

Every Mafia's Favorite Girl – The Soul Known 5

5: “Recalculation Required”

House Moretti’s cleaners moved through the room with quiet efficiency.

Among the Ten Houses, they had a specific reputation: they handle what others preferred not to see — bodies, blood, anything that needed to disappear.

One by one, the unconscious attackers were lifted and dragged toward the service corridors. The dead body was cleaned, leaving the room as polished and cold as if the violence had never happened.

The Summit did not end.

In Borgata, violence was merely an impolite interruption to the business of power.

Gian Lombardi remained standing at the head of the table with both hands braced against the polished mahogany surface.

He felt older than he had an hour ago.

However, when he looked at his daughter — pale, slightly trembling, but undeniably the one turning the situation around — something in him straightened.

“The security of this neutral ground has been compromised,” Gian stated, his voice carrying steadily through the chamber. “I move for a postponement of the dissolution vote. We must address the breach before we discuss the redistribution of territory.”

A low murmur rippled across the table.

Some of the Dons considered the proposal seriously. Others already looked openly insulted by the suggestion alone.

Armando Ombra leaned slightly forward, his sharp eyes fixed calmly on Gian.

“The breach is a separate matter, Don Gian. The fact remains: House Lombardi is insolvent. The debt remains, and your House cannot pay.”

Near the head of the table, Aren had just accepted a fresh cupcake from a servant whose hands were still not entirely steady.

She studied the frosting for a brief moment.

‘Different color.’

‘Possibly lemon.’

She took a small bite, then tilted her head.

“How much is the debt?”

Armando turned toward her slowly, his expression caught somewhere between disdain and newfound wariness.

“Five hundred million, Lady Ariana,” he said flatly. “A sum your family hasn’t seen in years.”

The silence that followed belonged in a museum.

Aren's eyes widened to the size of saucers. In her mind, five hundred million sounded like an impossible mountain of cupcakes.

Before anyone else could speak—

"I will settle the debt."

The voice was cold, decisive, and came from halfway down the table.

Caio Sartori leaned back in his chair, blue eyes fixed directly upon Aren.

"House Sartori will cover the Lombardi arrears," he said evenly. "In full. Today."

Gian's head snapped toward Caio instantly, eyes narrowed into dangerous slits.

"And the price, Don Caio?"

Caio didn't hesitate.

"Ariana Lombardi."

He held Gian's gaze without blinking.

"She becomes mine. Under my roof. Under my protection. My terms."

The social temperature of the room plummeted thirty degrees.

Gian's knuckles whitened violently against the mahogany.

"Explain *yours*, Sartori."

Caio didn't explain.

He didn't need to.

In Borgata's underworld, a woman traded to settle a debt was not a partner, and certainly not an employee. She became property, wrapped in prettier language.

But before Caio could double down, a hand lifted lazily into the air.

Languid.

Amused.

And perfectly manicured.

"Oh, let's not be greedy, Caio. It's such a bore."

Jeremiah Castellano stepped forward from behind his father's chair, pale teal eyes fixed openly upon Aren, his fascination no longer remotely concealed.

"I'm interested as well," he added with a bright, playful smile. "I've never seen a performance quite like that one. I suggest we divide."

"I am also interested in Miss Lombardi."

The third voice was quiet, clipped, and entirely devoid of Jeremiah's charm.

Isidore Accardi still hadn't looked up from the report in his hands. He stood with perfect posture, finishing a note before he spoke again.

"House Accardi will match any offer," he said plainly. "And exceed it."

The room instantly spiraled into shock.

The other Dons immediately exchanged glances of pure bewilderment.

Just yesterday, they had all considered Ariana Lombardi a walking corpse. Now, three of the most dangerous men in Borgata were competing for her.

Caio's expression darkened most of all.

Jeremiah's casual use of his first name without any title was already an insult in itself, but what truly angered him was the sudden competition.

Even Isidore Accardi, who was never the sort to interfere in such matters, was throwing his weight around.

Still, Caio knew the protocol. If an agreement formed at the Summit, the Houses were obligated to respect one another's interests.

