafia Mask 60

Chapter 60 Unlikely Alliance Formed

Caleb's POV

After my confrontation with Dominic in the back room of our legitimate front business, I knew the only path to Ivy's forgiveness ran through her closest ally. Zoe Miller had proven herself a formidable guardian of my woman, and if I wanted any chance of redemption, I needed her blessing. More importantly, I needed her boyfriend's support - Finn had influence over her that even blood ties couldn't match.

I pulled out my encrypted phone and dialed the number Dominic had provided through our network contacts. She answered after a few rings, her voice sharp with suspicion.

"What do you want?"

"Good evening, Zoe. This is Caleb Thorne. I believe we need to discuss our mutual friend."

The silence that followed spoke volumes about her opinion of me. When she finally responded, her voice carried the cold precision of someone who understood the violence of our world.

"Don Thorne. How did you acquire my private number?"

"Information flows freely when you control the right channels, Zoe. It's part of running this organization."

"Pity you couldn't gather intel on Ivy's innocence before you banished her from your territory like some common street rat."

This woman possessed claws sharper than the stilettos worn by our enemies' wives. Dominic had warned me about her protective instincts, but experiencing them firsthand was entirely different.

"My actions were unforgivable, Zoe. That mistake haunts me more than any blood I've spilled."

"Spare me the remorse, Don. I know exactly why you're calling, and my answer remains unchanged. I won't betray my friend by helping you drag her back into your twisted world."

"I understand your position," I said, keeping my voice steady despite the rage building in my chest. "But I'd like to meet face to face, Zoe. My treatment of your friend reflects poorly on my judgment, and I owe you a personal apology. Would you and Finn join me for dinner tonight?"

Her pause suggested I had caught her off guard with the formal approach. In our world, such invitations carried weight - refusing a Don's personal request for reconciliation would be seen as disrespectful.

"Fine, Thorne. You select the venue and cover all expenses. Send me the location and Finn and I will appear."

The line went dead before I could respond, but I smiled grimly at the small victory. She had agreed to negotiate. I immediately contacted Xavier - since Ivy maintained equal fury toward my Consigliere, he needed to participate in whatever penance Zoe deemed appropriate. After securing our usual private dining room at the upscale Italian restaurant, I transmitted the details to Zoe.

Xavier and I arrived at the upscale Italian restaurant early, ordering aged whiskey while we strategized our approach. Precisely on schedule, we observed Zoe and Finn enter through the main entrance.

"Good evening, you morons," Zoe announced pleasantly as they approached our corner booth, while Finn fought back obvious amusement.

"An accurate assessment of our recent behavior," I replied, standing to assist with her chair like the gentleman my mother had raised me to be.

"Are we truly beyond redemption?" Xavier asked Finn with genuine concern etched across his scarred features.

"Listen carefully - I know both women intimately. Ivy possesses fierce pride, which works in your favor. She might eventually grant forgiveness, but the process won't be swift or painless. And if Zoe influences the outcome, you'll endure considerable suffering first," Finn explained, running fingers through his hair in a gesture I recognized from my own moments of frustration.

"Then we'll submit to whatever punishment they consider appropriate," I declared, meeting Zoe's challenging stare without flinching.

"We'll see how long that bravado lasts," she replied with dark satisfaction.

The dinner conversation flowed surprisingly smoothly as we discussed neutral topics - legitimate business ventures, city politics, even Finn's background in financial consulting. He proved himself intelligent, articulate, and completely devoted to his woman. The way he anticipated her needs without being asked reminded me painfully of what I had lost with Ivy.

I began understanding why Zoe and Ivy maintained such fierce loyalty to each other. Despite her wealthy background, Zoe displayed no entitled behavior. She possessed sharp wit, genuine compassion for those beneath her social station, and treated our server with the same respect she showed us.

When dessert arrived, Zoe finally addressed the evening's true purpose.

"Enough pleasantries, Thorne. I attended tonight purely out of curiosity about your shamelessness. So tell me directly - what exactly do you expect from me?"

