Mafia Mask 71

Chapter 71 High Stakes Jealousy

Ivy’s POV

The girls had truly lifted my spirits after the emotional turmoil of recent days. Following hours of laughter and conversation in the private lounge, we decided to venture into the high-stakes gaming parlor on the penthouse level. The opulent space stretched before us like a forbidden kingdom, resembling an exclusive Monte Carlo establishment with polished mahogany tables, crystal chandeliers casting shadows over spinning roulette wheels, and rows of vintage slot machines humming with electronic melodies. Zoe approached the platinum cashier cage, exchanged crisp hundreds for gleaming black chips worth more than most people earned in months, and distributed them among our group with theatrical flair.

"Time to paint this syndicate red, ladies," she announced with infectious enthusiasm, her eyes glittering with mischief.

"Oh, we are absolutely going to paint it crimson," Nora’s voice carried a dangerous edge as she directed our attention toward a private poker table positioned in the room’s most exclusive corner. A cluster of women had gathered around it like predators circling prey. "Jude is about to learn a very expensive lesson about respect," she snarled, watching a raven-haired socialite drape herself across Jude’s shoulders with practiced familiarity.

"That backstabbing snake Finn, I should have anticipated this treachery. You duplicitous bastard, tonight you face the consequences of your disrespect," Zoe’s eyes sparked with predatory gleam. "The reckoning has arrived, and it will be written in blood money."

"And that shameless courtesan practically melting into my man’s shoulder? Oh, Xavier will pay dearly for permitting such insolence," Ruby’s voice dropped to a menacing whisper that would make lesser men tremble.

"Look at that platinum-blonde harpy grinding against Dominic like some common street walker. And that fool is actually encouraging her advances with his laughter. I’m going to erase that smug expression from his face permanently," Gemma’s fury radiated from every pore, her manicured nails digging into her palms.

My stomach churned with a mixture of rage and heartbreak, but the girls were electric with righteous fury. There they sat at that high-roller table, aged whiskey flowing freely, enjoying themselves immensely while we suffered. Caleb was actually smiling at some shameless temptress who had practically fused herself to his shoulder, her crimson lips whispering secrets in his ear. While I stood here, heart shattering into fragments sharp enough to cut. But he would suffer for this betrayal, and suffer magnificently.

"Alright girls, here's our strategy - I believe we should approach them directly and completely shatter their concentration," Gemma proposed with calculating precision, her voice carrying the cold authority she'd inherited from generations of syndicate royalty.

"Perfect. When they lose the game, they'll lose their money and completely lose their minds," Nora nodded approvingly, already savoring the impending chaos.

"That's amateur hour, and we're seasoned professionals in psychological warfare," Ruby's expression transformed into something wickedly brilliant. "See that third table beyond theirs? My brother Parker and his crew are holding court. We'll act as if we haven't noticed our men at all."

"No way! Are you actually suggesting we make our syndicate princes jealous using your brother and his notorious associates?" Zoe's face bloomed with a radiant smile that could launch a thousand wars. "Girl, you're absolutely diabolical! I worship your devious mind! As possessive as they are, they'll hoist us over their shoulders and drag us out of here like conquering barbarians."

"But that seems unfair to your brother and his crew, Ruby," I protested, genuinely concerned they might resent being manipulated as pawns in our revenge game.

"My brother would sell his soul to the devil himself to make Caleb jealous, Ivy. Those men won't object - they'll relish the opportunity to make those arrogant bastards squirm and be thrilled to receive our undivided attention," Ruby declared with absolute certainty, her smile sharp as a blade. "Let's move out, girls! Time to remind these men why they should never take us for granted."

Ruby assumed command as we crossed the room wearing radiant smiles, pretending complete ignorance of those faithless fools. At the table with Ruby's brother, additional men occupied the remaining seats - all dangerous, all beautiful, all eager for trouble.

As we approached, Parker’s face illuminated with genuine delight upon seeing us, his reputation as a charming predator preceding him.

"Gorgeous Ivy! You’re absolutely breathtaking tonight, a vision of pure temptation," Parker rose gracefully from his chair and greeted me with a gentle kiss on the cheek, his lips lingering just long enough to be noticed.

"Hey, I exist too, you know," Ruby playfully elbowed her brother with a grin, though her eyes held the same predatory gleam.

"Ah, but I’ve been admiring you since you were terrorizing the nannies, little sister." Parker winked at me conspiratorially and embraced Ruby warmly. He possessed the kind of devastating handsomeness that started wars and ended dynasties. "So, beautiful ladies, did you enjoy the entertainment at my establishment last evening?"

"Parker, your club is absolutely magnificent! We’ve already scheduled multiple return visits," Zoe gushed enthusiastically, playing her part to perfection.

"Anytime you desire, just contact me personally and I’ll secure the most exclusive table in the house," Parker radiated the same dangerous charm as his sister. "But allow me to introduce my business associates. This is Brenda, my partner in several lucrative ventures, Silas, Hunter, and Beckett."

We exchanged pleasantries with the entire crew. They were all devastatingly handsome, towering figures with the kind of muscular builds that suggested violence was their preferred method of negotiation. They smiled with friendly charm and shameless confidence, showering us with outrageous compliments and inviting us to join their private game.

Beckett was delivering another flowery compliment about how the table appeared infinitely more beautiful surrounded by the most stunning women in the city, when our men materialized like avenging angels, fixing us with laser-focused stares that could melt steel.

