

Mafia God 362

Chapter 362: You Know Me Too Well

That earned another round of laughter. The stylists resumed moving around them. Carol looked at the two girls again, two stunning, loveable women too pure for this world and also with a streak of craziness just right for this world.

This was madness. But it was theirs. And if Bianca had to hear the sound of Luca laughing with Veronica downstairs while the whole family gathered to celebrate what could never be hers, well—

Perhaps that was not cruelty, perhaps that was justice.

Marco was still searching for something to wear and already hated the entire process with a depth that felt spiritual. He hated suits, genuinely despised them. They were too stiff, and every formal occasion seemed to require him to wrap himself in one and pretend he was not thinking constantly about when he could take it off again.

Unfortunately, this occasion absolutely called for one. So there he was in the guest suite, barefoot, wearing nothing but a pair of shorts, bent over his half-unpacked travel bag. Shirts had already been tossed across the bed. One pair of trousers lay abandoned over a chair. A tie had been flung aside with visible resentment.

He combed through the bag again, muttering under his breath. "Come on," he said to no one. "Tell me I packed at least one thing." He heard the front door opening and closing and footsteps approaching. He knew exactly who it was. He would have known those footsteps anywhere.

A moment later Carol appeared in the doorway of the bedroom, one shoulder resting lightly against the frame, a blazer hanging from her hand.

"I thought you may be having problems with what to wear," she said.

Marco turned. "Ma..."

There was a smile in his voice before it even fully reached his mouth.

Carol lifted the blazer slightly. "Just throw it on over whatever you're comfortable in and you're good."

Marco walked toward her at once in relief. He took the blazer from her hands and looked it over. "You know me too well."

"Yeah," Carol said dryly. "Fortunately."

The blazer was perfect, of course. Good cut, understated, elegant without trying too hard.

He held it up against himself, already less doomed than he had been thirty seconds ago.

Carol had arrived for one purpose and was already preparing to pivot to another. "So..." she said.

Marco looked up.

"Valentina, uhn?"

He froze. The blazer lowered by an inch. Marco realised too late that the gift had strings attached and the strings were maternal in origin, which made them impossible to cut politely.

"Oh, don't give me that look, Marco," Carol said. "You are my son. What did you think? That I wasn't going to notice?"

Marco let out a slow breath and looked away, suddenly far more interested in the blazer hanging from his hand than in her face. "I'm sorry," he said. "I know... I know it's wrong." His jaw tightened slightly. "I know you're disappointed."

Carol stopped dead. Then she raised one dark, perfectly shaped brow in open disbelief. "Disappointed?"

Marco looked up.

"Why in the world," she asked, "would you think I would be disappointed? She is a fantastic girl."

All the lecture he thought she was going to give him—judgment, caution, loyalty, timing and not wanting him to die stupidly—this had not been one of them.

"She's engaged," he said quietly.

Carol's mouth twitched. "Yes... that. You know the rules of the famiglia," she continued. "So I will assume you have thought this through."

Marco gave a grim little nod. "Yes."

This was not some reckless crush he had stumbled into and could simply walk away from once he regained common sense. He had thought it through too much, if anything. Thought himself sick with it. Lied to himself for months. Stood back. Stayed quiet. Watched her with another man.

It wasn't.

"She was supposed to break it off," he said. "But Ricardo is gone. I am trying my damndest to find him," Marco continued. "Because it is getting difficult to hold on any longer."

"So," Carol said after a beat, "she feels the same way about you too?"

Marco's eyes flicked to hers. "Yes," he said. "Yes, she does." He looked down at the blazer in his hands, smiling in spite of himself now, in that small helpless way men did when they were already too far gone to save.

Carol saw the lightness she had noticed at the airport. Saw the boy in him that still surfaced when love found the exact crack in his armor and slipped through. "I'm glad," Carol said. "You say she wants to break it off with Ricardo," she continued, ticking the facts off neatly. "Ricardo is nowhere to be found, so..." She lifted a brow. "What do the rules say she should do?"

Marco frowned slightly, thinking not emotionally now but structurally. "Talk to the Don about it," he said.

Carol nodded once for him to keep going.

"But Luca isn't directly Ricardo's Don," Marco added. "And Val is yet to be claimed into the famiglia."

Then Carol smiled triumphantly.

"I think you have your answer, darling."

Marco stared at her. Slowly, realization dawned. Massimo. Of course. If Ricardo had effectively disappeared, if the engagement had to be addressed through authority, and if Valentina had not yet formally crossed into any branch of the famiglia, then the highest authority present could hear it.

The Don himself. Carol patted him lightly on the chest.

"Get dressed," she said. "Massimo is in the main living room if you want to see him before the party." She turned toward the door, clearly prepared to leave him with that bombshell and his pile of rejected clothing.

"Ma!"

Carol paused immediately and turned back. "Yes, baby?"

Because he was still Marco and therefore emotionally defective, he looked away and shrugged one shoulder.

"Nothing," he muttered. "Never mind."

Carol's face changed instantly. The softness disappeared. Her eyes narrowed. "Marco Costa Montgomery! You speak now!" she ordered.

Marco let out a breath. "It's nothing."

Carol took one slow step back into the room. "That is a lie."

"I was thinking..." Marco started, then immediately looked like he regretted beginning the sentence at all. He rubbed the back of his neck, eyes sliding away from hers before finally returning. "Well, I haven't talked to Val yet or anything," he said, "but if Ricardo is gone for good and this all works out..."

He paused. "Would you..." He cleared his throat. "Luca told me you were going to help raise their kid once it's born..."

The rest hovered there, unfinished but obvious. If this happened. If Val chose him. If all the broken pieces somehow settled into a life.

Would Carol make room for him too? Would there be space in her home—not just for Luca and Veronica's child, but for whatever future Marco was quietly daring to imagine?

"My beautiful boy," she said, and it sounded like the gentlest thing in the world. "I'd do anything for you. You and Luca both. But since there will apparently be children running around my house, you all better get me a bigger house."

The grin broke across his face so quickly and so fully that it made him look younger by years.

"Anything, Ma," he said. "Anything." He meant it.

A mansion. A palace. An island if she asked for it. Carol smiled, pleased by how easily she could still rescue him from drowning in his own feelings.

"Hurry," she said, heading for the door now. "Massi is in a good mood. I suggest you take advantage of that." She left him with that, closing the door behind her.

Marco stood there for a moment in the middle of the room. He stared at the door after she had gone, wondering—again, and never for the last time—what exactly he had done to deserve her.

Of all the people in the world to find him, to choose him, to call him son and mean it with every piece of herself, it had turned out to be Carol.

The most extraordinary woman God had ever bothered placing on earth. Marco let out a slow breath, and turned back to the bed, to the pile of rejected clothing and his former misery, and picked with far more confidence this time. A black shirt. Blue jeans.

He held them up against the blazer and nodded once. Yup. This would work quite well with the blazer.

Valentina and Veronica came down at the same time, escorted like royalty by Carol and Nonnina and the room changed the second they appeared at the top of the stairs.

The main living room had already settled into that rich, golden evening mood peculiar to old money and dangerous families. Low conversation drifted between the men gathered near the bar and fireplace—until the women appeared.

Then every voice stopped. Every single man turned. Massimo and Luca both locked onto Veronica at once, while Marco—poor bastard, completely and beautifully doomed—was glued to Valentina with such total devotion that he might as well have had it written across his forehead.