

Mafia God 396

Chapter 396: Do Defend Your Fighting Skills

Marco saw her first and slowed. "Oh no," he muttered.

Luca barely glanced up. Valentina stepped forward.

"Have you no sense?!" she descended on them both.

Marco opened his mouth. "Val—"

"Shut up."

He shut up.

"One minute after Nonnina dies," she snapped, pointing between them, "one minute!...and you both decide the best way to honour her memory is to act like animals for the whole world to see?"

Neither man answered. They stood there with their hands in their pockets, clothes rumpled, bodies bruised, faces a mess. Luca had dried blood near his mouth. Marco's cheek was swelling badly, one eye beginning to darken.

Valentina moved from one man to the other, voice rising with every word. "At a hospital? Really?"

Under normal circumstances, it would have been a funny sight. With her visibly pregnant stomach, Valentina looked quite small compared to the two of them, and yet she spoke as if she had birthed both men, raised them badly, and was now deeply disappointed in the results.

And something about it seemed familiar. It was as if Nonnina had taken over Valentina to speak her mind.

"Fighting like a bunch of knuckleheads who have no idea what to do with their time," Valentina went on, pacing in front of them. "What exactly were you showing off?" she demanded. "Your useless muscles or your half-baked fighting skills?"

Luca's head snapped slightly in offence. "Half—"

Marco's elbow landed sharply against his ribs. Luca stopped, glared at him, then wisely closed his mouth.

Valentina caught it anyway. "Oh, please. Do defend your fighting skills, Luca. I am dying to hear how impressive you think you looked being handcuffed in a hospital car park like a drunk idiot."

Marco's lips twitched. Valentina's eyes cut to him. The twitch died instantly.

"And you!" she said, turning an accusing finger to Marco. "When were you ever going to tell me something was wrong?"

Luca cleared his throat. "Bye," he said.

Then he turned and hurried away. Marco stared after the coward in disbelief. He turned back to her with a groan, dragging a hand down his bruised face. "I told you, there are things I cannot tell you."

"Fuck that shit! Vee is my sister," Val snapped. "I want to know whatever causes her distress, you stupid big baby!"

"Val?"

"No. No!" She pointed at him again, and somehow, despite being smaller than him by a ridiculous margin, she managed to make him take a step back. "How many times do I have to emphasise it? We only have each other. It has always been me and her. Before all of this. Before Luca. Before you."

Valentina's eyes shone, but she refused to cry. "So when something happens to her, I want to know. When she is in danger, I want to know." She took a breath, shaky but fierce.

"Val? Breathe..." Marco chipped in carefully.

"She blames herself," Val said. "She has no idea which decision she will make that will cause a storm in your lives. Every choice feels dangerous to her now. She thinks putting Nonnina in that taxi was the biggest mistake she could have made," Val continued. "She thinks Renato got to her because she was careless. She thinks if she had insisted on a hospital, if she had stayed closer, if she had done one tiny thing differently, Nonnina would still be alive."

"Val..."

"No." She shook her head sharply. "If you had told me what was happening, if anyone had bothered to inform me, don't you think I would have helped her earlier?"

Marco swallowed. "Val, please," he said quietly. "Just...can I say something?"

"You had every opportunity to say something. You didn't."

He opened his mouth. Nothing useful came out. "I'm sorry."

Val stared at him, hurt and furious and exhausted. "Yeah, like that fixes anything."

Then she turned and stormed upstairs toward the guest room. Marco remained in the living room, watching her go.

The house felt wrong without Nonnina in it. Marco exhaled. Everything was a mess. A big, giant mess.

Meanwhile, Luca reached the bedroom he now shared with Vee. Unpacked boxes and bags were still scattered everywhere from her move. The room should have looked like the beginning of something. A life being joined together. A home taking shape.

Instead, it looked like grief had walked in and sat on everything. Luca stopped at the doorway.

Vee was asleep on the bed, curled on her side, one hand tucked beneath her cheek. Her face was puffed from crying, eyes swollen even in sleep, cheeks still red and streaked.

He sighed, quietly peeled off his ruined clothes, and went into the shower to wash the day's mess off him.

By the time Luca got out of the shower, the water had washed blood from his skin, dust from his hair but it had done nothing for the heaviness sitting in his chest.

He stood in the bathroom for a moment, towel hanging low on his hips, staring at his own reflection in the fogged mirror. Bruise on his cheek. Split at his lip. Eyes too empty.

When he stepped back into the bedroom, Vee was still asleep. He turned toward the sofa, then stopped.

A small, stupid thought hit him. He had to pick out his own sleepwear. For thirty-one years, Nonnina had done things like that. She would leave nightclothes folded on a chair, muttering that he walked around the house like a shameless savage. Half the time, he didn't even wear them, preferring to sleep naked.

And still, she had kept doing it. Every night. His hand tightened around the towel.

"Fuck," he whispered. He made his way to the closet and opened the door. Inside, everything was arranged the way she had left it. Shirts by colour. Jackets by fabric. Shoes aligned. He grabbed the first comfortable thing he saw, put it on without caring whether it matched, then returned to the bed.

Vee stirred faintly when the mattress dipped.

"Shh," he whispered, sliding in beside her. His arm went around her automatically, pulling her into him. She came willingly even in sleep, her body seeking his warmth, her hand resting against his chest.