

## Chapter 2

I didn't sleep that night.

Every time I closed my eyes, I woke up crying. By dawn, I just sat there—knees pulled to my chest, staring into the dark until the sky turned gray.

When Luca came home the next morning, I pretended to be asleep.

He took off his coat, waited for the chill to fade from his body, and then pulled me into his arms. I could feel his heartbeat, steady and strong, against my back.

"Baby, look," he said softly, opening his tablet.

A picture of an island glowed on the screen—white sand, blue water, the kind of paradise people write about.

"I just bought it," he said, his voice almost boyish. "It's for our child. And that's not all—I've started building amusement parks across the country.

Every one will carry our child's name. When we finally have one, I'll throw a hundred-day celebration. The whole city will come to celebrate."

He looked so proud of himself, so full of plans for a future I knew would never come.

He talked and talked, and it took him a full minute to realize I hadn't said a single word.

Then he heard me snifle.

He turned toward me—and froze. My face was wet with tears.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

He panicked instantly. Luca Moretti—the man who once faced down a

rival family's gunmen without blinking—was trembling because I was crying.

If I had one ounce of pain, he'd carry it a hundred times over. That was who he was—or who I thought he was.

I forced a small smile and wiped my eyes.

"It's nothing," I said. "I just watched a movie. The husband cheated on his wife."

He relaxed, a smile tugging at his lips. "Then you have nothing to worry about. The rest of the world might cheat, but not me. Never me."

He cupped my face. "I'll stay with you all day. Tell me what you want to eat. I'll cook."

I shook my head. "It's fine. I'm meeting some friends for lunch. You should go to work."

He hesitated, but Luca never liked arguing with me.

So he followed me instead.

When we entered the private dining room, laughter filled the air.

"I knew it!" one of my friends teased. "If Valeria's coming, Luca's coming too. He never lets her out of his sight."

Luca laughed, easy and charming, like he wasn't the most feared man in the city.

He handed out the gifts he'd brought, one by one, to every woman at the table.

Gasps followed.

"Oh my God, this is the new L.T jewelry line—this set costs seven

figures!”

“Luca, you spoil us every time! We’re only this lucky because of Valeria!”

They were right. Luca would do anything to make my friends like him, because when they smiled, I smiled. And he always said that my happiness was his oxygen.

Everyone at the table looked at me with open envy.

“Valeria, you’re so lucky,” one of them said dreamily. “He loves you so much.”

I smiled politely, the kind of smile that didn’t reach my eyes.

They couldn’t see that my luck was bleeding out of me, one quiet heartbeat at a time.

The laughter was still echoing when the door opened.

And there she was.

Bianca Rizzo.

Draped in pearls and confidence, she stepped into the room like she owned the air itself.

““Oh—did I walk into the wrong room?” she asked with a soft laugh. “Wait... aren’t these my old college friends?””

No one said a word. The tension in the room turned solid.

But Bianca didn’t seem to notice—or care.

She slid into the seat right across from me and glanced casually at the gift boxes in everyone’s hands.

“L.T.,” she said, smiling faintly. “Famous brand. Though I guess most of

you don't know—it's mine."

She looked right at me as she added, "My husband invested billions to start it two years ago. He worked so hard—built twenty-six stores worldwide. He's the best partner a woman could ask for."

Her gaze flicked toward Luca, just for a heartbeat, then back to me.

The smile that followed was razor-sharp.

I couldn't breathe.



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