

Mafia God 348

Chapter 348: I Admit That

"All of this," he continued, "is my fault. I admit that." His gaze remained fixed on her, steady enough to make lying feel impossible. "What you resorted to, I take responsibility for. Love in the famiglia," he said, "for a Don or for a future Don, is a luxury. Something we do not believe we are entitled to. Something so rare to find that we dismiss it entirely."

His mouth curved faintly then. "So we made an excuse that it belongs to weaker, happier people."

Bianca swallowed. She had never heard him speak like this.

"When I arranged your marriage to Luca," he said, "when you were nothing but five years old, I did not think it through. I thought lightning could not strike the same place twice. I suppose I was wrong." He exhaled once. "Lightning did strike twice. And you became its victim."

"For that," he said, "I apologize."

"Don—" Bianca began.

"Let me finish." He raised a hand. "But," he said, "nothing excuses treason."

There was the real reason he had come. The apology was honesty before judgment.

"I stand here still believing you had nothing to do with the latest events," he said. "So I am asking you, Bianca—tell me the truth, and I can make all of it go away. Because," he added, "I take responsibility."

Her throat tightened. "I did nothing on purpose, Don," she said quickly. "I swear. How would I know Julian was planning all of this?"

"Luca seems to think you are the brains," Massimo said.

"Luca is blinded, by his obsession with his mistress, and he will do anything to get rid of me. Please," she said, taking one small step forward before checking herself. "I don't know what else to say. My own father will not talk to me," and that was the line that finally cracked her voice.

"Your father," he said, "is a Don through and through."

Bianca looked away, swallowing hard.

"The faintest sniff of treason," Massimo continued, "and he has his hackles up." He paused, then added, "Remember what happened with your brother."

That made her snap her gaze back to him.

"Fratello didn't do anything treasonous," she said immediately.

Some part of her had been waiting years to say it out loud to someone who might understand the difference.

"No," he said. "But he had no moral compass. He had no humanity," Massimo went on. "He was dangerous for the famiglia."

There was no point arguing with that. Her brother had never needed a reason to be cruel. He only needed opportunity.

Massimo took another measured breath. "Your father has always put the famiglia first," he said. "Always." His tone softened by a fraction. "And until there is proof that you are innocent," he said, "I'm sorry, but all you will get is a cold shoulder."

Bianca nodded in understanding.

"I will not place this offer on the table any longer," Massimo said. "Tell me what I need to know."

"There is nothing to know," she said at last. "And for this humiliation, Don," she added, "I will be making my own demands when there is finally proof that I had nothing to do with Julian's treachery."

"As you wish." He gave one measured nod, turned, and walked out.

Bianca stood motionless for another second, listening to the silence he left behind. Then all at once her spine loosened, the strength drained out of her knees, and she sank back onto the sofa with a tired sigh so deep it felt torn from somewhere below her ribs.

She leaned her head against the backrest and shut her eyes. Julian. That idiot. That snake.

That catastrophic, selfish, rotten excuse for a man.

Bianca prayed that Julian would keep his stinking mouth shut until the very end. If he dragged her name into his filth to save his own skin, then she would be totally done for.

Salvadori Venezia glittered. Light poured from discreet chandeliers and struck glass, gold, and diamonds until every surface shone with offensive elegance. Behind one long viewing counter stood velvet trays filled with different cuts and sizes of diamonds, each one flashing under the showroom lights, competing for attention.

Carol stood before them. This, apparently, was her first official grandmother duty. Get Veronica a ring.

Simple enough in theory. In practice, Carol had discovered that nothing involving Genovese men was ever simple.

Massimo stood beside her, far too composed for her liking, hands resting lightly behind his back.

The jeweler, a silver-haired man with an immaculate suit and the eager smile of someone who knew exactly how much money was standing in front of him, laid out tray after tray with theatrical care. "This

oval cut is particularly exquisite," he said, lifting one ring with gloved fingers. "Elegant, timeless. Worthy of a love that has matured beautifully."

Carol's eyes narrowed slightly. Massimo, wisely, said nothing.

The jeweler smiled more broadly, clearly encouraged by the silence. "And for a lady of your refinement, Signora, I would perhaps suggest something classic yet commanding. A ring that reflects history, devotion, and enduring passion."

Carol turned her head very slowly. Then it dawned on her fully. He thought Massimo was buying the ring for her. Her mood soured instantly. She had not invited him on this particular errand.

That needed to be stated for the record. Carol had only allowed Massimo to tag along because, annoyingly enough, his claim that he knew the best jewelers in town had turned out to be true. Salvadori Venezia was exactly the sort of place men like him would know.

Still, allowing him to come was not the same as wanting him there. And now people were making assumptions.

Carol's jaw tightened as the jeweler stood across the glass counter with his polished smile and his absurd romantic nonsense. "I'm buying the ring for my son," she said crisply, pointing to the selected diamond. "He plans to propose to his girlfriend soon. They're having a baby."

"Would you please wrap this up?" Carol continued. Then she turned her head toward Massimo. "The only thing this one right here is good for is paying bills."