

Undressed By The Mafia God #Chapter 101: You Have Two Choices - Read Undressed By The Mafia God Chapter 101: You Have Two Choices

Chapter 101: You Have Two Choices

Tears fell freely now, tracing bright lines down her pale cheeks. Her lips trembled, jaw tight, as she struggled to form words that wouldn't come. She had known that Luca was dangerous. But to see him like this...

Luca's hand reached for a knife from the array of tools spread meticulously on the desk. "I wanted to prolong his suffering..." he murmured.

"Luca..." she whispered, a plea that contained everything—fear, frustration. Her eyes were wide, tracking his movements.

"But since this is a show and tell..." Without a pause, he cut the rope holding Inferi's wrists, letting the man drop heavily to the floor with a thud that made the room shudder. Inferi's eyes, wide with terror, flicked to Vee as his body twisted weakly under the weight of his injuries.

The gag in his mouth muffled a desperate plea, but his eyes spoke volumes. He looked helpless, beaten, completely at the mercy of Luca's wrath.

"This isn't one of those times when you ask me to let someone go, I am going to kill him right here." The knife gleamed in his hand, poised above the broken man on the floor, an instrument of finality.

"You have two choices," he continued. "Walk away right now, and I will accept that you will never accept who I am. Or stay and watch me kill him, to prove to me that you accept all of me, that you want all of me."

Her chest heaved, lungs desperate for air.

And in that instant, Vee knew that whatever decision she made, nothing would ever be the same. To stay was to embrace his world, to accept his violence as part of the man she was falling for, to willingly walk into a darkness she had always feared. To walk away was to betray herself, to leave behind a connection she could never sever.

Luca despite all his evil, had drilled himself into her, so deep she couldn't find the entry point.

"God, please, Luca, don't do this." Behind Luca, Inferi struggled weakly on the floor, a ruined man waiting for the final sentence.

Luca looked only at her. "It's simple, Vee." The knife rested easily in his hand, an extension of him, as natural as breath. "I am giving you a choice. I don't have a gun to your head, now, do I? Are you ashamed of who I am, or do you accept who I am?"

"It's not so simple!" Vee yelled. "You're asking me to stand here while you take a life."

"I will count to ten." He gestured with the knife toward the steel door behind her. "There is the door. Here is me."

"Jesus!" Vee bit down on her lower lip. She squeezed her eyes shut. "Jesus Christ!"

"One..."

A strange, terrible calm slid over her skin. The panic that had been clawing at her lungs began to recede, not because the situation had softened, but because she suddenly understood something fundamental. Luca fed on fear. It validated him. It confirmed that the monster he believed himself to be was real.

"Two..."

Her eyes opened. She stepped toward him.

"Three..."

"I'm not running." She moved closer. "I will not run. I will stay."

Luca's brow lifted slightly, skeptical, amused. He thought she was bluffing.

"Four..."

Vee drew in a shaky breath, steadying herself against the tidal wave inside her. "I meant what I said last night. I said I love you. I meant it. But don't subject me to this. It will not change how I feel about you. It won't." She stepped even closer, until the knife hovered inches from her hip. "But it will most definitely change me."

She swallowed hard. "If you make me stand here and watch this, you are not testing my love. You are reshaping me into something I may never recognize again." Her hands came up slowly and pressed against his chest. "I love the man who protects. The man who terrifies everyone else but holds me like I matter."

Her eyes glistened, but she did not look away. "I know what you are. I accept what you are. But do not ask me to become it."

Inferi made a strangled sound on the floor. The knife gleamed between them.

"Five..." Luca moved behind Ineri now, the knife hovering at his throat. Vee's feet rooted to the floor, the edge of Luca's jacket gripped tightly in her fists. Her eyes, brimming with tears locked onto his, daring him to see, really see, what she was becoming in his presence.

If he wanted to witness the moment she turned—the moment she stepped fully into the darkness that danced alongside his light.

"Six..." he continued. He held the knife steady against Ineri's skin, a cold, absolute line of judgment, waiting. And in that pause, Luca realized a part of him wanted her to run, desperately. He wanted her to bolt, to retreat from this room of blood and fear, because maybe, just maybe, if she ran, he would see the futility of the obsession clawing at him from the inside.

Perhaps he would finally understand that what he wanted, what he needed, could never be his. But she did not move. Not an inch. Her body remained a tense, vibrant counterpoint to the lethality that surrounded her.

"Seven..." he murmured, and the faintest twitch appeared at the corner of his lip, imperceptible but telling. He saw it in her posture—the settling of her shoulders, the way her chin lifted, proud and resolute. Acceptance radiated off her in waves, not just of submission but of understanding.

She was choosing this path, choosing to meet him in his darkness. She would own her own darkness for him, and the knowledge that she could do this, that she would do this, left him enthralled.

"Eight..." His mind flicked to his father, the patriarch who demanded strength in every member of the Genovese household. If his father could see her now, he would recognize her instantly as the bride the family had always needed.

"Nine..." He couldn't do it. He couldn't let this continue. She was the good to his bad, the light to his chaos, and he couldn't push her into the abyss he inhabited. "Go! Now!" he snapped.

And then, she smiled, a triumphant, wicked, defiant smile.

"Oh, you bitch!" he hissed through clenched teeth. She had met him in his world, had stared at the abyss and chosen not to look away.

She had seen him, all of him, and she had not fled. And in that refusal, in that single act of defiance, she had claimed a piece of him he wasn't willing to give to anyone.

Vee's laugh echoed, a bright, ringing sound that felt sacrilegious against the lingering metallic tang of blood in the air. She hurried past the threshold of the room. She didn't

look back, before slipping out of the chamber, leaving Luca alone with the finality of his actions.

He glanced down at Ineri, already bored. He held the knife steady and sliced his neck clean through. His body landed forward, sprawled grotesquely on the floor. The anger that had built in his chest—the searing, relentless fire that had demanded attention all day—dissolved in that moment, leaving only an icy satisfaction.

He had defended what was his obsession. There would be others, of course, those foolish enough to challenge or threaten her, but they would fall eventually.

Dropping the knife onto the desk, he pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at the residual blood on his fingers. He then left the room and headed back to his office.

He found her waiting, the subtle curve of her hips framed by the tight fabric of her black dress, the arm warmers adding a hint of rebellious edge to her elegance. The fire in her eyes met his with unflinching boldness, a silent challenge that thrilled and unnerved him in equal measure.

"What now?" she asked.

"Now," he said, "I fuck you. Go home and wait for me."

Vee's lips curved into a hard smile, and she nodded. She slipped his jacket from her shoulders, shedding his protection to reveal herself entirely to him.

"No, take it." His hand grazed hers as he replaced the jacket over her shoulders, the heat of his touch lingering. "Oh, and Vee?" His lips twisted into a dangerous smile, dark amusement flickering in his icy blue eyes. "You better be wearing that dress when I come home... and you better be on your knees."

She swallowed, a shiver coursing through her at the tone in his voice, the thrill of being claimed, tested, and desired all at once. Yet she held his gaze with unflinching audacity, her lips curling into a grin.