"I will trade the exclusive northern supply routes to House Accardi and the Castellanos," Caio stated firmly. "If you both step back now."

Jeremiah laughed softly.

"Routes are boring, Caio," he replied, waving one elegant hand dismissively. "I'll offer ten percent of the Castellano Clubs' annual casino earnings to whoever stays out of my way."

Isidore didn't speak.

He took a small slip of paper, wrote a number with a larger string of zeros, and slid it silently toward Gian Lombardi.

Gian took a glance.

Cold sweat trickled down his spine despite himself.

At the center of it all, Aren sat very still.

She watched the exchange with growing confusion, her attention drifting briefly to the cupcake in her hands.

'Is this truly lemon?'

Her brow furrowed slightly.

'Or is it mint?'

She was increasingly confident it might contain mint.

Meanwhile, the discussion around her escalated steadily toward open hostility.

Voices sharpened.

Offers increased.

Threats became less carefully veiled.

Aren blinked slowly as her attention returned to the three men pointing fingers at each other over the table.

'Why are they... arguing?'

In her previous life, when three high-ranking officials argued over a person, it usually concerned a high-level security contract, or a transfer of personnel.

Her conclusion formed quickly:

'They want to hire me, but they're going to start a war over the contract details.'

Aren disliked conflict intensely. In her experience, a team that couldn't agree was a team that died very quickly.

"Excuse me," she said shyly.

The effect was immediate.

Three voices stopped simultaneously.

Three pairs of eyes turned toward her all at once.

Aren felt it immediately — the collective weight of their stares. Her shoulders lowered, and when she spoke again, her voice grew even shier.

"I would prefer..." she began carefully, "to... um, discuss terms individually, if that is acceptable."

Her gaze moved from Caio, to Jeremiah, to Isidore.

"I... would like to understand what each of you requires. Perhaps... if we speak one-on-one, we may discover a way for me to assist everyone without... um... all this shouting."

The three men stared at her.

Caio's jaw locked tightly shut in a silent snarl.

'Who the hell is this?'

Jeremiah's smile widened until it looked radiant enough to brighten the entire building.

'Absolutely stunning.'

Across the table, Isidore's pen stilled for the first time in over an hour.

'Recalculation required.'

The tension in the room snapped, replaced by a humming anticipation.

At the head of the table, Gian Lombardi looked at his daughter, and for the first time in years, an expression crossed his face that his enemies didn't recognize.

It was hope.

Gian's voice rang out then, with a strength it hadn't possessed in a decade.

"The Summit is adjourned."

Every eye in the room turned toward him.

"My daughter, Lady Ariana, will consult with her... suitors... individually."

Aren nodded politely to the room, pleased with the efficient discussion, then leaned over to Gian.

The prospect of calling this man "Father" still felt strange on her tongue, as she had never had one in her first life. She pivoted to her habitual politeness instead.

"Excuse me... I'm sorry," she whispered softly. "Would it be acceptable if I spoke with them tomorrow instead? I'm very tired, and I think I'd like some tea."

Every Mafia's Favorite Girl – The Soul Known 6

6: “Biscuit”

The Hub’s reception room was emptied on Gian’s orders.

Lombardi guards stood at both doors, their faces as rigid as the stone pillars they flanked.

Outside, the sounds of the other Houses departing – low voices, the rumble of car engines, the rhythmic click of heels on marble – gradually subsided, until only the city’s ambient hum remained.

Gian placed two cups of tea onto the table between him and his daughter.

For a long moment, he said nothing.

He simply looked at her, trying and failing to decide where to begin. It’d been so long since he’d last sat across from her for a real conversation that the silence felt heavy and brittle.

At last, he spoke.

“How did you move like that?”

His voice was thick with a mixture of paternal awe and the sharp suspicion of a man who had survived Borgata’s underworld for decades.

Across from him, Aren wrapped both hands around her warm cup, considering her response. She decided to remain as close to the truth as possible.

