

Mafia God 345

Chapter 345: You Should Go Back Home

Luca exhaled slowly, the faintest shake of his head following. "You should go back home."

Veronica blinked, her hand pausing where it rested near his hair. "What?"

Luca shut his eyes for a second, already regretting how it sounded.

"You don't want me here?" she asked.

His eyes opened immediately. "No. No, I do."

"This is not the welcome I expected," she said. "But you are on painkillers, so I'll allow it." She ran her fingers gently through his hair, smoothing it back from his forehead. Luca closed his eyes briefly at the touch.

"I was so scared."

A tear slipped from the corner of his eye, sliding down into his hairline. The drugs had stripped him of dignity, and Veronica had stripped him of the need to pretend.

"I thought he got you," he whispered.

"No," she said gently. "Marco did his best."

Luca let out a breath that was almost a laugh and almost another sob. "I owe that idiot everything. I'll rip out my own heart and hand it to him."

"Always morbid. Always." Veronica rolled her eyes. She let out a small sigh and brushed her thumb beneath Luca's eye, catching the last trace of that stubborn tear he had tried so hard to hide. "I have something to tell you," she said, there was a bright, almost breathless excitement in her tone.

"I have something I should tell you too."

"Okay," she said. "You go first."

"I love you."

A smile broke across her face, easy and warm and so full of relief it nearly hurt.

"I love you too, babe."

"But," he began, and already she hated that word, "I cannot keep endangering you."

Veronica frowned. "You were the one in the most danger. Look at you." Her hand gestured at him—at the IV lines, the bruising, the stiffness in the way he held himself, the entire absurd fact of him lying in a private medical suite looking like he had fought death and only barely agreed to postpone it.

Luca let out a strained breath. "Just let me get it out, okay?"

The plea in his voice stopped her.

"Sorry."

"I cannot bear to see you hurt," he said slowly. "I cannot bear even the thought of someone hurting you."

Vee's smile faded. Her excitement, the news perched right at the tip of her tongue, began to curl inward on itself.

Luca swallowed hard. His jaw flexed once, even now he wanted to take the words back before they fully formed. "And I am sorry," he said. "I'm sorry, it kills me... But you have to go, Bambola."

"I don't understand." She straightened slowly from where she had been sitting at the edge of the bed, the warmth of the moment vanishing so fast it felt like the air in the room had changed. One second she had been glowing with relief and love and news she could barely wait to tell him. The next, she was standing over him, staring down like she was trying to decide whether he was delirious, stupid, or both.

Luca looked up at her from the hospital bed, pale against the sheets, one cheek still damp, his body weak and bruised and full of drugs that made his eyes look heavier than usual. But there was no confusion in what he had said. "You have to leave," he said again. "Start a new life. Without me. Without any of this threat."

Vee just stared at him. For one long, stunned moment, she said nothing at all. "You better not mean that," she said at last. "It better be the damned painkillers talking because God help me, I will punch your nose out."

He only looked at her with unbearable sadness. "You have a free pass, Vee," he said. "Take it and leave. You will be safe. You will be happy—"

Before he could finish, she hit him in the face, open palm. His head turned slightly with the force of it.

Veronica stood there breathing hard, absolutely unapologetic. She did not care that he was injured. She did not care that he was in a hospital bed.

At this point, as far as she was concerned, his brain needed a hard reset and she was simply providing medical assistance.

"Now?" Vee snapped.

Luca turned his face back slowly, blinking at her.

"Now?" she repeated. "Are you—" She cut herself off hard, visibly restraining the much worse thing she clearly wanted to say.

"We will talk when you are better," she said, each word clipped and furious. "When you can stand on your own fucking two feet and be a man."

Luca opened his mouth, but she steamrolled right over him.

"You told me to learn," she said, pointing at him. "You told me to adapt. And when I do, when I actually do, you spring this shit on me?" Her eyes flashed with hurt now impossible to miss beneath the anger. "Are you fucking—" Again she stopped herself, drew in a sharp breath, then shook her head like if she kept speaking she might kill him herself and save everyone else the trouble.

"I'm gonna go sleep," she declared. "Cause right now your assholery is pissing me off!"

"Vee... listen to me," Luca started. He should have let her go. He knew that. He should have shut up.

But he couldn't. He needed to explain. Needed her to understand that this wasn't rejection, wasn't him loving her any less.

"I'm pregnant!" she finally said. Veronica let out a shaky breath. "I might as well tell you," she said, "because it seems your famiglia is planning on holding a party or something. Your father is acting weird."

Every thought in his head seemed to collide at once—shock, joy, terror, disbelief, awe. It hit him so hard it hurt.

"Bambola..." he breathed. "I thought..." he started, then stopped, swallowing hard.

"Yeah, I thought too." She gave a broken little laugh and wiped angrily at one eye before a tear could fall. "And this wasn't the way I thought we would...I thought you would be happy."

And all at once Luca understood with brutal clarity that he had just committed one of the greatest acts of stupidity in recorded history.

Not just bad timing. Catastrophic timing.

"Oh fuck!" Luca looked suddenly more awake than he had since she walked into the room, all the drugged slowness burned right out of his expression by sheer panic and horror at himself. "No—no, no, no," he muttered. He grabbed the IV line and yanked it out of his hand.

He shoved himself upright, swaying as his body protested violently. His legs were not ready. His ribs were not ready. Luca ignored them all and forced himself to his feet. "Vee..."

"No. No. No." Veronica threw a hand up the moment Luca tried to speak again, her eyes flashing with a fury sharpened by hurt. "You are not going to apologize for this. You are not going to apologize for ruining my moment. You ruined it already."

He stood unsteadily beside the bed, one hand braced against the rail. "Vee, if I had known—"

She narrowed her eyes immediately, pouncing on that. "So you admit your logic was stupid?" she demanded. "You... admit it?"

He took a breath. "No."

She stared at him, incredulous.

"The past few days," he continued, "all I have been thinking about is how I bulldozed through your happy life and ruined it." Luca swallowed hard, his gaze fixed on her. "You were just... a simple girl," he said. "With a sister who worships the ground you walk on."

"But you were happy," Luca finished. "And since we've been together, you have constantly needed protection—even though you refuse it half the time."

"I do not refuse it half the time," she muttered automatically, offended.

Luca gave her a look.

"Fine," she snapped. "Maybe forty percent."

"When Julian was talking," Luca said, "about everything he planned on doing to you..." He broke off for a second, jaw clenching. "I kept praying. To be able to see you one more time," he said. "To tell you how sorry I am. That the only thing I have brought you is hurt and pain."

"Luca..." she said softly. "I made peace with who you are," she said. "I did, because if I didn't, it meant I wouldn't be able to love you. And that seemed totally impossible. I want you to love me fiercely," she said. "I want you to love me dangerously. I want you to love me obsessively."

"When I got the news..." Her breath hitched, and this time she didn't stop the tear that slipped free. "I felt so happy, because I knew you would be happy..."

"I am," Luca said quickly. "I absolutely am. I am happy," he repeated. "I am sorry I ruined it. I...I will make it up to you, I promise."

Veronica folded her arms.

"Just..." He swallowed, looking absurdly earnest. "Can I have a redo?"

"You're stupid!" she said immediately, raising a hand. "It is already ruined."