Mafia Mask 72

Chapter 72 All In for Love

Ivy's POV

The private poker room at the Thorne family's underground casino reeked of expensive cigars and dangerous ambition. Throughout the high-stakes game, Parker maintained his calculated charm offensive, brushing his fingers against mine as he dealt cards and murmuring strategies against my ear. His breath on my neck sent involuntary shivers down my spine, and I ensured Caleb caught every subtle reaction. The Don's jaw muscles twitched with barely contained rage, his knuckles bone-white as he gripped his cards like weapons.

"Ladies, where shall we take you for dinner after we clean out these amateurs?" Brenda inquired smoothly, stealing glances at his hand before focusing his predatory attention entirely on Zoe.

"What about The Bistro?" Silas suggested with practiced eagerness. "Ivy, have you sampled their cuisine? The food is extraordinary, fitting for a woman of your caliber."

"I've heard impressive things, though securing reservations there is supposedly impossible," I replied, allowing genuine interest to color my voice. This observation made Jude's expression darken like a storm cloud.

"Reservations become quite possible when Silas's uncle controls the establishment," Hunter chimed in with a knowing grin. "If everyone agrees, it's perfect. The atmosphere screams old money elegance and the cuisine is exceptional, worthy of such captivating company." He directed a meaningful wink toward Gemma, causing Dominic to shift uncomfortably in his chair.

"Then our evening is decided. But you gentlemen will serve as our drivers afterward. We've been sampling Dom Perignon since this afternoon, and French cuisine demands proper wine selections," Ruby announced with supreme confidence.

"Already anticipating our defeat, gorgeous?" Xavier protested, though his complete devotion to her was painfully obvious. "Don't you have faith in your men's abilities?"

"Oh Xavier, poker involves so many unpredictable variables," Ruby replied with devastating innocence, her smile sharp enough to cut glass.

Our distraction strategy unfolded with military precision. Every calculated touch, every laugh shared with Parker's crew was designed to systematically unravel our boyfriends' legendary concentration. Even Finn, typically unshakeable as granite, showed visible cracks in his composure.

Silas crumbled first, throwing in his cards and immediately abandoning the game to hover protectively around Nora. His undivided attention ignited Jude's jealousy like gasoline on fire, destroying his famous focus until he too slammed down his cards, joining the territorial battle for his girlfriend's affections.

Hunter followed the pattern, showering compliments on Gemma with increasing desperation until Dominic couldn't endure another second and forfeited his position at the table. Brenda whispered something that made Zoe dissolve into musical giggles, prompting Finn to slam his cards down in frustrated defeat. Beckett barely survived another hand before Xavier possessively dragged Ruby's chair closer to his side and declared himself officially out.

Only Caleb and Parker remained locked in this primal masculine standoff, with me suspended between them like a prize worth dying for. Parker's confidence radiated through his relaxed posture and amused smile. He was savoring every moment of this psychological warfare like fine wine.

"Appears I'll have the distinct pleasure of your company tonight, beautiful Ivy," Parker said, his voice smooth as aged whiskey.

"Over my dead body," Caleb's voice dropped to deadly quiet, more terrifying than any shouted threat. "I'm doubling the current stakes."

Parker studied Caleb with calculating precision, searching for tells, weaknesses, anything exploitable in his poker armor. But Caleb remained stone-faced, every muscle controlled, every breath measured with surgical precision. His poker face was legendary throughout the underground for excellent reasons.

"I'll see your bet and raise you substantially," Parker countered with practiced smoothness. "Some prizes are worth any gamble, any risk."

Something predatory and absolutely lethal flickered in Caleb's icy blue eyes. Without hesitation, he shoved his entire stack of chips forward, the colorful towers representing a fortune that could buy small countries.

"All in," Caleb stated with chilling simplicity. "Like you said, some things are worth everything."

The room fell into suffocating silence. Parker straightened abruptly, his casual confidence wavering as he processed the staggering magnitude of Caleb's bet. He studied his cards again, then Caleb's perfectly impassive expression, desperately searching for any crack in that flawless mask.

After what felt like several lifetimes, Parker placed his cards face down and pushed back from the table with visible reluctance.

"I fold. Seems tonight wasn't destined to be my lucky evening after all, lovely Ivy." He lifted my hand and pressed a gentlemanly kiss to my knuckles.

"Excellent decision. Gentlemen, we'll be escorting our ladies to dinner now," Caleb announced, rising and collecting his substantial winnings with practiced efficiency.

Silas couldn't contain his burning curiosity, flipping both hands to reveal the cards. His groan of absolute disbelief echoed through the smoke-filled room.

"Parker, you absolute fool! You held a full house and folded to his obvious bluff. He only had a flush. You threw away a guaranteed victory!"

"Told you that you wouldn't be dining with our women tonight," Caleb said, his smile sharp with predatory triumph. "Now if you'll excuse us."

"This isn't finished, Thorne," Parker said as he stood, but our group was already moving toward the exit, barely allowing time for polite farewells.

They whisked us to an intimate bistro, small and cozy with exceptional food and discreet service that asked no questions. The atmosphere buzzed with warm laughter and easy conversation among friends who genuinely enjoyed each other's dangerous company.

"So gentlemen, were you following us today?" Zoe asked boldly, cutting straight through pretense to the heart of the matter.

"Pure coincidence, Zo," Dominic replied smoothly. "Though I'm curious how you ended up with Parker's crowd."

"Complete accident," Nora explained naturally. "We were exploring the casino when Ruby spotted her brother. We went to say hello, they invited us to join them, and refusing seemed unnecessarily rude."

"One thing led to another?" Jude's voice carried a dangerous edge that made everyone pause. "Well, tonight several things are going to lead to you being thoroughly punished for this little performance."

"Are you threatening to discipline me, husband?" Nora responded with perfect innocence. "You know how much I enjoy your creative punishments."

Jude's eyes blazed with dark promise while the rest of us dissolved into knowing laughter. Their dynamic never failed to amuse our tight circle.

"What stings, girls, is that you completely ignored us," Finn said, genuine hurt bleeding through his tough exterior.

"Oh darling, we honestly didn't notice you there!" Zoe lied smoothly, sealing her deception with a quick kiss. Her loyalty to Finn was absolute, but she'd never betray our sisterhood's secrets.

For dessert, Caleb ordered chocolate silk pie, feeding me bites with intimate precision. Each morsel delivered by his fingers sent heat pooling in my stomach, his eyes dark with unspoken promises for later.

Despite Zoe and Finn heading to the same building, Caleb insisted on driving me home personally. He walked around to open my door like the gentleman he'd been raised to be, but I needed answers before this night ended.

"Caleb, why haven't you left yet?" His confused expression prompted me to clarify. "I wrote you a goodbye letter."

His smile was tender as he cupped my face, delivering a soft kiss that tasted of chocolate and unwavering determination.

"Ivy, I will never say goodbye to you. I've told you before, I'll spend forever earning your forgiveness if necessary, but I'll never stop fighting for us. I love you."

"But—" He silenced my protest with another kiss, deeper this time.

"Go inside now. Give Max my regards. Sweet dreams, my love."

I walked into my building on unsteady legs, unable to comprehend his unwavering faith in our future. Yet part of me was grateful he refused to surrender.