She stepped closer, bridging the space between them, and pressed her lips hard against his in a kiss.

"I'll be waiting," she whispered against him, pulling back just enough to let the heat of anticipation linger between them, letting him feel the hunger in her eyes as clearly as he felt the thrill of possession in his chest. She turned gracefully as she strode toward the door, leaving him standing in the office.

Chapter 102: Pick A Safe Word

Luca arrived home later that night with a barely contained energy thrumming beneath his skin. It was subtle, but anyone who knew him would see it in the looseness of his shoulders, in the faint curve at the edge of his mouth, in the way his stride carried purpose.

One thing still lingered at the back of his mind. Marco's words earlier. Valentina had requested a meeting. Vee's sister. Why? Whatever she wanted would not be trivial. But the thought dimmed quickly beneath the heat rising in his chest. That could wait.

Because tonight, his obsession had chosen him.

"Holy Mary, you are done with dinner already?" Nonnina called as she stepped back into the dining room, wiping her hands on a dish towel.

"Yup. It was delicious," Luca replied, finishing the last of his juice in a single swallow. "Has Veronica been informed I am back home?"

"Of course," Nonnina said. "You want me to get her?"

"No. I'll go myself." He rose smoothly from the table, leaned down to press a kiss to Nonnina's cheek. Then he turned, already moving toward the rear wing of the estate.

He reached her door. He had mentally prepared for this. He would walk in, claim her, take what she had offered. That was the plan.

He pushed the door open.

And everything inside him snapped.

She was still wearing the same black dress from earlier.

And she was on her knees.

Waiting.

Her hands rested lightly on her thighs. Her chin was lifted, eyes locked onto him with unwavering intensity.

She had taken his command and transformed it into power of her own.

He stepped fully into the room and shut the door behind him. His eyes roamed over her slowly, unashamedly, memorizing every detail.

He had expected submission.

What he found was surrendered sovereignty.

"I've been waiting for you."

Luca stepped closer. "Pick a safe word."

Her brows knit slightly. "I don't understand."

His gaze remained locked on her. "One word that means you want me to immediately stop whatever it is I will most definitely be doing to you."

"Crimson," she said after a breath.

A corner of his mouth lifted. "Nice choice."

He stepped closer still, towering over her. "Now tell me what you want, Bambola."

Her throat tightened. "I want you to make me yours," she said.

His lips curved into an arrogant smile. "You are already mine. Try again."

She swallowed and lifted her eyes to his fully. "I want you... to fuck me."

He looked down at her, the muscle in his jaw tightening slightly. "How desperately?"

Her breath hitched. "Very much."

His gaze sharpened. "You are not trying hard enough."

He took a deliberate step back, testing her, widening the distance just enough to make her feel it. The threat of him walking away sliced through her composure.

"Please!" Vee blurted. She shifted forward instinctively on her knees. "Please, Luca. I want you. I want it all with you. Just you. I want to experience everything with you. The darkness. The fire. Please... don't walk away from me."

"Do you understand what you are begging for?" he asked quietly. "You will be bound to me. The only way out is if I let you go or death."

Vee locked eyes with him. "The only way out is death," she clarified. "It works both ways, doesn't it?" She looked resolute. Fierce in her devotion.

Luca crouched down in front of her, bringing himself eye level so she could see him clearly. So she could see that he was not posturing.

"Think about this," he said quietly. "I'll give you the world. I'll protect you with my life." His jaw tightened slightly. "But you cannot leave me."

He was confessing the shape of his devotion. It was territorial, absolute and dangerous.

"You cannot leave me," Vee echoed back immediately, her chin lifting.

His brow furrowed. "You suck at this!" He rose abruptly to his feet, frustration slicing through his composure.

"If it applies to me, it applies to you!" she snapped, rising onto her knees slightly.

"It already applies to me!" he shouted. "It has applied to me from the very first moment I set my eyes on you! It has... I'm obsessed with you."

"Why can't you just say you love me?" she demanded.

He looked at her like she had missed the point entirely. "Because what I feel for you," he said, "it goes way beyond love. It's too little a word to compare."

He stepped closer, towering over her again. "What I feel is consuming. It is violent."

"Luca...Please take me. Please..."

He bent down without another word, slid one arm beneath her knees and the other behind her back, and lifted her effortlessly.

She could feel his strength, the steady rhythm of his breathing, the tension coiled in every muscle. His gaze traveled slowly down her body as he moved.

He stepped out of the apartment and back toward the mansion.

He climbed the staircase, her body secure against him.

He pushed open the door to his bedroom with his shoulder and stepped inside.

He lowered her carefully onto her feet in the center of the room, but he did not step away. His hands remained on her waist, fingers firm.

He kissed her first, hard.

When he stepped away and turned to the dresser, where he had already prepared his array of toys, Vee's breath hitched behind him.

He was back in front of her in an instant, fingers brushing her waist. "It's not too late to stop, Bambola."

She shook her head, chest rising and falling faster now. "I'm ready."

He studied her face for a second longer, searching for hesitation, for doubt. He found neither.

"Good," he murmured.

The blindfold came first. He moved behind her slowly. When the cloth slid over her eyes, her world dissolved into darkness.

"I want to see you," she protested softly.

His lips brushed the shell of her ear. "Not tonight. Tonight, all I want you to do is feel. Okay?"

She swallowed. "Okay."

(Going to bed, decided to post in advance celebrating 100 power stones. Yay! On to the next: 200 power stones)

Chapter 103: Forgot About Those Ones

The blindfold changed everything. Without sight, every breath he took felt closer.

He kissed her neck. The scrape of his teeth made her fingers curl. He unbuttoned her dress one button at a time, drawing out the anticipation until it throbbed beneath her skin. When he pushed the fabric down her arms, it pooled at her feet.

The unclasping of her bra felt louder than it should have. The garment fell away.

Then his hands followed.

He cupped her breasts, weighing them, thumbs grazing over her nipples just enough to make them tighten. When he pinched one peak between his fingers, a tremor ran through her body.

She bit her lip to swallow the sound building in her throat. Her restraint cracked into a shaky breath as his mouth replaced his fingers. He circled the areola with his tongue, then sucked lightly before releasing her.

The pause was cruel.

She strained toward him instinctively, seeking more, but he stepped back. She heard a faint metallic clink. Her pulse spiked.

"Stay still," he instructed.

The first clamp brushed her nipple before closing around it. The sudden pressure made her gasp, back arching sharply.

He adjusted it slightly, watching her body respond. The second clamp followed, equalizing the sensation.

Vee's breathing turned ragged. Each small movement tugged at the delicate skin, sending sparks down her spine.

Luca stepped back to admire the sight. Her breasts lifted and exposed, nipples darkened and trapped in silver. He moved closer again, sliding a finger lightly down her sternum, over her stomach, lower. Every brush of his knuckles made the clamps shift, and each shift drew another fragile sound from her lips. "How does it feel?" he asked quietly.

"Intense," she whispered. "Good. Too much. I don't know."

He smiled against her shoulder. He let his hands roam, mapping her body. When he kissed her again, her moan escaped freely. He lifted her again, and laid her back against the sheets. Then stripped away the last of her clothes. Fabric slid down her hips and off her legs until there was nothing between her skin and the air. He went to the dresser.

