

Mafia God 364

Chapter 364: It's Your Damned Baby

The woman's recklessness. The man's relentless reach. The way he protected her. The way she still moved as though she knew—absolutely knew—he would be there when it mattered.

It struck too close. It was her and Luca in a dance. By the time the dancers hit their final dramatic hold and the room burst into applause, tears were already sliding down Veronica's cheeks.

Luca turned immediately. "Bambola?" he whispered.

Veronica laughed through it, already swiping furiously at her face with the tips of her fingers. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's your damned baby." She sniffled and shook her head. "I'm going to ruin my makeup."

"You'll still look gorgeous."

Veronica shot him a wet, unimpressed look. "You're still getting some tonight. Stop being a suck-up."

Around them, the room began settling again as the applause faded. Guests murmured to one another.

The lights rose once more. Don Genovese himself stepped into the center of the ballroom.

Massimo stood in the light. The room quieted in waves until even the drifting conversations at the back disappeared. He gave a brief speech, just enough to acknowledge the gathering, the family, the blessing of new life and new beginnings without drowning the moment in sentiment.

He turned slightly and extended one hand. "Veronica."

She looked at Luca. Luca gave her the smallest nod, his hand squeezing hers once before letting go.

Veronica moved to Massimo's side.

"I present to you, the Genovese Regina, responsible for the next generation of Genovese."

Applause rolled through the ballroom in warm waves, rising fast and full until even Veronica—still standing beside Massimo, still trying not to cry again in front of half the famiglia—had no choice but to laugh through the emotion of it.

The music began once more, and the room loosened back into motion. Congratulations came from every direction.

Men bowed their heads toward her. Women kissed the air near her cheeks, touched her arm, admired her dress, her ring. Veronica handled it as best she could, still glowing, still overwhelmed, still trying to remember that she was apparently now being presented to society as some kind of crowned future legend and not just a girl who had once spent her days in a pizza parlour.

Soon she was snatched away entirely by a circle of the wives who had seen enough rings in their time to know a very serious diamond when they saw one.

"Oh, let me see!"

"Look at the size of that stone!"

"Luciano did not come to play."

Kindly, blessedly, everyone was too polite to mention Bianca. No one said her name. No one asked questions. No one dragged the old wound into the middle of the evening to stain it. Whatever they thought, whatever they whispered privately, the room had collectively agreed to leave that ghost outside the ballroom doors.

Across the room, Luca stood speaking to one of the lieutenants, but his attention kept drifting right back to Veronica. He watched her laugh with the women, watched her tilt her head shyly when someone said something flattering, watched her touch the ring again.

He looked insufferably pleased with himself. The bandleader's voice rose over the room.

"A special request was made by Luciano Genovese." The chatter softened immediately. "Miss Veronica Scalese—this one's for you."

The women around her all turned at once, smiling knowingly, and Veronica looked across the ballroom just as Luca lifted his gaze and caught hers.

Her smile came easily. Then the song began.

"Gotta take a little time, little time to think things over..."

The first line had barely left the singer's mouth before Veronica felt that dangerous pressure behind her eyes, the one that warned her the tears were on their way again.

"Oh no," she muttered, already shaking her head in frustration.

The arrangement of the song had been edited, strings weaving under the melody. Veronica stood there trapped between laughter and emotion, wiping at her face and glaring uselessly at Luca from across the ballroom.

The music swelled. The chorus approached. And then, just as it hit that climbing, aching moment before release, Veronica watched the lead singer turn, grin, and throw the microphone in Luca's direction.

Without taking a breath, he caught the microphone just in time and hit that note.

"I wanna know what love is..." Luca sang it like he meant to drag the truth out of his own chest and lay it bare in front of everyone.

The room erupted instantly. Valentina screamed first—loud, delighted, completely unrestrained.

A few of the wives clapped their hands to their mouths in gleeful disbelief. Even the band looked entertained, clearly aware they had just become background musicians.

"I want you to show me..." Luca turned fully toward Veronica as he sang the next line, and whatever little control she had left over her face vanished completely.

She gawked at him. This man—this impossible, dangerous, emotionally damaged man was standing in the middle of a ballroom singing at her in front of God, family and allies.

"I wanna feel what love is..." He started walking toward her.

Valentina had one hand over her mouth and the other clutching Marco's arm like she might pass out from joy. Carol wondered when exactly both of her sons had become dramatic beyond repair. Massimo realised his son had somehow inherited all the worst and best parts of the family at once.

"I know you can show me..." Luca kept moving until he was right in front of Veronica.

The music swelled around them, the band carrying the moment forward, but for the two of them the room had gone strangely quiet. All the lights, all the laughter, all the spectacle of the evening blurred into the edges while he stood there holding her gaze with that devastating, steady intensity of his.

Veronica's eyes were full again. Apparently tonight her body had decided tears were now a permanent form of communication.

Luca lowered the microphone slightly, just enough that what he said next belonged only to her.