Mafia Mask 79

Chapter 79 Memorial Betrayal

Ivy's POV

We stepped out of the exclusive boutique that catered to the wives and daughters of the city's most powerful crime families, and the men escorted us toward the private dining room on the third floor of the Thorne family's legitimate restaurant front. The atmosphere felt warm and inviting, exactly what we needed after our afternoon of acquiring appropriate attire for upcoming family functions.

"Ladies, I cannot express how grateful I am! What you purchased today has already secured my entire monthly sales quota. You are absolute angels!" Gemma beamed at us, her relief evident as she spoke about the commission from outfitting the wives of such high-ranking famiglia members.

"Gemma, please, the pleasure was all ours. Those dresses are absolutely gorgeous, and we adore every single piece," Zoe responded warmly, adjusting the silk scarf that would help her blend into the sophisticated world of organized crime social gatherings.

"Honestly, Gemma, we should be the ones thanking you for making our ladies look absolutely breathtaking," Xavier said, his eyes never leaving Ruby's face as he spoke with the protective intensity typical of a high-ranking enforcer.

Caleb turned his attention to Gemma with genuine curiosity, though I could see the calculating look of a Don always seeking to expand his network of loyal associates. "Gemma, do you enjoy working at the boutique?"

"I do appreciate it, but this isn't my forever career. The work is draining, not every customer is as wonderful as these ladies, and having to work weekends and holidays makes maintaining any kind of personal life nearly impossible," Gemma explained honestly, unaware she was speaking to one of the most powerful crime bosses on the East Coast.

"How would you feel about joining my organization?" Caleb asked, catching all of us completely off guard. Working within the Thorne Syndicate's legitimate businesses would be an incredible opportunity for Gemma, not to mention much safer than her current exposed position.

"Caleb, I appreciate the gesture, truly, but I know you're only offering because Dominic asked you to. I cannot accept charity, even from someone as kind as you," Gemma replied with the utmost sincerity and grace, clearly not understanding the weight of receiving a direct offer from the head of the family.

"You misunderstand me completely. Dominic has nothing to do with this decision. This is purely business, benefiting both of us. My current secretary will be eliminated from her position soon, and I need someone trustworthy in that role. Since Ivy hasn't returned to her duties yet, your business degree would be invaluable to me. For you, it means regular weekday hours, exceptional compensation, and the protection that comes with being part of our organization," Caleb explained earnestly, his words carrying the subtle weight of mafia recruitment.

Gemma's eyes found mine, silently seeking my opinion on what she didn't realize was essentially an invitation to join one of the most feared crime families in North America.

"Gemma, this is an extraordinary opportunity. Working within the organization opens countless doors and provides security most people in this city can only dream of. You should definitely explore this further with Caleb," I encouraged her, knowing how life-changing and life-protecting this position could be in our dangerous world.

"Caleb, first you steal my best contact, now you want my goddess too?!" Dominic protested dramatically, sending us all into laughter as he played up his mock outrage with typical soldier theatrics.

The evening flowed beautifully, filled with animated conversation and laughter as Dominic regaled us with tales of their recent escapades during territory negotiations with rival families. The mood was perfect until several women appeared from nowhere, practically launching themselves onto Dominic's, Caleb's, and Xavier's laps like predatory cats marking their territory. My blood ran cold when I recognized one of them as Yara, the daughter of Underboss Rossi.

"Hey gorgeous! I have missed you desperately!" she purred, planting a possessive kiss directly on Caleb's lips while her companions did the same with Dominic and Xavier, displaying the kind of brazen behavior typical of spoiled mafia princesses.

"I was just telling the girls about our incredible night of passion in your office during Heidi's party. That leather couch has become my absolute favorite place in the world."

Her words hit me like a physical blow, each syllable designed to wound. A night of passion? On his office couch? The pain in my chest was suffocating. This was his behavior at a family gathering? He had insisted I attend that celebration. For what purpose? To witness him with another woman while I was there? To humiliate me in front of the entire organization?

"Angel and I were devastated you didn't invite us to Heidi's party," the woman draped across Xavier's lap whined in her grating voice, clearly referring to Yara. "We could have had such fun together, Opal, like we always do at family functions."

I caught the eyes of my friends, and I could see they felt the same rage and heartbreak coursing through them. The disrespect shown not just to us but to the family gathering was unforgivable. Zoe shot to her feet, grabbing Finn by his jacket with the fierce determination of a woman who'd grown up understanding the brutal realities of our world.

"Come on, Wyatt, it's getting late and we're taking the girls home. Let's go, ladies. These idiots can handle their own bill!"

"We're leaving too, Jude. Now!" Nora stood up, her anger blazing openly with the kind of fury that could start wars between families. "What a complete disappointment you are, but Caleb, you're absolutely the worst of them all."

We rushed toward the exit, ignoring their desperate calls for us to wait, their claims that they could explain everything, their protests echoing through the restaurant like the pleas of condemned men.

"How could they possibly do this to us?" Ruby's voice shook with outrage, her loyalty to our tight-knit group overriding any fear of challenging powerful men.

"Caleb has some serious nerve," Zoe's fury was palpable, her street-smart instincts telling her this betrayal went deeper than simple infidelity.

"Ladies, perhaps things aren't exactly as they appear. Maybe you should hear them out first," Finn attempted to defend them, but our collective glare made him immediately retreat. "Sorry, forget I said anything."

"Go home right now, Wyatt. I'm taking the girls home myself, and we'll discuss this later," Zoe commanded with authority, her voice carrying the steel that had helped her survive in our unforgiving world. "But you better not be taking those clowns' side in this."

"The same warning applies to you, Jude," Nora said, her voice dripping with the kind of cold anger that runs in the blood of women who've learned to navigate the treacherous waters of organized crime.

"Actually, I'm driving Nora home," Jude declared, moving toward his wife with the determined stride of a man trying to regain control of a rapidly deteriorating situation.

"No, you're not. I'll take her home myself," Zoe shot back, her protective instincts flaring as she stepped between them, unwilling to let any of the men near us in our current state of betrayal and hurt.

"Jude, don't you dare try to cover for Caleb or make excuses for what we just witnessed!" The words exploded from my lips with a fury that surprised even me, my voice carrying the rage of a woman who'd been publicly humiliated by the man she'd trusted with her heart. "What we saw in there was inexcusable, and if you think you can smooth this over with your diplomatic speeches, you're dead wrong!"

Jude stepped back, clearly taken aback by the intensity of my outburst, his usual calm demeanor cracking under the weight of our collective anger.

The ride home was silent except for the sound of my heart breaking into smaller and smaller pieces. Every word Yara had spoken echoed in my mind, each one a fresh wound. The image of Caleb with her, on that couch, during what should have been a respectful family gathering, was seared into my memory. How could I have been so naive? How could I have believed that someone like Caleb Thorne could ever truly care for someone like me? The pain was suffocating, and I knew that no matter what explanations he might offer, some betrayals cut too deep to ever heal completely.