Mafia Mask 94

Chapter 94 Ghosts in the Aisles

Ivy's POV

The next morning greeted us with the rich aroma of espresso drifting through my parents' secluded countryside estate. This fortified sanctuary, purchased with their hard-earned savings from years of careful planning and legitimate work, sat far from the blood-soaked streets of the city. Max bounced with excitement as my father led him to the small stable where they kept a pair of retired racehorses, animals my dad had always dreamed of owning.

They returned with Max clutching a ceramic mug of warm milk like a trophy, his face glowing with pure joy. This peaceful refuge felt like another world compared to the gun-laden reality we'd left behind in Thorne territory.

Breakfast unfolded to the symphony of birdsong filtering through bulletproof windows that appeared deceptively normal. The estate embraced us with its generous space and carefully constructed normalcy, morning light streaming across our table as filtered air swept through rooms equipped with hidden panic buttons and reinforced steel doors.

Our walking tour revealed the true scope of my parents' sanctuary. The property stretched far enough to accommodate thriving gardens that masked sophisticated security sensors, vegetable plots that concealed emergency supply caches, and outbuildings that housed more than just livestock. Max squealed with delight as my mother guided him through collecting warm eggs from the henhouse, blissfully unaware of the armed guards stationed discretely throughout the perimeter.

The front courtyard bloomed in carefully maintained colors, centered around a decorative fountain that doubled as a water filtration system. Colonial-style terraces wrapped around the main house, adorned with comfortable seating positioned to provide clear sightlines of all approach routes.

Behind the main residence, a complete outdoor entertainment area awaited with its own summer kitchen and gleaming pool that made Max's eyes light up like Christmas morning. Beyond that, a natural spring fed a gentle stream that wound across the property, its peaceful babbling masking the hum of underground communication equipment.

Max gazed up at me with those distinctive ice-blue eyes that never failed to melt my heart.

"Mommy, can we call Caleb to come swim with me?"

"Sweetheart, Caleb is handling very important business in the city right now. That won't work for this visit," I explained gently, catching my mother's knowing smile from across the garden. She understood the delicate balance between protecting Max's innocence and acknowledging the dangerous reality of our lives.

My parents had carved out their slice of heaven far from the violence that had funded it, and seeing their hard-earned peace filled me with profound happiness. Zoe arrived just as we finished lunch, and my parents eagerly launched into their grand tour.

"Thomas, this place is absolutely magnificent! Now I'm seriously considering my own retirement plan somewhere exactly like this," Zoe declared with genuine admiration. The easy affection between her and my parents warmed my heart as they embraced her like family, another soul welcomed into their protected circle.

"This is your sanctuary too, Zo. Our door is always open," my father said, wrapping his arm around her shoulders with paternal warmth that carried undertones of genuine protection.

Later, Zoe suggested a trip into the nearby town with Max. My mother seized the opportunity to hand us her shopping list for supplies that couldn't be delivered to the estate, and we prepared for our expedition into the civilian world.

Zoe parked near the town square, and we made our first stop at the candy vendor before settling onto a weathered bench. The afternoon stretched before us as we reminisced about countless conversations we'd shared in safer times, before bullets and blood became constants in our vocabulary.

As we strolled through the unchanged streets, whispers followed us like shadows. The locals still branded me as trouble, my son as fatherless, but their petty gossip no longer carried any sting. After surviving assassination attempts and territorial wars, small-town judgment felt laughably insignificant.

Inside the grocery store, I methodically worked through my mother's list until I turned into the snack aisle and froze. Brodie stood there looking like a walking corpse, gaunt, disheveled, unshaven, and wearing clothes that reeked of desperation and failure. The sight of him made me silently thank God for my narrow escape from that pathetic existence.

"Well, look who's back in civilization. Ivy. Took you longer than expected," Brodie sneered with familiar venom, though his voice carried the tremor of a man who'd learned fear the hard way.

"I'm visiting my family, Brodie. Not that it concerns a nobody like you," I replied, attempting to sidestep his deteriorating form.

"I heard stories about your new lifestyle. Big city connections, dangerous friends. You must be spreading your legs for anyone with guns and money."

"Keep your filthy mouth shut, Brodie! You lost the right to speak to me the day you chose betrayal over loyalty," I shot back, anger flaring in my chest like a familiar weapon.

"But I had you first. Or have you conveniently forgotten that I was the one who broke you in before you became a crime lord's whore?" His words made my stomach turn with revulsion and rage.

"You know what, Brodie? I don't regret a single moment that led me away from your worthless existence. The man who fathered my son was more of a man in one night than you managed to be in all our wasted time together. What I do regret is not seeing through your weakness sooner," I snarled, feeling righteous fury consume me completely.

"You're nothing but a mafia slut, Ivy! Thank God I ended up with Tiffany instead," he spat with pure venom in his bloodshot eyes.

"Right, because Tiffany serviced half the neighborhood muscle, but since they weren't strangers, that somehow makes her respectable?" I countered with cutting precision.

"You little..." Brodie lunged forward and seized my arm with pathetic desperation.

"Release her immediately, you worthless piece of garbage!" Zoe's voice cut through the tension as she appeared behind me, Max secure in her arms and her free hand resting meaningfully on her concealed weapon. "Let go and disappear right now, or I'll make one phone call that ensures you're found floating in the harbor."

Brodie's grip loosened as recognition dawned in his eyes. He'd clearly heard enough street rumors to know that threatening me now carried lethal consequences.