

Mafia God 361

Chapter 361: It's Weird Between Us

Luca thought immediately of Marco as someone who had spent his life earning space without demanding it.

And then he thought of Veronica. Of the child. It was one thing to want distance for a child.

Another thing entirely to choose the center of the fire for himself.

"I cannot move to Italy permanently, Dad. My life is in New York," Luca continued. "I have—" He stopped, exhaled, then looked at his father. "Dad... no."

"What would you have me do?" Massimo asked. "The only one left is... your cousin," he said reluctantly. "And his father kept him away from all of this. He does not know the first thing about the famiglia."

"Which, frankly, sounds like excellent parenting."

That earned Luca a look.

Luca lifted both hands. "I'm serious. I don't know, Dad. There is enough time for all of this," Luca said at last. "Can we just celebrate tonight?"

"Of course," Massimo said. "I apologise." He gestured lightly toward the door. "Go. Go prepare."

Luca exhaled and pushed away from the spot where he'd been standing. "See you downstairs." He made it almost to the door before Massimo's voice stopped him.

"Oh, and Luca?"

Luca turned.

"I truly hope you get your happy ending." Massimo held his gaze. "I will do my best to protect you and Regina and your kid or kids..." One shoulder lifted faintly. "Whatever the case may be."

That pulled a smile from Luca.

"You are getting very soft with age."

"Can't we talk like men?"

"Dad? We don't talk about mushy stuff. It's weird between us. Mom's gotta go. This version of you is..." Luca made a ridiculous little gesture with his fingers, physically trying to pinch the sentiment out of the air. "It fucks me up." Luca, unwilling to remain in the room long enough for his father to say anything else heartfelt and permanently damage the emotional order of the universe, turned and hurried for the door.

"Pussy..." Don muttered under his breath.

Luca was already halfway into the corridor when he barked back, "I heard that!"

In the quiet that followed, Massimo smiled. It sat strangely on his face. He stood there alone in the suite, jacket settled, tie straight, grief still living somewhere in his bones but no longer the only thing occupying them. There was a funny feeling in his gut—odd, warm.

Luca was happy. And it made him happy. Massimo had spent so many years measuring his sons through strength, resilience, discipline, survival. Pride he understood. Pride had always come easily enough, even in silence, even at a distance. He had known how to watch Luca from afar and think, yes, that one is mine. He had known how to admire capability, how to reward ruthlessness, how to harden affection into expectation until it barely resembled love at all.

But this? This soft, absurd warmth at seeing his son genuinely happy? He was not used to it.

He was so used to them all being constantly constipated emotionally, so used to every expression of feeling in this family arriving in blood, or gunpowder, that he had nearly forgotten there was another way for a man to feel about his child.

Veronica and Valentina were being dressed by their stylists when Carol walked in. The women's dressing room was alive with perfume, soft chatter, and the subtle chaos that always came before an important evening. Garment bags hung from hooks. Makeup palettes lay open across a wide vanity. Hair tools hummed and clicked. Shoes, jewelry, and boxes were arranged.

And in the middle of it all sat Veronica and Valentina. Glowing. Veronica was nearly finished, her hair styled, her makeup soft but luminous, the engagement ring on her finger catching the light every time she moved her hand. Valentina, equally radiant, sat nearby in a swirl of fabric, somehow managing to complain, and supervise her own styling at the same time.

Carol stopped just inside the doorway. "Oh, you girls look just magnificent," she said, pressing a hand lightly to her chest. "Oh...I'm going to cry."

"Please don't," Veronica said at once, lifting both hands. "This baby is already making me cry a lot, and if you cry, I will cry. So please—don't cry."

The plea came out so quickly and so earnestly that everyone in the room burst into laughter.

Carol pressed her lips together, trying and failing to hold onto composure. "Well, that is extremely manipulative."

"It is self-defense," Veronica said, pointing at her own face to remind everyone that she was currently one sentimental comment away from dissolving.

Valentina gave a small snort. "She's not lying. I've watched her cry lately more times than she has in her entire life."

"Now you are just exaggerating," Veronica muttered.

Carol's expression shifted as a thought struck her. "I just saw Bianca. Why hasn't Luca sent her off already?" Carol asked. "Why is she still here?"

Valentina lit up immediately. "Actually," she said, raising a finger like a star pupil in a classroom of crimes, "that was my idea when Vee called to give me the news."

Carol turned to look at her fully. "I would like to understand why."

Val sat a little straighter in her chair, clearly pleased to finally explain herself. One stylist was pinning the fall of her dress while another adjusted a bracelet, but neither interruption dimmed her enthusiasm. "Well," she said, "it's complicated. But I kind of swore I was going to make her suffer."

Carol's brows rose.

Veronica groaned softly. "This is the part where I pretend I had no involvement."

"You didn't," Valentina said cheerfully. "This brilliance is all mine."

Carol folded her arms, intrigued now despite herself. "And?"

Valentina smiled. "What worse way is there," she asked, "than to make her watch—or at least hear—just how happy Vee makes Luca?"

"You're diabolical," Carol said. "I like it."

Valentina chuckled, deeply satisfied with herself.

Veronica covered her face with one hand. "I definitely should be afraid of this family."

"You should be," Carol and Valentina said at the same time.