

Mafia God 429

Chapter 429: We Are Not Open Yet

"Really?" she asked, tilting her head with shameless interest. "Looks like you got more toned here..." Her fingers traced lightly down his torso when he came close enough, and Marco caught her wrist gently before her hand could wander lower.

His eyes met hers. "Don't start what you can't finish, love."

Val's brow lifted. "And since when haven't I been able to finish you?"

Marco's smile deepened. "Gospel..." He leaned down and kissed her.

The next day, Luca went to visit the pizza shop. He had absolutely no idea why he needed to go.

That was a lie. He knew exactly why.

Vee had everything handled. Between Tony managing the place, Val refusing to sell it, and Vee pretending she was not emotionally attached while making decisions about expansion, Scalese Pizza was already crawling back to life.

But with this new guy across the street, buying Marino's place, Luca wanted to get a lay of the land.

A hot, dreamy new neighbour, according to his fiancée. He still hated that phrase.

Luca parked in front of Scalese Pizza and stepped out of the car, buttoning his suit jacket. The shop looked better than the last time he saw it. Fresh paint, repaired sign, clean windows.

Tony was inside, speaking to a man who had a clipboard out.

Instead of going in, Luca stood outside for a moment, looking across the street. Heritage Café. Interesting.

The new owner hadn't really changed the name. He had simply removed Slices and replaced it with Café, which either meant he was too lazy to think of a proper name or he didn't give a shit about the business itself.

Through the café windows, he could see people moving around inside. Workers, from the look of it.

Maybe he had nothing to worry about. Still, it wouldn't hurt to check it out.

He crossed the street slowly, taking in the details as he approached. New paint on the door. Simple gold lettering. Clean windows. A chalkboard sign leaned near the entrance, advertising coffee, pastries, and opening soon.

Cute.

Luca pushed the door open. A small bell jingled above him. The café smelled of fresh wood. The interior had been redesigned with warm lighting, dark green walls, small round tables, brass fixtures.

A man stepped out from behind the counter. "We are not open yet."

Luca gave him a polite smile. "I gathered. I'd like to meet the owner."

The man's gaze flicked briefly over Luca's suit, watch, face. "He's in the back office."

"Thank you." Luca gave a small smile and moved past him.

The café was still unfinished in places. A ladder leaned near one wall. A stack of unopened cups sat on the counter. The espresso machine gleamed. Two workers were arranging chairs around little tables as Luca passed.

He noticed everything including the window that looked directly into Scalese Pizza. Maybe he was paranoid.

Paranoia had kept him alive.

He reached the back office and knocked with three fast taps.

A voice answered from inside. "Come in."

Luca pushed the door open and stepped in. David was seated in his new official chair behind a large desk. The office itself was almost empty. Just the desk, the chair, one empty shelf waiting to be filled, and bare walls.

David looked up. "What can I do for you?"

Luca closed the door behind him. "Nothing really. Just checking out the new enterprise."

The man was handsome, Luca admitted with irritation. "You didn't need to walk in here for that, Mr. Genovese." He said, cutting to the chase. He was never one for small talk.

Luca's brows lifted faintly. "You know who I am."

"Who doesn't?"

This man looked at him and clearly wasn't impressed.

"I hope my reputation precedes me then," Luca said.

David shrugged.

"My wife and her sister own the pizza parlour," Luca said.

"I heard the rumours," David said. "Bad for business."

Luca stepped closer to the desk. "And still, you choose to have a business relationship with her."

"Not exactly a relationship."

"No?"

"If my customers need pizza with their drinks, I merely have to walk into the shop right outside." David gestured lightly toward the street-facing wall. "Simple business sense. Besides," David added, "I heard the pizza is good."

"It is." Luca turned slightly, taking one last look around the office. "Well, have a good day, Mr...?"

David's eyes held his. "Call me David."

"Is that all I am getting?" Luca asked.

"Wouldn't want to make it easy on you to run that background check now, would I?"

Luca chuckled softly. "My reputation does precede me."

"It walked in before you did."

"Good. Saves time."

"Is it going to be a problem working with your wife?"

Luca's eyes cooled. "That depends."

"I wouldn't want to end up like the previous owner of this place."

"You shouldn't listen too much to rumours."

"It's hard not to," David said turning casually on his chair from side to side. "Everyone who walks in here has something to say about it."

Luca felt the hairs at the back of his neck rise. He had seen this man before. He tilted his head. "Have we met? You look very familiar."

"In passing," David said.

"Where?"

"I walked past you at the precinct when I went to visit Detective Voss," David said. "He sold this place to me. You stood out because you had a woman in your arms, clearly your...wife?"

"Ah..." Luca said slowly. "That must be it."

But he knew that wasn't it at all. Something about David felt familiar in a stranger way.

"I better let you get back to whatever it is you are doing." Luca stepped toward the door. "I do hope it will be a pleasure working with you."

"Hmmm..." David hummed.

Luca opened the door and walked out, moving back through the café. The bell jingled above his head as he stepped outside.

Only then did he finally realise something. Despite everything David seemed to know about him, despite his reputation, despite the rumours, there had been no fear in David's demeanor.

He had held Luca's gaze steadily all through. Only people who had reasons not to be were never afraid. Like when you have your own army or you were just as much a psychopath as he was. He shrugged it off for now and crossed the street back to Scalese Pizza.

The bell above the door rang when he stepped inside. Tony was behind the counter. Folded chairs leaned against the wall, and a new stack of menus sat near the register.

Valentina was seated at one of the customer tables, comfortably shameless, and wolfing down a bowl of ice cream. "I thought you lost your way when I saw you walk into the café."

Luca gave a slight chuckle and slipped his hands into his pockets. "Just wanted a cup of coffee."

Valentina snickered around her spoon. "Or you wanted to feel out the new neighbour."

Luca looked mildly offended. "You wound me."

Val dug her spoon back into the bowl. "You know, Luca, you cannot keep threatening everyone."

"I didn't..." Luca paused, searching his memory. "Threaten him."

"You may not do it with words. You have this swagger to you that makes everything you say sound threatening."

He smiled and pulled out the chair beside her, lowering himself into it. "Then how come you aren't threatened by me?"

Val scoffed. "I ain't no chicken."

Luca glanced at her. "Marco still asleep?"

"Like the dead," Val said.

"He had a long night."

Val scraped the last bit of ice cream from the bowl and sighed with satisfaction. "I'll go back home soon for lunch. What is it you boys were up to last night?"

Luca turned to her, face perfectly serious. "If I told you that, I'd have to kill you."

Valentina rolled her eyes. "You don't scare me." She shifted in her chair with a small grunt. The movement immediately wiped the humour from Luca's face. His gaze dropped to her stomach, then back to her face.

"How are you dealing with all of this?" he asked. "Do you need additional help? I can have ten assistants here in five minutes if you just need to put your feet up."

"It's okay," she said. "The doctors say I have to exercise. Seeing as I can no longer see my feet, exercise feels like a fantasy. So I just have to move around as much as I can."

"If you need me for anything... anything at all, I will be there." He then added, "Just don't make me wear any costumes, please."

She laughed, then readjusted herself in the chair. She kicked off her flip-flops, lifted both feet, and landed them comfortably on Luca's thighs. Val leaned back, completely shameless. "Come on, massage them. They are kind of swollen, but you know... whatever."

Luca stared at her feet then at her then back at her feet. "Valentina."

She wiggled her toes. "Rub."

He took one of Val's feet carefully in his hands and began to massage it.