The shibari ropes came next.

He knelt at the edge of the bed and lifted one of her ankles, testing the flexibility of her leg before guiding it outward. The rope wrapped snugly around her ankle, then secured to the opposite side of the bedframe. He repeated the process with the other leg, spreading her wider, opening her.

The position left her exposed in a way that made her stomach flutter.

She inhaled slowly, feeling the stretch in her thighs.

He stepped back to look at her.

Every part of her offered without being forced.

He stripped out of his own clothes, tossing them aside, then returned to the bed. This time, he lowered himself between her legs slowly, his presence announced by the heat of his body and the brush of his hands against her thighs.

When his mouth pressed against her clit, she sucked in a sharp breath.

He kissed her. The scrape of his stubble sent sparks through her nerves.

She felt seen.

His fingers inside her, finding her center, circling gently before narrowing their attention to her g spot. Her hips jerked instinctively against the ropes.

He replaced his fingers with his mouth, and the sudden warmth made her gasp.

The blindfold intensified everything. The suction. The slow rhythm of his tongue. The way he paused just long enough to make her chase sensation that wasn't there.

Her hands dropped automatically, fingers tangling into his hair.

"Ah..." he muttered against her skin, amusement threading through his voice. "Forgot about those ones."

He pulled away, leaving her suspended in unfinished pleasure.

The absence was aching.

She lifted her head slightly. "About what?"

He did not answer right away. She heard the faint click of metal being picked up.

He returned to the bed and lifted one of her wrists gently.

"These," he said softly.

The cuff snapped closed around her wrist. He secured the other just as carefully.

He returned to her, lowering himself between her thighs again. His mouth found her with renewed purpose. He built her climax. Layer by careful layer.

Vee's breathing unraveled into soft, broken sounds. The blindfold left her stranded inside sensation. Every stroke of his tongue felt magnified. Every drag of his lips pulled a tremor from somewhere deep in her belly.

When he tugged lightly on the chain between the nipple clamps, the sharp pull sent a streak of heat through her body. Her hips jerked upward in response, a cry spilling from her lips.

The combination was cruel. Pleasure blooming, pain slicing through it, neither allowed to stand alone.

Luca felt her orgasm approaching. The way her thighs trembled. The way her toes curled against the sheets. He reached for himself, stroking slowly, matching the rhythm he was setting for her.

"I'm going to cum!" Vee cried as she pushed her hips toward him, chasing what he was giving.

He increased the pressure, pulling the chain of the clamps just enough to sharpen the edge.

Her release tore out of her. "Oh God... Ah!"

When he gave another firm yank to the chain at the height of it, the shock of sensation fractured her climax. Pleasure and pain fused into a single blinding wave.

Her entire body shook. The ropes held her open as she convulsed beneath him.

"God! Fuck!" she cried.

He then positioned himself between her legs, dragging his cock through her cum. She was still trembling when he leaned over her and lifted her bound wrists slightly higher.

"Breathe," he murmured.

She tried.

When he entered her, he thrust forward in one decisive motion, shattering her barrier.

The intrusion stole the air from her lungs. She cried out at the sudden fullness, the stretch, the pain, the overwhelming sensation of being claimed so completely.

It hurt. It filled. It shocked.

He stilled for a moment once he was fully inside her as his own head reeled from the sensation. He could feel the tightness around him, the way she fluttered and resisted.

Chapter 104: You Have The Safe Word

"I told you I wouldn't be gentle."

She nodded weakly beneath the blindfold, breath shaky. She had known. She had wanted the intensity, the surrender of it.

He moved again, letting her feel every inch of him. Each thrust tugged at the clamps. Each shift of her hips tightened the ropes at her ankles. Luca moved inside her with steady force, hips driving forward and pulling back with an intensity that bordered on ruthless.

His fingers tangled briefly in the chain between the clamps, the other folded into a fistful of hair.

A groan tore from his throat. Being inside her, finally, felt overwhelming. She was tight, impossibly tight, her body clenching around him.

He glanced down to where they were joined, watching the rhythm of his body disappearing into hers. The sight alone pushed him closer to the edge. He increased his pace, each thrust landing deeper, harder, making sure she felt the full weight of him every time he drove forward.

Vee writhed beneath him, torn between the sting and the swelling heat building again in her core. Her cries filled the room. She urged him on even as her voice trembled with overload. "Luca—" she gasped.

"You have the safe word," he whispered against her ear. "You want me to stop? Use it." He released the chain and slid his hand between them, fingers searching until he found her clit that had already been made raw from earlier. When he began to rub her there, the change in her reaction was immediate.

Her mouth fell open, frozen in a breath she could not seem to complete. Air rushed in and out in shallow pulls. Her body strained against the cuffs, against the ropes, chasing sensation she could not escape. Her lungs burned. Her thoughts fractured into flashes of feeling.

Pain bled into pleasure until she could not tell where one ended and the other began.

Each thrust drove into her while his fingers worked relentlessly, pushing her body toward another peak whether she felt ready or not.

She could not close her mouth. Could not steady her breathing. Every nerve felt lit from the inside.

He groaned. "I knew fucking you would be beautiful." His hand unclasped the nipple clamps and letting the sudden freedom of her peaks pull a sharp gasp from her lips. He bent forward, mouth closing over one, sucking with hunger, drawing her further toward the edge.

"God! Fuck me!" Vee screamed, every word a ragged plea as another orgasm began to coil inside her. "Please...please...please...please..."

Luca felt the storm building inside him, a slow-motion train wreck threatening to consume him. But he held back, tethering himself to the moment, needing her climax first. He yanked the blindfold from her face in one swift motion, letting their eyes meet as he kissed her.

He swallowed the jumbled sounds she made, tongues tangling, lips pressing with a possessive intensity. Her body clenched around him, spine arching, and she let out a

long, piercing cry. At the very last second, he pulled out, jerking himself hard against her chest, grunts ripping from his throat, muscles taut and coiling.

Vee watched, breathless, her body still thrumming from the waves of her own release. He was magnificent in motion, every line of him coiled with power and lust.

When his climax finally ebbed, leaving him trembling and spent, he reached into the bedside drawer and retrieved wipes. His hands were careful as he started cleaning her chest. His fingers grazed over the tender, overstimulated skin, following the curves he had just worshiped with mouth and hand.

He moved lower, cleaning between her thighs. She flinched slightly, the faint twitch of sensitivity sending a rush of pride through him. Her body was raw, marked by both their pleasure and the evidence of her release—blood mingled with cum on the sheets. He traced the sight with careful fingers, feeling the satisfaction of having been the one to go where no man had gone before.

He worked carefully, untying the ropes from her ankles with fingers that had only minutes ago been merciless. The fibers slid away from her skin, leaving faint red impressions. He removed the cuffs from her wrists next, rubbing gently where the metal had pressed into her flesh. Her arms fell limp to the mattress.

He shifted lower, his palms wrapping around her calves, kneading the trembling muscles with slow strokes. "You okay?" he asked. For the first time tonight, he looked uncertain. As if the man who had dominated her so completely was now afraid he might have gone too far.

