

## Mafia God 297

### Chapter 297: I Wish Things Were Different

Marco imagined himself at the engagement party—standing among the guests, watching her celebrate a future that did not include him. He forced a small, polite smile and shook his head. "No, no I will not. I don't want to put Ricardo in an awkward position," he said.

It was a lie, and they both knew it. Ricardo's comfort was merely a convenient excuse. Marco did not trust himself to watch the woman he loved pledge her life to another man.

"Marco...I wish things were different."

A quiet sigh escaped him as he leaned back in his chair. "Yeah," he admitted. "It's my fault. I complicated everything."

Valentina instinctively wanted to reassure him—to say the expected words: Don't blame yourself, or These things just happen. But the truth lodged stubbornly in her throat. Ever since the day he kissed her, nothing had felt simple. That single moment had awakened emotions that confused her.

She loved Ricardo. There was no doubt about that. He was kind and offered her a sense of stability. She was marrying him, building a future with him, and carrying his child.

And yet, there was Marco. Their connection was different, impossible to define. It felt deeper, their lives had become intertwined long before either of them realized it. When Marco was absent, something essential felt missing.

"You deserve to be happy, Val," he said quietly even though he didn't mean it. "Ricardo can give you that."

She nodded slowly. Her fingers moved of their own accord, guided by a will separate from her mind. Tentatively, Valentina placed her hand into Marco's much larger palm resting on the table. The contact was gentle, cautious. She laced her fingers with his and began to stroke his hand softly, the gesture intimate yet restrained. It was the only affection she could allow herself, the only indulgence that didn't feel like a complete betrayal.

Marco inhaled sharply, the simple touch sending a wave of emotion through him. He closed his hand around hers, and then shut his eyes. This was all they had—stolen moments in quiet corners, brief touches hidden from the world, glances heavy with meaning. Soon, she would stand before another man and say "I do," and with those words, he would lose her forever.

Valentina studied him as his eyes remained closed. Her gaze drifted to his lips, and before she could stop herself, the memory of their kiss replayed vividly in her mind.

It had been unexpected, born from a moment of emotional chaos, yet undeniably beautiful. She remembered the warmth of his mouth against hers, the way time had seemed to pause, and how every rational thought had momentarily dissolved. In that instant, she had been shocked—but beneath the shock had been an undeniable truth: she had wanted it.

Marco's eyes slowly opened, sensing her nearness. He didn't need words to understand what she was thinking. The intensity in her gaze mirrored his own unspoken memories.

Yeah, I'm thinking about it too, he thought. His hand lifted instinctively, drawn toward her face. He longed to brush a stray strand of hair behind her ear, to feel the softness of her skin beneath his fingertips, to close the distance that separated them. For a fleeting second, the world narrowed to just the two of them, balanced precariously on the edge of a decision that could change everything.

Then, reality intruded. The cheerful voice of the waitress cut through the moment. "Here's your bill," she said brightly, placing the small folder on the table.

Both of them pulled apart immediately. Valentina withdrew her hand, tucking it into her lap, while Marco cleared his throat and reached for his wallet. The spell was broken, leaving behind a lingering ache.

Marco slipped a note into the folder and offered the waitress a polite nod. As she walked away, he turned back to Valentina. "You should go, Val," he said gently.

Valentina nodded, understanding the unspoken meaning behind his words. She glanced briefly at her handbag, aware of the gun hidden inside. Oddly enough, the weapon felt less dangerous than the emotions swirling between them. "It's probably a good idea," she agreed softly. Then, offering him a small, bittersweet smile, she added, "I'll see you."

"Be careful," Marco reminded her.

She nodded once more and rose to her feet. With a gentle wave of her hand, she turned and walked out of the café, leaving Marco behind with nothing but the echo of their stolen moment.

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"I cannot believe you agreed to this!" Vee yelled at Luca the moment they stepped out of the vehicle in front of her house.

He rolled his eyes as he followed her toward the entrance. Of course, he would be on the receiving end of her anger. The woman was like dynamite—just a little flicker of heat and boom, she was exploding all over the place. "My permission wasn't requested for. I was merely invited!" he snapped back, his tone edged with irritation as Vee stormed into the house, pushing the door open with unnecessary force.

She spun around to face him, her eyes blazing with fury. "Do you even comprehend what this is?" she demanded, her hands gesturing wildly, the magnitude of the situation required physical emphasis. "Do you understand what this is? My sister—my only sister, my only family—oh, and pregnant, by the way—will be in the same room as your maniacal wife, who, might I remind you, once shot me!"

Luca exhaled slowly, pinching the bridge of his nose, trying to ward off an impending headache. "I understand," he replied. "But you have to understand, Vee—she... don't take this the wrong way—she is my wife."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Should I be comforted by that? Because the last time I checked, being your wife didn't stop her from putting a bullet in me."

He ignored the jab and continued, choosing his words carefully. "She can host a dinner with Winn Kane in my name, and he wouldn't say no to her."

"This is a disaster waiting to happen. You've got my hormonal, crazy sister, your unhinged wife with a trigger-happy history. What could possibly go wrong? Should we also invite a marching band and a few explosives just to complete the spectacle?"