"Zoe, I want to apologize personally for the pain I caused you. When I destroyed your friend, I damaged you as well. My actions were reckless and unjust..."

"You were arrogant, self-righteous, and a complete monster," Zoe interrupted sharply. "Both of you."

"Zoe, you're defending your friend, correct?" Xavier interjected, receiving a curt nod. "Well, I was protecting mine. Caleb is closer than blood to me, and when I believed he'd been betrayed by someone we'd brought into our inner circle, it enraged me beyond reason. But we were wrong, and you're absolutely right - we should have investigated thoroughly before passing judgment."

"Zoe, I'm genuinely sorry. I love Ivy in ways I never imagined possible. I'm desperate here. Please forgive me and help me repair this damage. I'll spend my entire existence earning Ivy's forgiveness if necessary," I pleaded with complete sincerity.

"You destroyed my friend, Thorne. And you, Xavier, you delivered the killing blow." The pain in Zoe's voice cut deeper than any blade I'd faced in territorial wars.

Finn reached for his girlfriend's hand, looking directly into her eyes as he spoke.

"Zoe, they made terrible mistakes, but who among us hasn't? Remember when we first became serious and you were convinced I was cheating because someone fed you lies about seeing me with another woman? You refused to hear my explanations. Later we discovered it was all fabricated jealousy, and we worked through it together. That was our chance to start over. Maybe Thorne deserves one too, and Xavier along with him."

"That situation was completely different, Finn. What we experienced was nothing compared to the destruction these two inflicted on Ivy. Thorne told her she belonged in the gutter with the rest of the street trash," Zoe's fury remained justified and razor-sharp.

"And you called me worthless garbage back then, Zoe. When we're wounded and angry, we say things that don't reflect our true feelings," Finn responded patiently. "Everyone deserves another chance. And you're not considering what might be best for Ivy, or how much she's suffering right now."

"Of course I'm thinking about Ivy, Finn. She's suffering because of them. I won't allow them to inflict more damage."

"But what if her love for Thorne runs deeper than this pain? What if losing him permanently would cause greater suffering than forgiving him?" Finn was becoming my unexpected advocate, and hope flared in my chest like wildfire.

"Finn, are you seriously taking their side?" Zoe asked incredulously.

I had to admire Zoe's unwavering loyalty. Ivy was fortunate to have such a fierce protector watching her back.

"I’m taking the side of our friend’s happiness. Let me ask you this - have you considered that he might be the love of her life, the one person who could bring her true contentment?"

Zoe groaned and stared down at her untouched tiramisu with obvious internal conflict.

"I don’t know, Finn. Perhaps you’re right, but I can’t help them - it would constitute betraying Ivy. Besides, this fool already possesses the most powerful ally possible and he’s too blind to recognize it. Max is your direct path to Ivy’s heart," she said, studying me like I was missing something obvious.

"Zoe, I would never manipulate Max to influence Ivy. That would be despicable. I genuinely care about that boy in ways I can’t fully comprehend. There’s a connection between us, probably because he’s the son of the woman I love," I said with absolute honesty.

"You wouldn’t be betraying Ivy, Zoe. You’d be helping your friend find happiness," Xavier added. "I would do anything to see Caleb content. And if you include me in this forgiveness arrangement, you and Ivy will gain the most loyal ally you could ask for in this dangerous world."

Zoe examined each of our faces carefully before releasing a long, weary sigh.

"I’m probably going to regret this decision completely, but fine. I’ll help you both. Only because I’m tired of watching Ivy suffer, and I can see you genuinely care about Max, Thorne."

"You won’t regret this choice. I’ll make your friend happier than she’s ever been," I promised, briefly squeezing her hand in gratitude.

"You better, because if you destroy this opportunity, I’ll end you myself," Zoe warned. "And I want another piece of that tiramisu."

"You can have the entire cake if you desire it," I replied, grinning widely for the first time in weeks.