Mafia Mask 64

Chapter 64 Just For Tonight

Ivy's POV

When Caleb and I found ourselves alone at the reserved VIP table in the underground club beneath his casino empire, my pulse quickened like I was back to being that naive girl who first stumbled into this dark world. The nervousness coursed through me as his predatory gaze held mine across the marble surface littered with empty glasses and the remnants of our evening with his crew.

"Listen to me very carefully, Ivy." His voice dropped to that dangerous whisper that had once made grown men tremble in fear as he leaned closer, his breath warm against my skin in the dim lighting of the exclusive venue. "You can rage against me all you want, but that doesn't change the fact that you belong to me and this family. I won't stand by and watch other men put their hands on what's mine. You can leave our territory wearing that sinful dress that shows off every curve of your incredible body, and I might grit my teeth and bear it. But dancing with another man in my own establishment?" His ice-blue eyes darkened with the lethal intensity that had earned him his reputation. "That will never happen again."

Fire surged through my veins as I met his stare without flinching, even as the sound of distant slot machines and muffled conversations from the legitimate casino above filtered through the reinforced walls. "You're completely delusional, Mr. Thorne. I don't belong to anyone, especially not you and your bloody empire. And yes, I'm furious, so don't push me any further."

The arrogant bastard had the nerve to flash that devastatingly dangerous smile that had seduced countless women and intimidated rival family heads. His eyes gleamed with the predatory satisfaction of a man who had never been denied anything he wanted.

"There's a fine line between love and hate, sweetheart. You're mine, Ivy, and everyone in this territory knows it. It's only a matter of time before you stop fighting it and accept your place in this world." He pressed a soft kiss to the tip of my nose, the gentle gesture at complete odds with his possessive words that carried the weight of his authority.

I huffed in frustration, hating how my body responded to his touch even in this den of criminals and enforcers. As I turned my head away, searching for something to focus on other than his magnetic presence, I caught sight of a woman approaching our table through the haze of cigar smoke. She was

practically spilling out of her barely-there sequined dress, her surgically enhanced chest threatening to escape her neckline entirely. Her hips swayed in an exaggerated motion as she strutted over in sky-high heels, her face caked with enough makeup to rival the showgirls who performed in the legitimate theaters Caleb owned as fronts.

"Hey there, gorgeous," she purred, leaning over Caleb's chair until her artificial assets were practically in his face, completely ignoring the armed bodyguards stationed discreetly around our section. "Dance with me. I'm sure your little sister won't mind sharing such a powerful man."

Sister? The audacity of this woman in Caleb's own underground kingdom sent my blood pressure skyrocketing. I watched Caleb's reaction, waiting for him to shut her down with the cold brutality he showed to anyone who disrespected his property. Instead, he remained perfectly still, his eyes slowly traveling up and down her body as if he was actually considering her proposition, his expression unreadable.

Something snapped inside me. Whether it was the expensive champagne coursing through my system or pure territorial instinct awakened by months in this violent world, I shot to my feet and leaned across the table until I was nose to nose with the plastic fantastic intruder.

"Sister?" I said, my voice dripping with venom that would have made any of Caleb's lieutenants proud. "What exactly gave you that brilliant idea in this establishment? Why don't you take your cheap performance somewhere else, because this man already has everything he needs right here."

Caleb's attention shifted from her to me, his eyebrows raising with interest as if he was enjoying watching me stake my claim in front of his crew and clientele. The woman looked me up and down with obvious disdain, then had the audacity to laugh in the face of the Thorne family's authority.

"Seriously?" She gestured to her artificially enhanced figure with theatrical flair. "You honestly think he'd choose a boring little mouse like you over all of this in his own territory?" She leaned down to whisper in Caleb's ear, her voice loud enough for me to hear every word. "I'm one hundred percent woman, baby. I can show you pleasures you've never imagined. Don't waste your time with her when you could have me doing whatever you want, however you want it."

White-hot rage exploded through every nerve in my body. This shameless woman was propositioning my man right in front of me in his own underground empire, and Caleb was just sitting there like he was enjoying the deadly show.

"Listen carefully, you walking advertisement for poor life choices," I snarled, my voice low and dangerous enough to silence nearby conversations. "Turn around and crawl back to whatever dive you escaped from before I have you permanently removed from this territory."

Caleb burst into laughter, clearly entertained by the entire spectacle unfolding in his exclusive domain. The sound only fueled my anger, and I smacked him upside the head, which made him laugh even harder. But then he stood up abruptly, his arm snaking around my waist and pulling me flush against his hard chest. Before I could react, he planted a quick, possessive kiss on my lips and turned to address the intruder with the cold authority of a man who ruled the underworld.

"Do you really think I'd be interested in your amateur performance when I have the most stunning woman in the city right here beside me?" His smile was razor-sharp and deadly. "You're nothing but a desperate wannabe. Get lost and don't show your face in my territory again."

"Bye bye, sweetheart," I added with a sarcastic wave, watching her storm away in defeat through the maze of gambling tables and enforcers.