"So, beloved wife, enjoying yourself immensely?" Jude inquired, looming over Nora with barely contained violence simmering beneath his controlled exterior.

"Oh absolutely, Jude. It appears our women are truly having an exceptional time with such attentive companions," Dominic confirmed in a threatening undertone while hovering over Gemma like a storm cloud.

"And you, Miss Zoe, anything requiring my immediate attention?" Finn seized Zoe's hand possessively, his knuckles white with restraint.

Parker and his associates observed the unfolding drama with obvious entertainment, appearing thoroughly prepared to engage with any provocations our men might offer.

"Gentlemen, please join our little gathering! It seems these lovely ladies genuinely appreciate civilized company," Parker declared in a deliberately mocking tone that cut through the tension.

"Oh, these ladies are exceptionally friendly indeed. Unfortunately, we have pressing business elsewhere." Caleb's smile held arctic coldness as he wrapped his muscular arm around my waist, lifting me effortlessly with one swift motion. "Hello, tesoro," he murmured against my ear, staring intensely into my eyes before delivering a quick, claiming kiss that branded me as his property.

"Listen carefully, you can all leave if you choose, but we're under no obligation to follow. We're remaining here to play with our charming new friends," Zoe announced defiantly, dramatically flipping her hair over her shoulder.

"Sorry, sweetheart, but absolutely not," Finn stated with finality, placing both hands on Zoe's waist and forcing her to stand.

"Well, we appreciate you gentlemen entertaining our women, but we have existing commitments," Dominic brought Gemma to her feet, pulling her flush against his body in an unmistakably possessive gesture.

Jude had already swept Nora into his arms effortlessly. The scene was almost theatrical in its intensity. Parker possessed a mischievous sparkle in his dangerous eyes, like a predator plotting something elaborate, and his crew appeared eager to support whatever chaos he might unleash.

"Ginger, come with me. I promise you'll adore the surprise I've prepared," Xavier was practically groveling before Ruby, already behaving like a desperate man begging for scraps of attention.

"Gentlemen, why don't we create some real entertainment?" Parker asked with deceptive casualness, his voice carrying the authority of someone accustomed to high-stakes games. "I propose a wager that will allow us all to savor these beautiful ladies' delightful company."

"I have a superior proposition," Nora interrupted quickly. "You men sit down and play seriously. Whoever emerges victorious gets to escort us to dinner and enjoy our undivided attention for the evening."

"Are you intoxicated, Nora? There's absolutely no chance you're dining with another man," Jude scolded his wife harshly, his territorial instincts flaring dangerously.

"What's the problem, man? You that terrible at cards?" Silas taunted Jude with a knowing smirk, winking suggestively at Nora. Jude's jaw clenched with barely controlled rage, mirrored by the other syndicate men.

"Are you challenging me?" Jude demanded with deadly precision. "I'm exceptionally skilled at poker - it's how I earned my first territory."

"So the others must be the ones who are hopeless?" Beckett needled relentlessly, clearly enjoying the rising tension.

"Listen carefully, nobody here is hopeless at poker. We're all seasoned professionals who've won fortunes and territories at these tables," Xavier snapped defensively. "We could strip you amateurs down to your underwear and leave you begging for mercy."

"Now we're talking serious business! You're wagering money, women, and dignity?" Hunter chimed in with obvious excitement, his eyes gleaming with anticipation.

"Oh, I would absolutely love to see all these gorgeous syndicate princes humbled because of us," Zoe whispered conspiratorially in my ear, and I couldn't suppress my burst of laughter at the mental image.

"Care to share Zoe's amusing observation, tesoro?" Caleb said sternly, tightening his possessive grip on my waist, his voice carrying a warning that made my pulse race.

"So, gentlemen, are you frightened of a little friendly competition?" Parker provoked with calculated precision, his smile sharp as a switchblade.

"Nobody here experiences fear. We simply prefer not to waste precious time we could be spending with our women playing cards with unfamiliar faces," Caleb retorted coldly, though his eyes burned with the challenge.

"Well, you've already wasted considerable time, since they arrived here completely unescorted," Brenda pushed the boundaries with surgical precision.

"Come now, afraid of a little friendly competition? It's merely a card game and dinner among civilized business associates. Nothing too serious," Parker encouraged smoothly. "Besides, if you're truly as skilled as your reputations suggest, you'll demolish us completely."

"Deal!" Xavier impulsively exclaimed, slapping his hand decisively on the mahogany table.

"Damn it, Xavier," Jude muttered under his breath, recognizing the trap too late.

"What? It's just cards," Xavier protested as if it was completely insignificant. The syndicate men exchanged looks of pure frustration, knowing they'd been expertly maneuvered.

"One game. And we're going to achieve complete victory," Caleb hissed menacingly, then whispered intensely in my ear, his breath hot against my skin, "There's absolutely no possibility you're dining with that man, tesoro."

"Then don't lose," I shot back defiantly, my green eyes flashing with challenge.

The men settled into their chairs like gladiators entering the arena, conducted formal introductions with the courtesy of dangerous predators, and established the stakes with military precision. Besides dinner with us, the victor would claim all the money on the table. Despite Beckett's persistent suggestions, they

refused to wager their clothing, concluding such behavior would result in immediate expulsion from the exclusive establishment.

The dealers brought additional chairs, and we positioned ourselves strategically among the men to observe the unfolding battle. Cards were distributed with ceremonial gravity, and the betting commenced with the intensity of a territorial war. Zoe sent an identical text message to each of us:

"Time to make them lose everything and remember who really holds the power here."