

Mafia God 263

Chapter 263: I Broke Up With Ricardo

Even if she hadn't been there.

"I'm fine," Marco said.

On the sofa, Veronica shifted slightly.

"I'll give you guys a moment," she said, already beginning to rise.

But Marco reacted immediately.

"No, stay."

Veronica paused mid-motion, her eyes flicking between them. Marco's gaze didn't leave Valentina.

"You have to stay," he added. "I cannot be alone with her."

"I broke up with Ricardo."

"Which is why I am here," he said.

"I'll go," Veronica said again, more firmly this time, pushing herself up from the sofa. "I'll be right in the kitchen. Within earshot."

This time, Marco didn't stop her.

"I hate this," Valentina said. "I hate us like this."

Marco swallowed slightly. "I'm sorry I ruined everything," he said.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Val asked. "Why didn't you say something?"

"I guess I was being an idiot," Marco admitted. "As Luca has been constantly calling me for the past few days."

"This isn't funny," she whispered.

"I know," he said quietly.

"I cannot lose you, Marco," she said.

"I appreciate that," Marco said. "But I have always wanted one thing for you," he continued. "And I still want that one thing for you."

Valentina's brows furrowed slightly.

"And you should want that one thing for you and your baby," he added. "Your happiness," Marco said. He held her gaze as he asked the next question. "You love Ricardo?"

"Yes, yes I do. But—" Valentina barely got the words out before Marco lifted his hand slightly.

"Shhhh... no buts," he said softly. "I'll always be there when you need me," he continued. "I'll always be watching." His jaw tightened slightly. "I'll always be there to catch you. I will... I will..." he paused, the rest of the sentence catching in his throat. For a moment, it looked like he might say it—might let the truth slip out fully.

But he didn't. He swallowed it. Forced it down.

"Marry Ricardo."

Valentina's eyes glistened, her heart sinking even as she tried to hold onto the pieces of what he was saying. It sounded noble. It sounded right.

But it hurt. God, it hurt.

"Luca said I won't get to talk to you or see you," she said. "He says you are not allowed to be anywhere near me."

"Did he?" he said lightly, brushing it off. "He is exaggerating."

It was a lie. But it was easier to soften the truth than to let it crush her completely.

"But yeah... some things have to change, Val," he added, more honestly this time.

The boundary neither of them wanted—but both of them understood.

"You will be married to a man who clearly adores you," he continued. "Brave man too."

That earned the faintest reaction from her. A small, reluctant smile.

"He managed to come at me in his rage."

"I thought you were going to break him," she admitted.

Marco chuckled under his breath. "He is going to be your husband," he said. "Your protection covers him too."

"Marco..." she said gently. "Can I hug you?" she asked. "Please let me hug you... please."

Marco stepped forward. That was all it took. Valentina closed the distance between them in an instant, crashing into his chest. Her arms wrapped tightly around him, clinging, holding on. Marco held her just as tightly.

One arm came around her back, the other settling protectively at her shoulder, pulling her closer.

She really did feel small against him.

"You doing good?" he asked quietly.

Valentina nodded against his chest.

"You healthy?" he continued. "Baby is healthy?"

She nodded again.

"Good," he breathed. He closed his eyes briefly, and allowed himself to feel the warmth of her, the familiarity of her presence, the comfort that had always come so easily between them. He breathed her in and let himself have her. "I have to go, Val."

"No..." she said immediately, her grip tightening again.

Marco let out a soft chuckle. "Since when are you such a baby?" he teased lightly. He knew she hated that.

And sure enough— Valentina pulled back slightly, just enough to glare at him through tear-filled eyes, a faint, reluctant reaction breaking through her sadness.

"Take care," she said. "Don't be a stranger."

Marco nodded. "Say goodbye to Miss Scalese for me," he added, glancing briefly toward the direction of the kitchen, where he knew Veronica was close enough to hear everything, even if she hadn't stepped in. He turned and walked out.

Ricardo was in his element when Valentina arrived. The back room of the club buzzed with pre-night energy. The dancers were gathered in a loose semicircle. Ben stood beside Ricardo with a clipboard, pointing at time slots while Ricardo leaned over the papers, already correcting half of what was written.

"Too revealing," Ricardo said firmly, tapping one of the outfit sketches with two fingers. "We are not doing 'barely legal fantasy number three.'"

One of the girls rolled her eyes. "That's what the men want."

"That's what men think they want," Ricardo countered without missing a beat. "We give them mystery, they stay longer. We give them everything at once, they leave after one drink."

Another dancer smirked. "We get more money that way."

"And the club wants them to stay longer," Ricardo shot back, pointing at her lightly. "Spend more money. Not just stare and leave satisfied."

Ben snorted beside him. "Psychology of desire."

"Alright. Focus. Give it your best tonight. No excuses. No half-energy."

The girls responded with scattered affirmations. Ricardo gave a final nod, dismissing them with another clap.

And just as the group began to disperse— A voice called from the entrance.

"Ric?"

He turned immediately. One of the staff members stood there, gesturing down the hallway. "Your fiancée is here. I put her in your office."

"Right," he said after a beat. "Thank you." He gave the room one last look, then turned away and walked down the hallway. He pushed his office door open.

Valentina was already standing. She had been sitting before, but the moment he entered, she stood up.

"Hi," he said gently.