Vee nodded. The release had wrung her out, left her open and fragile.

"Bambola?"

"Yes... yes... I'm fine," she breathed. "It's just overwhelming."

Her hand moved instinctively toward the sheets, seeking cover, a shield against how exposed she felt now that the intensity had passed. But Luca caught her wrist and smacked her fingers lightly away.

"Don't."

"Luca... I need to..." she began, her vulnerability surfacing.

"Don't take the view away from me," he murmured, leaning down to press a slow kiss to her belly button. The intimacy of it was different from before. Less punishing. He stretched out beside her, one arm propped beneath his head, the other hand roaming lazily up and down her chest.

His fingers traced over the marks he had left, following the faint bruises, the flushed skin. He leaned up to kiss her neck in appreciation. His lips lingered at the sensitive spot beneath her ear, drawing a soft shiver from her.

The contrast undid her.

Minutes ago, he had been relentless. Now he was being gentle.

"Was it good for you," she asked suddenly, "as much as it was for me?"

Shyness crept over her features, warming her cheeks. For all her boldness, she still needed reassurance.

He let out a low breath. "You have no idea." His eyes moved down her body slowly, openly. "I've never felt myself that hard before." He shifted slightly, pressing his hips against her to prove it. "And I'm still hard."

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard. Love you. Whenever you want to give Vee and Luca some ass whooping, you just let me know.)

Chapter 105: Only Way Out Is Death

She giggled softly.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked. The dominant in him wanted to revel. The man in him needed to know.

"Yes," she admitted, holding his gaze. "But it was a good kind of hurt."

He searched her eyes for regret. There was none. Only exhaustion.

"You're a good girl, love," he said, brushing his thumb over her lower lip. "You took me like a badass."

He chuckled softly, but there was pride in it. Pride in her strength. In her surrender. In the way she had trusted him with her pain and let him push her to the edge of herself.

She turned slightly toward him.

"I love you," she whispered.

"And I'm obsessed with you, pizza girl." His mouth came down on hers. His tongue pushed into her mouth, deeper, tangling with hers.

He pulled back just enough to look at her. "Can you take me again?"

Vee nodded, breath already uneven.

His hand came down sharply against her ass. The sting shot through her and she yelped instinctively.

"Yes!" she corrected quickly.

He studied her face. "You're sore. Don't lie." He knew her body. He knew what he had done to it.

She smiled anyway, lips swollen from his kisses, eyes still heavy with afterglow. "Yes, I am," she admitted. "But I do want to feel you inside me over and over again."

A proud smile curved across his face in approval. He shifted closer, sliding one hand under her thigh and lifting her leg over his hip. The movement opened her again, exposed her to him in a way that felt intimate rather than brutal this time.

He positioned himself carefully.

When he entered her, it was nothing like before.

This time he pushed in slowly, watching her face as he did. She was still wet from earlier, her body pliant and welcoming despite the soreness she tried to ignore. The lubrication made it easier, but not effortless.

Vee held his gaze as he pressed deeper, her fingers instinctively digging into his arm. The first stretch sent a sharp sting through her. She hadn't realized just how tender she was until he began to fill her again.

He paused halfway in, jaw tightening as he felt the way her body clenched around him.

"You feel so good, Bambola," he grunted. "Your pussy is so goddamned tight."

He felt the tremor in her thighs, the way her nails bit into his skin, the way her breathing faltered before evening out again.

He pushed the rest of the way in slowly, stretching her inch by inch.

Her lips parted on a sharp inhale. The soreness burned.

"More, Luca," she whispered.

Each thrust was measured so accurately that she felt every glide of him inside her.

Her hands slid from his arm to his shoulders, pulling him closer.

He leaned down, pressing his forehead to hers as he moved.

"You're so fucking gorgeous when I'm inside you," he muttered.

She arched into him despite the soreness, chasing the rhythm he set. Each thrust reignited the ache between her legs. Her body responded again, betraying the tenderness with renewed wetness.

He felt it.

A low growl vibrated from his chest.

His hand slid down to her hip, gripping it firmly as he increased the pace just slightly, testing her limits. The sound of skin against skin grew louder, more urgent. Her breaths turned into broken syllables, small cries escaping without her permission.

The sting faded into warmth. The warmth into heat.

The first time had been fire and fracture. This was heat and love.

Luca kept his forehead pressed to hers as he moved.

Her nails dragged down his shoulders, leaving faint crescent marks in their wake. She did not look away from him. Even when the soreness flared. Even when her breath caught.

"Cum for me," he murmured.

"I don't think I can," she whispered back.

She trembled when he shifted his angle slightly, her body responding despite exhaustion and soreness.

He noticed the way her expression changed. The way her lips parted. The way her thighs tightened instinctively around him. He really didn't want to spill himself anywhere but inside her again.

His rhythm deepened.

Her head tipped back against the pillow, exposing her throat, and he leaned down to kiss it.

The pace grew heavier. She wrapped her arms around his neck.

The pleasure built again.

"Luca...I think I'm going to cum." she breathed.

He tightened his hold on her thigh, guiding her body, feeling the tremor that signaled she was close again. His own restraint thinned with every movement. He could feel the pull in his abdomen, the tightening coil threatening to snap.

He slowed at the last second to stretch the moment. He couldn't take her anymore tonight. He'd probably kill her.

She whimpered softly, hips chasing him.

"Look what you do to me." he grunted.

She did.

He resumed his movement, needing her to see the pleasure in his face, the need in his eyes, the want in his hold.

Her cry this time was quieter. It rolled through her body instead of shattering it. She clung to him, shaking, breath breaking against his shoulder.

"You meant what you said? Only way out is death?" he asked.

"Only way out is death." She affirmed, out of breath.

He followed a heartbeat later, burying his face against her neck as he finally pushed his cum inside her.

He rolled onto his side eventually, pulling her with him, keeping her leg hooked over his hip.

She rested her head against his chest, listening to his heartbeat settle.

Living with the Genovese for almost three decades had taught Nonnina the art of disappearance. So Nonnina had learned to fold herself into corners, seen only when necessary.

That morning she instructed the staff in the same sacred discipline.

Luca Genovese did not bring women home. He had always kept that side of himself away. Hotels, penthouses, foreign cities. Never here. It had been a rule he followed without being asked, a strange tenderness in a man feared.

But Zuccherino had broken that rule.

(Once again, brought to you by Jennifer Willard)

Chapter 106: A Perfect Night

Nonnina had lain in her bed, rosary tangled in her fingers, staring at the ceiling as the sounds traveled through the walls. Zuccherino's cries, Diavolino's voice, the rhythmic protest of the headboard against the wall.

She should have been scandalized. Instead, her chest ached with a complicated joy.

He had found someone who could reach him. Her Diavolino.

Still, Nonnina knew the world they lived in. The Genovese curse would not allow softness. She had seen this story unfold too many times. A powerful man falls only because love makes you visible.

She prepared coffee strong enough to wake the dead. She poured juice into crystal glasses and arranged breakfast neatly on a silver tray.