“I... had a lot of time to think while I was away. I realized that if I didn’t want to be a liability, I should learn to be... useful. So I practiced. And studied.”

Gian closed his eyes briefly, one hand rubbing slowly against his temple.

He didn’t believe a word of it. A spoiled socialite didn’t “study” her way into becoming a lethal weapon overnight.

He also didn’t care. For the first time in years, he didn’t feel like he was waiting for a funeral.

He lowered his hand, studying her quietly before speaking again.

“What do you intend to do about the offers from Sartori, Castellano, and Accardi?”

Aren silently cataloged the names. After a brief moment of thought, she lifted her gaze toward him.

“Is it acceptable if I take all three?”

Gian jolted so hard the tea nearly sloshed over the rim of his cup.

“Ariana, you don’t understand! Their intention isn’t to help. It is to humiliate you! They want to parade you around like a trophy of our failure.”

Aren tried to recall the men from the Summit table.

Caio had seemed exhausted. Jeremiah had looked entertained. Isidore had looked more interested in paperwork than anything else.

She couldn't quite see the "humiliation" Gian was referring to.

"Well..." She tilted her head slightly. "We are already in debt. Which I think... is already a form of humiliation."

Gian grimaced as though physically struck.

Her bluntness delivered the punch, mostly because of how correct she was. Still, every instinct in him rebelled against allowing his daughter to walk willingly into the hands of those men.

"Even so, one arrangement would already clear the arrears. There is no reason for you to involve yourself with all three."

"But..." Her eyes wandered to the luxury around the room. "These buildings we own — the hotels and the clubs — they look like... they cost a lot to run. We need more than just to be out of debt. We also need to... operate well. I believe taking all three offers is the most efficient path."

Gian stared at her in genuine disbelief.

This was not only the most intelligent thing his daughter had ever said in front of him, it was the most selfless.

She had been the reason the debt existed in the first place, yet here she was, planning for the House's future and long-term operational survival.

"Ariana," he said, trying once more to dissuade her, "I can't allow you to deal with those three men alone. They are not simple businessmen. They are predators."

Aren gave it a thought.

In her previous life, one person's problem was the team's problem. Family, squad, unit — it made little difference to her mind.

This man and Ariana Lombardi were family. Therefore, by the logic of her previous life, his problem was now hers.

"We are family," she said softly. "And I would like to be useful."

Once again, Gian found himself struggling for words.

Nothing about this conversation aligned with the daughter he thought he knew anymore. He took another sip of tea simply to steady himself.

"If you truly intend to proceed, then understand this clearly. They all want something from us, and it isn't just the money."

Aren blinked at him.

"What do you think they want?"

Gian exhaled heavily, exhaustion lining every word that followed.

"Caio Sartori has the closest business relationship with us — he provides narcotics for our nightclubs, among other things. But he's been looking for an opportunity to absorb our territory for years."

Another long sigh.

"Accardi Bank holds our debts and wants our influence. And Castellano... they are our direct competitor. Their fight clubs draw more crowds than our nightclubs ever could. They want to see the Lombardi name erased."

Aren nodded slowly, filing the intel away like a mission briefing.

"You should not worry, Father," she said at last. The word felt strange on her tongue, but it came out more naturally than she expected. "I will be very careful."

Gian studied her face in silence.

There was something deeply unsettling in her eyes as she said those words — not the glassy vacancy of a high, nor the usual petulant spark, but a steadiness that felt displaced, as if she had witnessed things far beyond her years.

In that moment, he realized he didn't recognize the girl sitting across him at all.

He let it go for now.

"Be careful," he repeated.

Afterward, Gian walked her down to the entrance where the Lombardi sedan waited. They bid each other farewell, and Aren prepared to return to the hotel.

Gian watched her car until it disappeared around the corner, his hands clasped behind his back and his face very still.

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The drive back to the Lombardi Hotel was stifling.

Aren watched the city of Borgata blur past the window — a labyrinth of glass and concrete that felt, for a moment, like a cage.

Moments later, the car rolled past a small park, its iron fence bordering the edge of the financial district.

