

Mafia God 417

Chapter 417: I'm Sorry To Do This

David gave a polite smile. "I'm sorry to do this, but I own the property opposite your store."

"Oh, you bought Heritage Slices?" Vee asked. Her tone was polite enough, but her eyes were already measuring him.

"Uh, yes," David said, giving a modest little smile. "I... uh... might need your help."

Vee stared at him. Tony looked up from the counter. "You want me to help you?" Vee asked slowly. "We are competitors."

David laughed quickly and lifted both hands. "Oh no, no, no. I know nothing about pizzas. It's just a café," he said. "Coffee, tea, parfaits, ice cream, youghurt, that kind of thing."

"So what do you want?"

"I'm new around here," David said. "Don't really know anyone yet, so I was thinking we could have some sort of arrangement."

"What arrangement?"

"If my customers need slices of pizza to go with their drinks, you could have them delivered. It's just a short walk. I would rather support a neighbour than start making terrible pizza myself."

Vee glanced toward the front window. Across the street, Heritage Slices looked bright and clean. A café there could bring foot traffic. Foot traffic meant customers. Customers meant Scalese Pizza might live again, despite the whispers. "We aren't open right now. I just came by to discuss with Tony here about managing the shop."

Tony straightened slightly.

"I own the place with my sister," Vee continued, "and she is expecting a baby. I have other commitments, so I guess you are in Tony's hands now."

David glanced briefly at Tony. "I hope they are capable hands."

"The best," Vee said without hesitation. "He has been with Scalese Pizza for years now."

"I will see you around, Miss Scalese."

"Apparently, you're across the street, so yes. Very likely."

His smile widened a little. "When I get the staff settled in, I will invite you over for a cup of coffee. I'll keep tea available too in case. And congratulations for your sister."

"Of course. Thank you."

David gave one final polite nod and walked out of the shop. The bell jingled above the door as he stepped back onto the sidewalk, crossed the street, and returned to his new shop, Heritage cafe.

Only then did her guard relax. This was the life she had to get used to now. Being suspicious of every stranger who came within a foot of her.

She turned away from the window and looked at Tony. "What do you think?"

He shrugged. "I think it will help us get some more people in here. Or at least get orders."

Vee looked around the shop. The repairs were good. Better than she expected. The walls had been repainted, the counter polished, the broken glass replaced. The old warmth was coming back slowly. "You really think people will come?"

Tony's face softened. "People love pizza, Vee. They forgive almost anything for good pizza."

She smiled faintly, then grew serious again. "So you think you can manage this by yourself? We will only come in a few days a week or whenever our schedules allow."

"I got you, Vee," Tony said. "No issues." He said it with the kind of confidence that made her want to believe him. Tony had always been like that—steady in the background. "But," he added, glancing around the shop, "I think we need to add a bit more space at the back. You, me and Val? That's too many people to cram into your makeshift office behind the counter."

Vee looked toward the narrow little corner they had always called an office. It was barely big enough for a desk and two chairs. "That's true."

Tony nodded. "Last time Val came in there with her belly, I thought one of us had to leave by the window."

Vee laughed. "I'll have a builder come by. Dad always wanted to use the back space for some nighttime outdoor dining. He never got to it." Her smile faded a little.

How could he? He had spent all their money and all his time on booze. Dreams were expensive. Drinking had been easier.

Tony seemed to sense the shift and cleared his throat. "I'll also need to employ staff."

"Shoot." Vee blinked. "I forgot about that."

"Unless you plan on having me cook, clean, deliver, manage accounts, answer phones and fight rude customers by myself."

Vee looked around again. "Wow," she murmured. "It's always been just us and Rosa for years, isn't it?"

Tony's face softened. "Yeah."

"We loved this place." Her voice dropped. "How did this happen?"

Tony leaned both hands on the counter. "Do not dwell on the past. That's not the way to move forward." He pointed toward the door. "Come on. Go. Head out. That wedding will not plan itself. I have everything handled." He straightened proudly. "You are looking at the new manager of Scalese Pizza Parlour. SPP."

"It sounds corporate." he shrugged once the words left his mouth.

"Okay, okay." She lifted both hands. "I'll get out of your hair."

"Good. I have managerial thinking to do."

"Please don't hurt yourself."

"Rude."

Vee smiled and moved toward the door. "Take care."

"You too, Vee."

She stepped outside, the little bell jingling behind her. The street felt normal—cars passing, people walking.

Her gaze drifted across the road to the new café. David was by the window, wiping it down. He looked up, caught her watching, and gave her a small wave.

Vee hesitated then she slowly raised her hand to return it.

Luca had been home for hours, and Vee was still nowhere. He stood in the living room for the third time in twenty minutes, checked his watch, then looked toward the foyer as if she might suddenly appear just because he was irritated enough. Nothing. Only the quiet elegance of the house stared back at him and the flowers he had had scattered everywhere to welcome her home.

Tonight was the night. The night she would stand beside him as Donna. She didn't know it yet, of course, because the whole thing was supposed to be a secret. A formal initiation. A declaration. The famiglia would bow to her tonight. She had already earned the place ten times over, her loyalty was undisputable but tonight, the famiglia would hear it from his mouth.