As she approached Luca's bedroom, the door opened.

Luca stepped out barefoot, shirtless, hair disheveled. Faint red marks traced his chest and neck. His eyes were softer.

"Morning, Nonnina," he said, reaching for her and kissing her hair.

Nonnina's smile widened as she looked at him, the years peeled away from her memory. He did not look like the Don of the New York Genovese empire. His shoulders, usually set had softened. The perpetual tension that lived in the line of his jaw had eased.

His eyes were no longer that glacial, punishing blue that froze men mid-sentence. This morning they were lighter. Clearer. The shade of an open sky before a storm gathers.

"Looks like you had a good night," Nonnina said.

"A perfect night." He took the tray from her hands with steady fingers. "She's going to need painkillers."

"Diavolino, what did you do to the girl?" Her eyes sharpened instantly, warmth hardening into steel.

"Nothing," he answered. "It's her first time. I was... a bit rough."

The slap cracked through the corridor. Luca's head snapped to the side. Nonnina had not struck him in years.

"You have gotten so used to abusing women, you think it's normal!" she snapped, her small frame trembling with fury. The familia had taught Luca brutality. The world had rewarded it. But she had raised him to always respect women.

"Nonni..." He exhaled sharply. "I didn't do anything she didn't want."

Her gaze bored into him. She had seen men convince themselves of that lie before. Powerful men who blurred consent with conquest. His own father did the same thing.

Nonnina sighed. "I'll make sure she is taken care of. That girl is too pure for you, crazy idiot."

"Nonni..." he tried again. Him and his damned mouth. He had spoken without thinking.

"Go," she cut him off, waving a dismissive hand. "Get ready for work and leave the Zuccherino alone."

"Yes, ma'am." He turned and reentered the room, closing the door quietly behind him. The curtains were half drawn, pale morning light spilling across rumpled sheets. Vee lay tangled in them, hair fanned over the pillow. Her skin bore faint traces of him. She looked small in that enormous bed, fragile against the weight of the world he inhabited.

He set the tray down carefully on the nightstand, the silver barely making a sound. He did not want to wake her yet. She deserved sleep. She deserved softness.

Maybe Nonni was right.

He stood there for a long moment, studying her. Vee was not like the others. She did not orbit him for the thrill. She had looked at him last night with trust. The most dangerous gift anyone could offer a man like him.

Was he capable of gentleness? Or was brutality so deeply wired into him that even love would come out sharpened?

He swallowed hard.

Maybe she deserved more than his brutality. More than his world.

But the thought of letting her go would not even settle. The only way out is death.

He poured a cup of coffee. He moved to the sofa near the windows and checked his phone.

Messages stacked. Shipments. Accounts. His wife. And reminder of a meeting with Valentina.

He took a slow sip of coffee, eyes scanning his screen, but his attention kept drifting back to the bed.

Soon, Vee stirred.

Luca was on his feet. He crossed the room and sat on the edge of the mattress. He reached out and ran his fingers through her hair.

"Good morning, Bambola," he said quietly.

Her eyes opened slowly, lashes fluttering against skin still warm from sleep.

"Morning to you too," she replied.

"How are you feeling?" She could see it in his eyes, the concern.

"Luca, I'm fine. It's not like I am glass."

His jaw tightened slightly. "I should have been gentler. I'm sorry."

"I don't want you gentle," Vee said, matter of fact. "That's... that's what we are," she continued, pushing herself up slightly against the pillows. The sheet slipped, revealing bare shoulders marked faintly by his hands. She met his eyes steadily. "Explosive. Nothing about us makes sense. You don't live in my world. I don't belong in yours. And that's exactly why it feels the way it does. It's the best experience I have ever had. And I wouldn't want it any other way."

Luca's eyes lit up with validation. He leaned closer, brushing his thumb lightly along her jaw. "You have no idea what you do to me," he murmured.

A sharp knock cut through the moment.

"Enter," he said.

Nonnina entered. She carried a small white packet of painkillers in one hand. Behind her followed a maid in a black uniform, head bowed, arms filled with folded towels, oils, bath salts in glass jars, and a small wooden box. The maid moved quietly, crossing the thick rug without disturbing so much as a thread, then disappearing into the adjoining marble bathroom where water began to run moments later.

Nonnina threw Luca a glare sharp enough to cut glass before turning her full attention to Vee. The transformation was immediate. Her lined face softened, eyes warming.

"Good morning, Nonnina," Vee said.

"Zuccherino... how do you feel?" Nonnina asked, placing the painkillers firmly on the tray beside the coffee.

Vee turned questioning eyes to Luca.

He shrugged.

"I'm... I'm fine?" she offered.

Nonnina's brow lifted slightly. "You don't have to lie to me," she said. "Eat. Take your medicine. I'm preparing a soothing bath for you. A masseuse will be here in an hour to take care of you."

Chapter 107: You Should Be Proud

Vee blinked. A masseuse?

Nonnina moved toward the bathroom. The scent of herbs drifted into the bedroom.

"What... what did you tell her?" Vee hissed the moment the bathroom door closed.

"I didn't have to tell her anything," he said. "But I did tell her I may have been a bit rough."

"Oh God." Vee buried her face in her hands, mortification flooding her cheeks.

His mouth curved. "It's cute when you act shy," Luca said, bringing the tray closer to her. The silver rattled softly as he set it within reach.

"I am shy. I am not acting shy," Vee argued.

Luca's mouth curved slowly. "You should be proud. You are the best fuck I've ever had."

"Am I now?" Vee straightened.

Luca couldn't help himself. His hands moved to her bare legs, palms warm as they skimmed over her skin, following the faint lines of muscle and softness. He traced her knee, her thigh, in recollection.

"I keep replaying it, all night." he murmured. He closed his eyes for a second as memory hit him full force. "The sensation with my cock inside you. For a moment..." He exhaled. "For a moment my soul left my body. And then I understood what people mean when they say they make love."

She smiled faintly and picked up a piece of toast, using it as a shield against the sudden intimacy of his words. "Are you being romantic right now?"

He opened his eyes and looked at her. "Is that what it is?"

She laughed softly. "I think so...Do you think Nonnina will give me a break enough to go into the pizza parlour?" she asked, brushing crumbs from her fingers. "I need to check on the shop. Especially after Inferi."

"You want to go back there today?"

"I have to," she said firmly.

"You think the ruckus will affect sales?" Luca asked.

"He chased my customers out violently," she said. "No one is going to walk back in there like nothing happened. People talk."

"Hmmm... If you need my help..." Luca said it lightly.

"I will tell you," Vee replied.

"Good girl. I have to go into work for a bit, but I will be home as early as I can....Is everything alright with your sister?" he asked.

Vee's brows drew together. "Ugh... of course. Why? Did you hear something?"

"No, no," he said quickly, glancing back at her. "Just checking in. I know how much you care about her."

"She's all I have," Vee said quietly.

"You're wrong," he said. "You have me too."

"Yes," she said after a beat. "I have you."

She scooted closer on the mattress, ignoring the faint ache in her body, and pressed a brief kiss to his lips.

But with Luca, brief was never enough.

