

Mafia God 358

Chapter 358: Good News Everywhere

"So," Marco said, "good news everywhere, uhn?"

Luca smiled. "Yeah," he said. "I'm going to be a father, and I'm going to be marrying her." He glanced briefly toward Veronica, who was still tangled up with her sister and laughing through tears. "Not necessarily in that order."

Marco barked out a laugh. "Congratulations."

"Leave some love for your mother." Carol's voice came from behind them, and both men turned. She had just finished with Nonnina and now stood there, looking every inch the formidable woman who had somehow become the gravitational center of this increasingly unruly family.

Marco's whole face changed the moment he saw her. A boyish grin broke through instantly. "Ma..." He crossed to her, took her hand first and lifted her fingers to his lips before pulling her into a hug.

It was a beautiful little contradiction, Luca thought. All that strength and loyalty and danger wrapped up in a man who still greeted Carol like a son grateful to have been chosen. And Carol, softened immediately. She did that only for him.

"My beautiful boy," Carol murmured. She pulled back from the hug, both hands still resting on his arms. "You look..." She paused. Carol narrowed her eyes, studying him from head to toe with increasing suspicion, as though he had somehow arrived from New York with a secret stitched into his skin and she had every intention of finding it.

"You feel..." She turned toward Luca. "Do you notice anything?"

Luca stared blankly. "No?"

Carol turned back to Marco, still unconvinced.

"What are you talking about, ma?" he asked, laughing softly now.

"I don't know..." she said thoughtfully. "You're just different."

Marco lifted a brow. "Different how?" he asked.

Carol's gaze swept over him again. There was nothing visibly wrong. Quite the opposite, really. He looked strong. But there was something else there too, under the surface, as if a storm he had been carrying for a long time had finally chosen a direction.

She just couldn't quite put her finger on it. Before she could try, Valentina came hurtling across the little reunion circle.

"Hey! Brother-in-law!"

Luca barely had enough warning to brace himself before she crashed into him with a full hug, nearly knocking the breath right back out of his recently repaired lungs. "Oh God," he groaned, catching her automatically anyway. "What hell do you have prepared for me?"

Valentina beamed up at him, and that beam alone was enough to make Luca deeply suspicious. She just grinned.

Luca looked heavenward. "God... no."

Veronica, watching from nearby, laughed under her breath. Marco looked away before anyone could catch the smile trying to break across his face.

Luca finally lowered his gaze to her stomach. "How is the little one doing?" he asked.

"It's a boy," Valentina said.

The little circle around them shifted with fresh delight. Luca smiled.

"Nice," he said. "So where is Ricardo? I thought he would be coming with you."

The change in Valentina's face was immediate. Her smile disappeared so quickly it felt like someone had blown out a candle.

Marco had been waiting for the question and still hated hearing it asked.

"I don't know," Val said quietly. "He just up and left."

The easy air of the reunion fractured.

Luca's head turned sharply toward Marco. "What?"

Veronica's brows pulled together. "Why?"

Marco let out a slow breath. "I've been trying to locate him."

Luca's entire body changed. The danger was back in him, quick and cold and absolute. "He better be dead," Luca snapped. "He better be fucking dead."

Veronica immediately reached for Luca's arm, fingers pressing lightly against him.

"Let's not ruin today," Val said quickly. Her tone was lighter than the words deserved, but everyone heard the strain in it.

Luca shut his mouth. The effort showed in the way his shoulders held, in the tight line of his jaw, in the look he shot Marco that promised this conversation was not over.

But he nodded once, because Valentina was standing right there, visibly trying to keep herself together, and because today—today of all days—was not meant to be swallowed whole by sadness.

Veronica squeezed Luca's arm once more before letting go. Carol stepped closer to Val without saying anything, just enough to be there.

Luca drew in a breath. Then another. When he could finally get a little space—he stepped away and walked toward Nonnina. "Nonni..."

She opened her arms. Luca went into them. Nonnina wrapped him up tightly. "Diavolino..." she murmured. "I'm so happy for you. Finally happy. Finally very happy. I can die knowing I did good."

"What will I do without you then?" Luca chuckled, lowering his head to kiss Nonnina's hair.

The old woman sniffled harder against his chest, her fingers clutching the back of his shirt. "You will manage," she muttered. "You've got love now."

He pulled back. "You are forbidden from dying."

"Ah," Nonnina said, dabbing at her face, "now you want to give me orders."

"Yes."

Nonnina laughed and smacked him on the chest. Around them, the airport pickup lane had become a loud, messy knot of family relief. Veronica and Valentina had already fallen into rapid conversation, talking over each other the way sisters did when too much had happened and there was no time to unpack it all one thing at a time.

In general, it was an emotional reunion. And rightly so. With everything they had been through—the blood, the fear, the waiting, the separations, the betrayals, the near-losses—they had earned this noise. This relief. This ridiculous, imperfect happiness spilling into the open air where strangers passing by could hear it and never understand what it had cost.

They spoke loudly. They joked. They interrupted one another. Bags were sorted. Doors opened and shut. People paired off into different cars.

And through all of it, Carol's eyes kept drifting back to Marco. Watching him. Really watching him.

The way he instinctively slowed his pace for Valentina. The way he had his hand in the small of her back. The way he opened the car door and made sure she was comfortable. The way his attention returned to her again and again.