

Mafia God 455

Chapter 455: I Just Got Back Too

The moment Val spotted her, her face lit up.

"Vee!"

"Oh my God," Vee breathed.

Val hurried as much as a heavily pregnant woman could hurry, which was less of a run and more of a determined waddle. Vee met her halfway, and the second Val reached her, she threw herself into her sister's arms.

Vee held on tightly, kissed her face once, then again, then pulled back only to kiss her cheek a third time. "Oh, look at you." Her eyes dropped to Val's stomach, widening. "You look very ready to pop."

Val laughed, breathless and bright. "They almost didn't let me on the flight back."

"You look like you could give birth anytime soon."

"I swear this baby already thinks my ribs are a vacation home."

Vee's face softened. "Oh, I missed you so much." She hugged her again.

"I just got back too, you know," Marco said from behind them.

Vee pulled back from Val and turned, as if she had only just remembered luggage and husbands existed.

Marco stood a few steps away, holding two suitcases and looking unfairly handsome.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Vee said quickly, moving toward him. "Come here." She pulled Marco into a hug, then immediately froze. "Oh wow..." Her hands pressed against his arms. "I did not realise you were this buff. Oh my..."

Marco chuckled. "Good to see you too, Vee."

"He's still my husband," Val called.

"Great job," Vee said, then winked at Val. "You married well."

Marco shook his head, but he was smiling as they reached Vee's car. It was parked close enough to the exit. Val had reached that stage of pregnancy where walking long distances seemed like a personal attack.

They all gathered into the car. The airport noise faded behind them once the doors shut. Marco glanced at the driver.

Marco looked at Vee. "New guard?"

Vee's smile thinned slightly. "Yeah... long story."

They pulled away from the airport, joining the traffic. Val leaned back with a long sigh, her palm resting over her belly.

"Oh, it's good to be home," she said.

Vee looked at her sister's face, the softness there, the tired joy.

Val turned her head. "How are things at the shop?"

Vee gave a small smile. "Everything is going smoothly. The yellow tape is gone, and Tony is back to working on the construction."

Val smiled, but it faded a little as another thought settled between them. She rubbed slow circles over her stomach. "And... uhm... Ricardo?"

Vee reached for Val's hand and squeezed it. "Whenever you are ready, sweetie. Luca spoke with his mother. He asked her to be patient until you return."

Val looked down at their joined hands. Vee could see the nerves in her sister's face, the fear tucked beneath the calm. There were some conversations that could bruise before they even began. "It's okay. You can handle it."

"Baby, you cannot travel anywhere any longer," Vee said gently.

Val turned her face toward the window as the city slipped past.

"The baby is almost ready to be here," Vee continued. "You will not be at his funeral." Vee squeezed her hand. "If you don't say your goodbyes... you will not forgive yourself."

Val swallowed. All the warmth from Santorini seemed far away—the sea, the sun, the laughter, the little bubble of peace she and Marco had built around themselves. Here, home came with unfinished grief waiting at the door. "I guess you're right...I just..." Her voice faded.

Vee knew some pain did not like being dragged into words. Sometimes it had to sit there first, until the person carrying it found the courage to name it. "I understand why this is hard for you, Val... Truly, I do. If I could take all of this away from you, trust me, I would."

Val looked at her then, eyes bright.

"All I ever want is for you to be free of hurt and pain," Vee continued. "To be happy. To enjoy your husband, your baby, your life."

"I am happy, Vee."

Vee's eyes searched hers.

"I am," Val insisted, a small smile touching her lips. "But I guess life isn't always perfect. There has to be some hurt and pain so we can appreciate our happiness the more."

"Look at you getting wiser."

Val lifted her chin. "I was always the wiser one."

"Hmmm..." Vee leaned back, pretending to consider it. "More level-headed, sure. Wiser? Leave that to the elder sister. I been on this earth longer than you have, sweetie."

"You are older by a few years, not a century."

"Experience is experience." Vee smiled, then pulled her close once more. "Oh, I really did miss you."

They gisted and gossiped all the way home. By the time they drove through the gates, the car was full of laughter. Vee had already heard different versions of Santorini—Val's romantic one, Marco's practical one.

The courtyard was warm. The house stood ahead with climbing flowers. Vee saw Luca waiting near the entrance.

He stood with his hands in his pockets, dark shirt fitted across his shoulders. The ladies exited the vehicle first, Vee stepping out easily while Marco came around to help Val down. Val accepted his hand with a small huff, one palm pressed to her lower back.

Luca stepped forward as Marco approached him. The two men hugged briefly, a firm clasp of shoulders. "Welcome back."

"Thanks, boss," Marco replied.

Luca's mouth twitched faintly. "You look well rested."

"Being on a honeymoon does that."

Luca's gaze moved to Val. "You look good." Luca had never been good at standing on uncertain ground, and with Val, he still did not know whether their relationship rested on stone or sinking sand. He did not know how she still felt about him.

"Thank you," she said, clipped. She turned and headed inside the house.

Marco glanced between them, then gave Luca an apologetic look before following Val. "I'll get the bags."

Luca pursed his lips and turned to Vee. "I'll wait for you at home."