His hand came to her waist instantly, pulling her flush against him. The kiss deepened. His mouth demanded more than she had intended to give in that second.

"Hey!" Nonnina's voice cut through the room.

Luca and Vee jerked apart instinctively.

"Leave her alone!" Nonnina scolded as she stepped out of the bathroom, the maid slipping past her and disappearing.

Vee couldn't help it. She giggled into Luca's chest, pressing her face briefly against the solid warmth of him. The absurdity of being policed like teenagers with one of the most feared men she knew made her smile.

"Your relationship with Nonnina is quite cute," she teased once the older woman had exited fully.

Luca exhaled. "She's been with me since I was born," he said. "She is practically my mother."

"And your mother?" Vee asked.

"She's... she's around. Eat."

"I don't know anything about you," she said. "Except that you're crazy, a murderous son of a bitch, and that you're obsessed with me."

His lips twitched at that. There was no denial in his eyes.

"Isn't that enough?" he asked, tilting his head slightly.

"No."

"Sure I can't change your mind about that?" he murmured.

He moved before she could respond, climbing over her on the wide bed, the mattress dipping beneath his weight. The sheets shifted, sliding over bare skin. His hands traced down her body beneath the fabric.

"For now, maybe?" she said, arching a brow, though her breath caught as he pulled her closer.

Her fingers slid into his hair.

"You're insatiable, woman," he muttered against her skin. "I'm not complaining, but Nonnina would kill me if I break you."

Vee laughed softly. "You won't."

"Don't be in a hurry, love. I assure you, I am going to fuck you in every hole I can fit in." he teased, sucking in the lobe of her ear.

Vee shivered at the promise that they weren't nowhere near done yet.

After a moment, he forced himself to pull away before he wouldn't be able to anymore and Nonnina would need a crane.

Later, Nonnina welcomed the masseuse.

One of the maids stepped forward to escort the masseuse into the house.

Nonnina was turning back toward the kitchen when one of the guards approached her.

"Signora," he said respectfully. "Someone is waiting at the gate. Says he is here for you."

"For me?" Her brows knit together. Very few people came to the Genovese estate asking for her directly. Only food vendors.

"Yes."

The iron gates at the front of the property stood tall, flanked by stone pillars. Beyond them stretched a long gravel drive that curved toward the villa.

Nonnina adjusted her shawl and walked briskly toward the entrance.

When she reached the gate, she slowed.

Standing just beyond the wrought iron bars was someone she had not expected to see on this side of the world.

"Riccardo! Why didn't you tell me you were coming to America?"

The young man standing beyond the iron gates smiled. He was taller than she remembered. Broad across the shoulders now, the softness of adolescence replaced by a lean, defined strength. His dark hair was slightly longer than Luca's, falling carelessly over his forehead, and there was stubble along his jaw that made him look older than his twenty-something years.

Chapter 108: I Wanted To Surprise You

Riccardo stepped forward as the gates opened and pulled her into a tight embrace.

"I wanted to surprise you, Zia," he murmured against her shoulder.

"Come in! Come in!" she urged, stepping back to look at him properly, her hands framing his face. She gestured sharply to one of the guards. "Take his bags."

The taxi idled awkwardly at the curb beyond the gates, its driver glancing nervously at the security presence before quickly unloading the luggage.

"What are you doing here?" she asked as they began walking up the long gravel drive toward the mansion.

"Mrs. Genovese spoke to the Don," he said carefully. "He got me a spot with Luca. I am to replace Marco."

Nonnina stopped mid-step.

"What? Does Luciano know this?"

"I told the Don to wait until I saw you," Riccardo said. "I didn't want to ruin the surprise."

They resumed walking, but her pace had slowed.

"I have so many questions," she said finally. "The first is, I didn't know you wanted to join the familia. You said you wanted to pursue medicine. You were going to be a doctor."

"It didn't work out, Zia."

They reached the wide stone steps leading into the mansion. The front doors stood tall and carved.

"How is your mother?" she asked.

"She is fine," he replied. "Well taken care of. The Genovese have been generous."

"Luciano has been generous." Nonnina corrected. "Why would Don want Marco replaced?"

"I don't have much information, Zia," he said carefully. "But Bianca said he betrayed Luciano."

"Impossible." Nonnina's reply came fast. She moved toward the sitting room. "Marco has been with Luciano a long time. He would never." Her eyes sharpened as she turned back to him. "And since when are you so close with Bianca?"

Riccardo allowed himself a faint smile. "Did you forget? We were in school together."

"Oh..." Nonnina's pace slowed. "I still didn't know you were close."

"She has been a very good friend... It's really so good to see you again, Zia."

She reached up to cup his cheek. "It's good to see you too. I'll make you something to eat and then you can go see Luca at the office. Then he needs to give me instructions on where to have you situated."

"Of course...of course." He sank into the deep leather sofa, stretching his long legs in front of him.

Soon, Nonnina returned, a tray balanced expertly in her hands. Steam curled from a bowl of pasta al forno, with bread and olives.

"God, I've missed your meals," he said.

"Ah...your mother cooks better than me." Nonnina waved the compliment away, but she stepped closer, smoothing his hair back from his forehead.

"And she brags about it at every opportunity." He let out a low laugh.

He had just finished his meal, the last smear of tomato sauce dragged clean with a piece of bread, when the sound of footsteps descended the staircase.

Veronica appeared slowly, one hand gliding along the banister. She was dressed for work in a fitted Scalese pizza T shirt, the logo stretched lightly across her chest, and blue jeans.

"Ah... Zuccherino!" Nonnina's entire face transformed.

Riccardo's gaze sharpened instantly. He reached for his phone and tapped the screen. He angled it low, subtly, unnoticeable.

"You feel better?" Nonnina asked as she cupped Veronica's cheek.

"I'm fine, thank you very much, Nonni," Veronica replied.

"And who is this?" Riccardo asked, tilting his head slightly.

"None of your business." Nonnina's response cut clean. She did not even look at him when she said it. Her attention remained fixed on Veronica. "You have a nice day. I'll make you something that will give you energy for dinner."

Veronica laughed. "I'll need it," she said. She leaned forward and hugged Nonnina gently. Her eyes flicked toward Riccardo.

She turned and walked toward the front door

.Nonnina turned slowly back to Riccardo. He had slipped the phone into his pocket, leaning back into the sofa cushions with a faint smirk.

"You want to live long?" she asked.

Riccardo straightened immediately. "I'm sorry, Nonni. Did I do something wrong?"

"Stay out of Luca's business at home. Do you hear me?" she said.

"Yes, Zia," he answered finally, lowering his eyes.

But inside, his thoughts moved faster. Who was she? Why did Nonnina defend her so fiercely?

"I suppose I should head out to see Luciano," he continued smoothly, shifting the subject. "He still works from Commissioned, right?"

"I'll get someone to drive you," Nonnina replied.

As she moved toward the hallway to summon a driver, Riccardo remained seated for a moment longer.

The moment Nonnina's footsteps faded down the corridor, he stepped toward the tall windows overlooking the gardens. He pulled his phone from his pocket and opened the video call.