Caleb turned back to me, his arms tightening around my waist as I savored my victory in this dangerous paradise. But my triumph was short-lived when I heard his husky whisper against my ear.

"You have no idea how incredibly sexy you are when you're claiming your territory."

I tried to pull away from his embrace, but he held me tighter, and my legs turned to liquid under the weight of his power and presence. One touch from this lethal man and my brain stopped functioning properly.

"The woman who just publicly marked me as hers in front of my entire crew wouldn't refuse to dance with me now, would she?" Without waiting for an answer, he guided me toward the private dance floor reserved for family members, and I found myself powerless to resist his gravitational pull.

The live band began playing a slow, sensual melody, and I melted into Caleb's arms as he pulled me against his body with the confidence of a man who owned everything and everyone around us. He moved with the fluid grace of someone trained in both ballroom dancing and lethal combat, leading me around the floor while the seductive rhythm pulsed through the exclusive space. His hands explored the

curve of my waist as he sang the lyrics softly in my ear, his voice sending shivers down my spine. Being this close to him was pure torture when I was trying so hard to resist everything he represented.

The band seemed determined to test my resolve, playing one romantic song after another as other couples from his inner circle joined us on the floor. We stayed pressed together through several more dances, our bodies moving in perfect synchronization like we were made for this dangerous dance. I never wanted the moment to end.

When the music finally shifted to something more upbeat, Caleb kept his arm possessively around my waist as we returned to our VIP table. Our friends were all staring at us with knowing looks, and the women were practically fanning themselves. He pulled my chair closer to his and draped his arm across my shoulders, ignoring my warning glare.

"What?" he asked with mock innocence, pressing a soft kiss to my bare shoulder. "Don't you want to keep that desperate woman you so eloquently dismissed away from what belongs to you?"

"Caleb, I need to tell you something," I began, but he silenced me with a kiss that stole my breath and scrambled my thoughts completely.

The kiss was desperate and hungry, filled with months of longing and the dangerous tension that existed between us in this violent world. It was overwhelming and irresistible, making my head spin and my heart race against the backdrop of his criminal empire. I wound my arms around his neck and kissed him back with equal fervor, surrendering to the moment despite my better judgment.

When we finally broke apart, his eyes were blazing with satisfaction and possession. But I wasn't ready to wave the white flag just yet. He hadn't suffered nearly enough for what he put me through, and I wasn't about to make this easy for the most powerful man in the underworld.

"Don't think this changes anything," I said firmly, watching confusion flicker across his features. "I'm still angry, and you're definitely not forgiven. But we're here together tonight in your kingdom, and I won't pretend you don't affect me. So we can have fun, but this is just for tonight. Tomorrow, nothing changes in this war between us."

I pulled him down for another searing kiss, pouring all my conflicted emotions into it.

"If that’s what you want tonight, then that’s what you’ll get," he murmured against my lips with the dangerous promise of a man accustomed to getting everything he desired. "I’ll take whatever you’re willing to give me, tesoro."

"Perfect." I drained my champagne and stood up, extending my hand to him. "Then let’s dance, handsome."

As we returned to the dance floor, I spotted familiar faces through the crowd. Ruby appeared at my side with a knowing smirk, her designer dress perfectly suited for this high-end establishment.

"Well, well," she whispered in my ear as we swayed to the music. "Someone’s finally stopped pretending she doesn’t want the most dangerous man in the room."

I rolled my eyes but couldn’t suppress my smile. "It’s complicated, Rubes."

"Honey, the best things always are." She glanced over at where Xavier was deep in conversation with some of Caleb’s business associates, his sharp suit and confident demeanor fitting seamlessly into this world of power and influence. "Trust me on that."

When the song ended, we made our way to the powder room where Zoe was touching up her lipstick, her reflection stunning in the ornate mirror surrounded by golden fixtures.

"So," she said without turning around, "are we finally admitting what everyone else in this place already knows?"

"Which is?" I asked, though I already knew the answer.

"That you and Caleb Thorne are absolutely perfect for each other in this beautifully twisted world of ours." She turned to face us, her expression serious despite her playful tone. "Ivy, I’ve watched you transform since you entered his sphere of influence. You’re stronger, more confident, more yourself than you’ve ever been."

Ruby nodded in agreement. "She’s right. You belong here, with him, in this life. Stop fighting what’s meant to be."

As the evening wound down and we prepared to leave, I found myself surrounded by the people who had become my chosen family in this dangerous underworld. Finn appeared at Xavier’s side, and I could see the subtle protective way he positioned himself, always alert even in the relative safety of Caleb’s territory.

"Ready to head out?" Xavier asked, but his eyes were on Ruby, and I caught the meaningful look that passed between them.

"Actually," Ruby said, intertwining her fingers with his, "I think I’m exactly where I need to be."

Zoe laughed, the sound bright and genuine in the dim lighting. "Look at us all, finding our places in this wild world."

As we made our way toward the exit, Caleb’s hand warm and possessive on the small of my back, I realized they were right. This was my world now, these were my people, and despite all my protests and fears, I was exactly where I belonged.