Mafia Mask 95

Chapter 95 Unexpected Homecoming

Ivy's POV

Zoe and I returned from our shopping expedition to the local markets, our arms laden with packages containing gifts from the outside world. The moment we stepped through the threshold of my childhood home, we called out our arrival. We had barely managed to set our shopping bags on the worn kitchen counter when Max came sprinting from the living room, his voice ringing with unbridled excitement.

"Caleb! You actually made it here!"

"Of course I came, little soldier. I have been missing you something fierce!" Caleb's unmistakable voice reached my ears and my blood nearly froze in my veins.

I whirled around to witness them embracing with genuine warmth. Mom displayed the most radiant smile I had witnessed in months, while Dad appeared genuinely taken aback by this unexpected development. Meanwhile, Zoe remained motionless with her jaw hanging open as Finn approached her with obvious caution.

"What exactly is the meaning of this surprise visit, Finn?" Zoe's tone carried a sharp edge of suspicion as she deliberately avoided falling into her boyfriend's waiting arms.

"We could not bear the separation from our women any longer. Especially not from this little prince here." Finn's response sounded too rehearsed, too convenient for my liking.

"But I never disclosed our destination to you," Zoe snapped back, her irritation clearly escalating.

"Come on, sweetheart. You and Ivy vanishing together for a weekend retreat? There is literally only one sanctuary in this entire country where you two would seek refuge!" Finn's smugness was practically radiating from his every gesture.

Words completely abandoned me. The shock had rendered me utterly speechless. My parents immediately gestured for everyone to gather around the modest dining table. Caleb approached me with my son still cradled protectively in his powerful arms and pressed a tender kiss against my forehead.

"Hello, my queen. I simply cannot endure extended periods away from my family." His whispered declaration came with that devastating smile that had claimed my heart completely.

Once we were all seated around the familiar table, my father immediately addressed the elephant in the room, making little effort to conceal his own bewilderment.

"Daughter, this formidable young man has informed me of his intention to claim you properly. Before I could even formulate a response, he declared his plan to bind you to him without any prolonged courtship period."

The memory of my parents' own whirlwind courtship struck me like lightning. I leaped to my feet, seized the nearest cleaning implement, and began pursuing Caleb away from the table with mock fury. However, before I could make any meaningful progress, a small figure with those distinctive ice-blue eyes positioned himself directly between us as my shield.

"Mama, please do not chase away Caleb like that." Max's cherubic face wore the most serious expression imaginable, prompting everyone around the table to erupt in genuine laughter.

"That is absolutely correct, my boy. Tell mama that I would protect her with my very life." Caleb crouched down to Max's eye level and whispered conspiratorially while maintaining unbroken eye contact with me.

"Did you hear him, mama? He says he would fight anyone who tries to hurt us." Max repeated the sentiment with earnest devotion, and watching my son defend this dangerous man was simultaneously endearing and exasperating.

I could not sustain my theatrical anger any longer and gathered Max into my embrace. Caleb immediately enveloped both of us within his protective circle.

"My angel, please do not be displeased with me. I simply missed you both beyond all reasonable measure."

"But Caleb, I specifically requested time and distance for reflection." I attempted to maintain my stern facade, but it was rapidly crumbling under his intense gaze.

"But it has already been too long since our separation. I have reached my absolute breaking point." Caleb drew us closer against his chest.

"Release the poor man from his obvious torment, sweetheart." Dad interjected while Mom nodded her enthusiastic agreement from across the table.

"Yes, Ivy, it appears your dangerous prince has already won over quite the loyal following here." Zoe's astute observation triggered fresh waves of laughter throughout the room.

We returned to our seats while Mom bustled about serving refreshments and homemade treats. Caleb and Finn had apparently arrived shortly after Zoe and I had departed that morning, providing Caleb with ample opportunity to spend quality time winning over my parents. He had shared our complicated history with them, explaining the dangerous world we inhabited, convincing them of his genuine remorse and his absolute devotion to me. My parents had clearly fallen completely under his formidable charm.

"However, there remains something that continues to perplex me greatly," Dad announced, his expression growing more contemplative. "I feel compelled to address this directly. Ivy, how is it remotely possible that Max bears such an extraordinary resemblance to Caleb? Even down to those remarkable ice-blue eyes?"

"Yes, Dad, they certainly share similar features, but Caleb is definitely not Max's biological father, if that addresses your unspoken question." I answered my father's inquiry with complete directness.

"Who mentioned anything about mere biology?" Caleb interjected suddenly, causing everyone to turn toward him with surprise. "I may not be his biological father, Thomas, but I fully intend to earn the right to call myself his father through my actions. I love that boy with everything I possess. From the very first moment I discovered his existence, something fundamental shifted within me that I cannot adequately explain."

"Well, that decision ultimately rests with Ivy alone, but I am genuinely pleased to hear you understand the responsibility of properly caring for my grandson and not merely pursuing his mother." Dad stroked his graying chin thoughtfully. "Though you two genuinely do share an uncanny resemblance that goes beyond coincidence."

My parents extended dinner invitations to our unexpected visitors. While the men engaged in increasingly animated discussions about territory boundaries and family obligations, Zoe and I retreated to the familiar kitchen to assist Mom with meal preparations.

"Honey, your boyfriend is absolutely magnificent and possesses remarkable presence," Mom commented while skillfully chopping vegetables with practiced ease.

"Yes, he certainly commands attention, Mom. And he demonstrates incredible patience with Max despite his demanding lifestyle." I could feel myself practically glowing as I spoke these words.

Throughout our dinner preparation, Zoe regaled Mom with carefully edited stories about our current life in the protected territory. Mom was thoroughly delighted and laughed heartily at every sanitized anecdote Zoe shared. Dinner itself continued in the same atmosphere of warmth, laughter, and blessed normalcy. Being home felt like the most precious sanctuary imaginable.

"Caleb, are you completely certain you would not prefer to remain here with our family tonight?" Dad inquired after we had finished our meal.

"Thank you tremendously for such generous hospitality, Thomas, but since I arrived without proper notification, I have already arranged accommodation with Finn’s extended family. It would be inappropriate to impose further on your household." Caleb’s response demonstrated perfect courtesy and respect. "However, I would be deeply honored to accept your hospitality during future visits. I would treasure the opportunity to stay here in this peaceful refuge."

"Consider our home your sanctuary as well, young man!" Dad declared with obvious pleasure.

"Thomas, Diane, are you absolutely certain you cannot join us for the family gathering tomorrow afternoon?" Zoe asked with clear disappointment in her voice.

"Unfortunately, we cannot, dear one. We are expecting other visitors tomorrow. Perhaps another occasion would prove more suitable. But Ivy will definitely accompany you both." Mom graciously declined while maintaining her warm smile.

"Well then, we should probably depart now. We will collect both you and Max tomorrow morning, Ivy." Finn announced as he rose from the table, signaling the end of our unexpectedly perfect evening.