Bianca answered almost immediately.

Her face filled the screen.

"Did you get the video?" he asked quietly.

"She is in my house?"

"Is that the woman you say you saw?" Riccardo pressed.

"Yes!" Bianca snapped. "He brought her into our home?"

Riccardo leaned his shoulder against the cool glass of the window. "I still think you need to take a chill pill. You married a Genovese, for God's sake. What did you think was going to happen?"

Bianca's nostrils flared. "We haven't even consummated the marriage and he is already taking a mistress and bringing her into our home!"

In their world, men had mistresses. But bringing a woman into the same house they were supposed to be living in, before even sealing the marriage? That was insult.

"Look," Riccardo said. "I'm not doing this again, okay? We are even now."

Whatever history lay between them was finished. They had made promises once. Then she had married power instead.

"Don't take that tone with me," Bianca hissed. Her face leaned closer to the screen, her beauty sharpened dangerously. "Do you realize who you are speaking to?"

Riccardo's jaw tightened. Of course he did.

He was speaking to the wife of Luciano Genovese. A woman whose word was law in the familia. He was speaking to someone who had chosen power over him.

(Brought to you by Mrs B. Thank you very much.)

Don't forget to follow me on instagram for sneak peeks before a Chapter drops.
Joyceortsen1.

Chapter 109: Nonnina Is Headed Back

"I'm sorry," he said evenly. "I have to go. Nonnina is headed back."

He glanced over his shoulder, listening for the echo of approaching footsteps.

"And just so you know," Bianca added, "I will have your aunt's head."

The call ended abruptly.

Riccardo stared at the black screen for a long moment before lowering the phone. His reflection looked back at him in the dark glass of the window. Handsome. Composed.

He exhaled slowly.

Never ask a crazy woman for favors. Never.

He pushed off the window and ran a hand through his hair. He had thought this would be simple. Step into Marco's position. Earn Luciano's trust. Establish himself in America. Instead, he had walked into an explosive triangle.

Riccardo closed his eyes briefly.

Bianca was a woman who burned when crossed. Luca was a storm of his own. And now he stood at the center of both.

His new life policy formed quietly in his mind, edged with bitter amusement.

Never ask a crazy woman for favors.

Especially not when she carries a surname that can have you buried beneath the ocean.

Detective Voss arrived at Scalese Pizza Parlour late that morning.

As Valentina had expected, there were no walk in customers. Still, the phones rang intermittently with delivery requests. Hunger did not pause for fear.

Valentina had asked for the day off. She said she wanted to check on a friend. That was the story she offered Veronica. Veronica had not pressed.

So it was just Rosa and Toni at the counter.

Veronica stood behind the counter.

"Detective Voss... how may I help you today?"

"Miss Scalese. Hello to you." His mouth curved faintly.

"Cut the crap. Why are you here?" she snapped.

"Well," he said, stepping closer to the counter, lowering his voice but not enough to shield it from the room, "I got a report that the thug who runs your block is missing. Inferi."

"And how is that my problem?" she asked.

"It shouldn't be," Voss replied honestly. "Inferi is a human stain, in my point of view."

"Wow," Veronica shot back, leaning her palms against the counter. "Way to be professional, detective."

He exhaled slowly through his nose. "Usually, I don't handle missing persons cases. Especially when it's one less asshole tormenting the community." His gaze locked onto hers, probing. "But see... every report that concerns Luciano Genovese ends up on my desk."

"And seeing as recently," Voss continued, "I added you to the list of his acquaintances, Inferi's case was referred to me."

Veronica felt heat rise under her skin.

"Would you like to know why?" Voss asked.

Of course, Veronica knew exactly why Ineri had disappeared.

But Detective Voss seemed to enjoy the sound of his own deductions, so she folded her arms across her chest and let him perform.

"The last trouble Ineri caused was right here," Voss said, glancing around the pizza parlour. "In this shop. What did he want?"

"He wanted me to push his poison," Veronica replied evenly. "He assaulted my customers. Assaulted me."

She lifted her chin and brushed her fingers against the faint, healing mark at the side of her neck. The wound had closed but the skin was still slightly darker there.

"And then he disappears that night," Voss continued. "Hasn't been heard from since."

"What's your point, detective?" Veronica asked.

"I think your shiny new boyfriend offed him."

"I wouldn't know anything about that," she said calmly. "All I remember is Luca paying him off and begging him to leave in peace."

Voss barked out a short laugh. "And you thought it was over?"

He leaned closer across the counter, his shadow falling over her.

"I know you know that Luca had him killed," he said quietly. "And I wonder... were you always this way? Or did Luca turn you?"

Was she always this way?

Before Luca, she had been angry but contained. Protective of her family, yes, but naive enough to think the law could be leaned on when things went wrong. Before Luca, she had believed in boundaries.

Then Luca had stepped into her life.

He had protected her. He had fucked her.

And somewhere in the middle of all that, her moral lines had blurred.

"You can keep wondering," she replied. "But if the police department would do their jobs and protect us better, we would be safe from the likes of Inferi, wouldn't we?"

"You would be safe from the likes of your boyfriend too," Voss continued. "Just because your human stain wears a suit, attended fancy schools and fronts a legitimate business doesn't make him any different from Inferi."

Veronica felt the insult land. Voss had just reduced her Luca to the same gutter level as Inferi.

"Look," Voss went on, "I am on to Luca. I am going to take him down on anything I can get my hands on, even if it is for the disappearance of a son of a bitch like Inferi."

"What did he ever do to you?" Veronica demanded. "What's this obsession with him?"

She needed to know whether this was professional or personal. Whether Luca was simply a target or a wound.

Voss turned and looked through the front window.

Across the street, directly facing Scalese, stood another pizza shop. The sign above it read Heritage Slices in peeling paint.

"You see the pizza shop right in front of yours?" Voss asked quietly.

"What's that have to do with anything?"

"My father," he said. He corrected himself immediately. "Well... stepfather owned it."

"He was a good man," Voss continued, his jaw clenching. "And your boyfriend had him killed."

Paul Marino.

Veronica knew him. Everyone on the block did. He had never seemed dangerous.

"Good luck on your investigation, Detective Voss," Veronica said, forcing her voice back into composure. "Have a nice day."

"I have my eyes on you, Miss Scalese," Voss replied, turning back toward her. "I hope you rethink your stance. I'd hate to put you down along with Luca."

Veronica turned away from him deliberately, stepping toward the kitchen.

The bell chimed again as Voss left.

Veronica's chest felt tight. She lifted her gaze slowly toward the window, toward Marino's shop across the street.

Had Luca really killed Mr. Marino?

Why?

Marino had been calm. A shark in business, yes. But he had never seemed reckless.

Unless he had crossed a line.

If Luca had killed Marino, then Voss's hatred made sense.

She had to tell Luca. The detective's grief had teeth.

Luciano was already bouncing on his feet restlessly by noon.

He checked his watch again.

He was waiting for Valentina, yes. But once she finished, he would get the fuck out of here.

Because he couldn't get Vee out of his mind.

It was irrational. He knew it.