"Stop here, please," Aren said. "I would like to walk. Just for a moment. I need the air."

The driver pulled over without a word.

The park was nearly empty. The sky above was a bruised purple-grey that had begun to leak a fine, mist-like rain.

Aren found a bench near a weeping willow. It was damp, and the cold seeped through the thin fabric of her floral sundress, but she didn't mind.

She thought about her brother-in-arms.

She wondered if they had made it out of the bunker, whether the mission had succeeded, and who was making dinner now that she was gone.

She sat very still, her hands folded over her cream cardigan, watching the raindrops bead on the surface of her skin.

That was when she saw him.

Across the gravel path, tucked beneath the shadow of a wooden bench, sat a dog.

He was a scruffy, medium-sized creature of indeterminate golden retriever lineage, with

one ear that stood alert and another that bent forward like a broken hinge.

He wasn't barking or begging. He simply sat there, watching her with the patient sobriety of a creature who had seen far worse weather than a spring drizzle.

Aren didn't move.

She knew how to wait.

In her previous life, she had waited hours in rafters and crawlspaces for a target to emerge. She gave the dog the same respect.

Seven minutes passed.

The rain grew steadier, turning the air cold.

Finally, the dog stood up.

He trotted across the path with a slight limp, stopped at her knees, and rested his chin on her floral-print lap.

He looked up at her with amber eyes that seemed to see straight through the face of Ariana Lombardi.

Aren looked down at him for a long time.

She reached out, her fingers brushing the wet, coarse fur behind his ears.

"You've had a long day too."

She picked him up.

He was heavier than he looked, but she tucked him securely inside her cardigan, letting his warmth press against her chest.

She stood up and walked back to the car.

"I'm ready," Aren informed the driver as she climbed into the back seat, shielding the dog from the wind.

The driver shot a glance back, first at her damp cardigan, then at the scruffy head poking out from her lap.

A look of confusion and displeasure crossed his face.

"My lady, I thought the Lombardi Hotel didn't allow dogs."

"Oh." Aren startled, pausing for a moment. "I will... try to convince them."

The driver took her words for a tasteless joke. She was the Lombardi heiress; she could change the hotel policy with a single phone call.

He turned back, starting the engine and giving the matter no more thought.

"Does he have a name yet?" he asked, mostly to fill the silence.

"His name is Biscuit," Aren said brightly, stroking the dog's damp head.

Surprise crossed the driver's face.

"Biscuit?"

"Because he's the same color as a good biscuit." Aren smiled at the driver's reflection in

the mirror. "It is a dignified name."

The car drove away, its tires hissing against the wet asphalt.

Twenty meters away, shrouded in the shadows of a brick building, Jordan Marchetti didn't breathe.

He had come to the park for the same reason Aren had — the air in the Hub had become suffocating.

Jordan hated the Summits.

He hated the posturing, the cold financial cruelty of the older men, and the crushing weight of his father's expectations.

Earlier, standing at the far edge of the mahogany table behind his stone-faced father, Jordan had watched the girl in the sundress. He had watched the way she blinked — earnest and slow, like a creature that didn't understand why people were shouting.

When the bidding war had broken out, Jordan had remained silent.

His father, Eduardo, would have gutted him for interfering in a dispute over a disgraced socialite. But inside the pockets to his suit jacket, Jordan's hands had curled with white-knuckled force.

Now, with his collar turned up against the rain, he watched the empty bench where the girl had been.

He had seen her wait for the dog with the patience of someone who understood that you couldn't rush a creature's trust.

When she tucked the scruffy creature under her cardigan with that same quiet, apologetic grace she had used to break a man's arm, Jordan felt his heart do something violent and unfamiliar.

"Sir, it's raining heavier," his security detail muttered, stepping closer with an umbrella. "The Don is waiting. We should return to the car."

Jordan didn't blink.

"Not yet," he said, a low, jagged rasp.

He watched the tail lights of the Lombardi sedan disappear into the grey mist.

The cigarette tucked between his fingers was left to burn down to the filter, unsmoked.