He was going to pick her up. Take her back home. Lock the doors behind them and fuck her until his madness went quiet.

Or maybe he would pull her into the back seat of his car the moment she stepped out of the shop. And fuck her in there. Anything...just anything.

He needed a fix of her.

That was the word that fit too well.

A fix.

He opened the drawer slowly and pulled out his phone.

Then he placed a call to Scalese Pizza Parlour.

Rosa answered.

"Hello..." Luciano said smoothly. "I'd like to make a special order to be delivered. Can I speak to the owner?"

There was a pause. He could imagine Rosa's eyes widening slightly.

"This is Luciano Genovese," he added.

Another pause. Longer this time.

He leaned back in his chair, one ankle crossing over his knee.

A faint click.

Then her breath on the other end of the line.

"I would like to order a box of pizza," he began. "Pepperoni, beef, extra cheese."

"Yup," he continued. "It's a special order."

A beat.

"Well... because you will send it along with the underwear you are putting on right now."

On the other end, there was silence.

He could almost see her face flush.

He ended the call before she could respond.

Luciano leaned back fully in his chair, letting his head rest against the leather. A slow smile curved his mouth.

About fifteen minutes later, Valentina arrived accompanied by Marco.

Marco stepped in first.

Valentina stepped past him.

She wore a fitted navy dress. Her eyes were Vee's eyes. Same depth. Same stubborn spark.

Marco remained at the door, hands clasped in front of him, silent as a sentry.

"Miss Scalese," Luca said.

"Please call me Valentina."

"Valentina it is," he replied. He gestured toward the chair opposite him. "Have a seat."

She crossed the room and lowered herself into the leather chair. It swallowed her slightly, emphasizing her age. She folded her hands neatly in her lap.

"I must admit," he continued, eyes flicking briefly to Marco before returning to Valentina, "when Marco told me you wanted to see me, it rattled me. Is everything okay?"

"First," Valentina said, straightening slightly, "I want to thank you for saving me from Bastardi."

Chapter 110: I Stayed Hidden

"I got all the thanks I need from your sister," he replied.

"Which brings me to the next..." She inhaled slowly. "What are your intentions toward my sister?"

He leaned back in his chair, folding his hands over his abdomen. Was he about to have this conversation with a teenager? In his own office, under the silent observation of a man who would kill on his command? He let out a low chuckle. "What?" he said. "Are you going to break my legs if I hurt her? Is this where this is going?"

"Actually yes. My sister has spent her life protecting me," she continued. "Working for us. Holding that shop together with her bare hands. When Ineri attacked the shop, her first instinct was to hide me. And you know what I did?" Valentina pressed on. "I stayed hidden. I listened while he beat her. She has always been the shield," Valentina said. "And I have always been the one behind it."

"She is quite protective of you," Luca acknowledged.

The resemblance between the sisters was undeniable.

"I know," Valentina replied. "I may not be able to hurt you physically if you hurt her." She lifted her chin slightly, a gesture that felt older than her years. "She seems to care about you, of all people. And I have decided not to question it."

Luca understood perfectly what she meant.

"I have decided to trust her," she continued. "If you make her happy, I'm all for it."

"But I want to stop hiding," she said, and now her voice sharpened. "I want to stop holding her back. I want to protect her too."

"I can protect her," Luca said evenly. "And by extension, you."

Valentina shook her head slightly. "I don't want to feel helpless," she said. "My helplessness gets people in trouble." She swallowed, forcing herself forward. "Marco tried to help me escape from Bastardi. He had everything right. And I still couldn't manage to run. I watched him take the hit because I couldn't move fast enough. Because I was afraid."

Luca's gaze flicked briefly to Marco.

"So," Valentina said, inhaling deeply, "I would like to join the familia. Your familia, specifically."

Luca stared at her, certain he had misheard.

He let out a short, incredulous breath. "You what?"

Shock rippled visibly across his features now.

Marco stepped forward immediately, abandoning his post at the door. "She doesn't know what she is talking about," Marco said instantly.

"I do. I do, Marco," Valentina shot back, her composure finally cracking. "I'm done being the weakling of the family."

Luca chuckled under his breath. He lifted a hand slightly toward Marco, signaling him to stand down. "You want to be part of the familia?" Luca said, folding his arms loosely across his chest. "It's simple. Marry someone from the familia."

"And be a weakling to him too?" she snapped.

"Valentina..." Luca exhaled slowly, rubbing a hand over his jaw. "First of all... let's even ignore the fact that your sister is going to slice my balls, chop them into tiny pieces, chew them and spit them out for even entertaining this conversation. You're... what, sixteen?"

"I'm eighteen," she cut in instantly. "And my age is not a problem because I have seen boys my age guarding for you. Is this because I am a girl?"

"No. God no," Luca said quickly. "It's... I..." He turned slightly, helplessly, toward Marco. "Marco, help me out here."

"She will just be on her way, boss," he muttered, clearly hoping to end this before it spiraled.

Valentina stood abruptly from her chair. "If you don't help me," she said, "I can go to another familia."

Luca's posture changed instantly. The humor evaporated. The warmth drained from his expression. "Vee hasn't told you much about me, has she?" he asked quietly. "I'll kill them to keep you safe," he said. "Whatever hurts Veronica will not see the next sun," Luca continued. "And if seeing you become this version you so desperately want to be hurts her, I'll kill whoever helps you."

Luca straightened slowly and leaned back into his chair, reclaiming his composure. "Listen," he said. "You want to feel powerful? Learn how to defend yourself. Train. Learn to shoot. Learn to fight. Build something of your own."

"Or marry a powerful man," Luca added. "Hell, I'll arrange that for you in a heartbeat."

Marco's head snapped toward him.

"Hell," Luca continued, eyes flicking briefly toward Marco, "marry Marco."

Valentina turned her head slowly toward Marco, studied him as if Luca's suggestion had painted something obscene across his forehead, and then twisted her mouth in exaggerated revulsion. "Ew."

Marco rolled his eyes with long suffering and smacked the back of her head. "Watch it," he muttered.

She glared at him, rubbing the back of her head.

Luca leaned back in his chair and looked between them.

"Both of you have a weird thing going on. I don't get it," he said, exasperation threading through his tone. "How about this? Marco can help you."

Valentina arched a brow.

"He can train you in self defense," Luca continued, pointing lazily in Marco's direction, "and help you snag a powerful husband. How is that? And for fuck's sakes, talk to your sister about this. I love my balls, please?" He pressed his palms together in mock prayer, dark eyes glinting with genuine anxiety beneath the humor. He flicked his fingers dismissively. "Out. Before I start considering installing a panic button with your name on it."

Marco placed a firm hand on her shoulder and steered her toward the exit.

They emerged into the parking lot.

Marco did not stop walking until they were several paces away from the main entrance.

Then he turned on her.

"What the hell were you thinking? Joining the familia? Are you crazy? Do I need to start worrying?" His hands were on his hips now.

"I said what I said, Marco," Valentina replied, lifting her chin. "Look how many people I get in trouble."

"You blindsided me," he shot back. "If I had known this is what you wanted to discuss with Luca, I wouldn't have taken you seriously."

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard)