

# **Undressed By The Mafia God #Chapter 121: Madre Di Dio - Read Undressed By The Mafia God Chapter 121: Madre Di Dio**

## **Chapter 121: Madre Di Dio**

Pain was foreign to her, alien as a forgotten language. She had been born into a familia that demanded strength, obedience, and control. Weakness had no place. But pleasure—pleasure was a language she spoke fluently. Her hips collided with his in a rhythm that was desperate, insistent, beautiful.

Her body ignited as wave after wave of ecstasy tore through her. Muscles tensed, hips bucking involuntarily, breath hitching, cries spilling into the room. Her fingers moved from him to herself, clutching and twisting at her breasts, teasing her nipples until they burned under her touch, until the sting of desire was almost unbearable.

Luca grunted into the hollow of her neck, teeth grazing skin, vibrating in tandem with her frantic rhythm.

He wanted release. God, he wanted it, needed it, but every time he approached the precipice, it slipped away. His body was taut, muscles coiled, and yet the edge of satisfaction eluded him.

His gaze flicked to her distracted form, her back arching, her lips parted in pleasure. Then, he reached into the pocket of his shorts and withdrew the small, delicate piece of lace he had kept hidden. Veronica's underwear. The scent was faint and the sight of it in his fist set a fire through him that even Bianca's body could not fully douse.

He brought it to his face, inhaling sharply. His fingers clenched around the delicate fabric, a reminder of what waited oceans away.

Bianca, oblivious to his distraction, cried out again, her movements growing wilder, more urgent, almost frantic. Luca's own breath hitched, muscles trembling as he balanced on the edge of two worlds—one immediate, one distant, one flesh, one obsession, one pleasure, one sin.

The scent in his hand had almost undone him.

It twisted through his senses. For a split second, the wrong name hovered at the back of his throat. A single slip and the fragile architecture of his marriage would collapse.

He swallowed it.

Buried it.

Bianca mistook the wildness in his movements for hunger. For a husband overwhelmed by her. She arched into him with a cry that echoed against the high ceilings. "Yes, Luca... Madre di Dio..." Her fingers clutched at him. "Luciano!"

He moved with relentless intensity, chasing release. Bianca's body answered him eagerly, her pleasure cresting again, her face open and unguarded in ecstasy.

He felt the tightening of her body, the final wave of her climax rolling through her. A low, guttural sound torn from somewhere deep.

He grunted wildly, pulled out of her quickly and wrapped his cock with Vee's underwear cumming hard into it.

Bianca shoved her nipple into his mouth, dragging out the tiniest of pleasure she still could.

He pulled the taut bud between his teeth, working through his orgasm.

He collapsed beside her and as discreetly as he had retrieved the underwear, he shoved it back into his short pocket.

Luca rolled onto his back, staring at the ceiling. His chest rose and fell slowly as he wrestled his pulse back into something manageable. He felt split down the center. One half here, in Vienna, in a bed that symbolized alliance and obligation.

The other half... elsewhere.

Bianca turned onto her side, tracing slow circles across his chest with the tips of her fingers. "That was exquisite," she murmured softly.

"How long are you staying?" she asked.

"Why? Can't get enough?" he asked, a lazy edge to his voice as he stared at the ceiling.

Bianca laughed softly, still tracing patterns against his chest. "If I ever tell you I've had enough, shoot me."

Luca slid both hands beneath his head, stretching slightly. "I'll be taking a flight out as soon as I'm done talking to Father in the morning."

"So soon?" she asked, trying to keep the disappointment from sharpening her tone.

"I have work."

"You know he plans on punishing you for what you did to Julian?" she said quietly.

"I know."

Of course he knew. He had challenged the rules of the house.

"You can apologise to Julian," she suggested carefully.

He turned his head slowly to look at her.

"Over my dead body."

"Luciano... you know your father." Her fingers stilled against his chest.

"I can take it," Luca replied simply.

He rolled onto his side and pressed a soft kiss to her forehead.

"Go to sleep," he murmured. "Don't worry about all of that."

But Bianca did worry.

If she couldn't soften Luca, then she would have to go to the source of the grievance.

She lay still beside him, eyes open long after his breathing deepened.

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Across the courtyard, Julian stood by his balcony doors.

He watched until the movement ceased. Until Luca carried Bianca inside.

Only then did he reach forward and draw his own curtain shut.

He knew Luca had seen him.

Maybe that was why their father favored him. Because he was alert in ways that bordered on predatory. You could never sneak up on Luca. You could never catch him unaware. Even when he looked relaxed, even when he smiled, something behind his eyes remained watchful.

And whoever dared test that vigilance usually didn't live long enough to regret it.

Julian leaned his forehead briefly against the cool glass.

First son.

Second choice.

Luca had everything.

Power. Money. The family name that opened doors and closed mouths. And on top of that, beside him stood Bianca. Beautiful, composed, untouchable Bianca.

Everyone saw her elegance. The carefully measured way she spoke around Luca, around their father. She knew when to lower her gaze, when to soften her voice.

But Julian saw the fire.

It flickered behind her eyes when she thought no one was watching.

Julian loved that part of her.

He moved toward his bed slowly. He sat down on the edge, pulled his phone from his pocket, and unlocked it with a familiar swipe.

He pulled up a picture of her he had taken months ago at a beach party.

Bianca stepping out of the water in a red bikini, droplets sliding down sunlit skin. Her hair slicked back, shoulders proud, hips swaying with unintentional confidence. She had laughed at something someone shouted from shore, unaware of how devastating she looked.

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard. Thank you so much. I know that I am currently breaking your heart but do you really think Vee is just going to sit back and take this? uhn?)

## **Chapter 122: The Fuck Was That Good**

He had taken the photo casually.

He had kept it obsessively.

"Jesus," he muttered under his breath.

And now she was in the next wing of the house. In his brother's bed. Married to Luca. Carrying his last name. Wearing his ring. Being fucked by him.

His hand drifted downward to his cock, slow at first, almost absent-minded.

He exhaled sharply, eyes closing.

He imagined her hands instead of his own. Imagined her mouth forming his name instead of Luca's. Imagined her on top of his cock, bouncing on top of him.

"Bianca..." he breathed.

This was his private torment.

Under the same roof as her, he was never at peace. Every shared dinner. Every passing touch in a hallway. Every accidental brush of her perfume in the air. It wound him tighter and tighter until he felt like a live wire waiting to snap.

He hated Luca for having her.

The worst part was knowing she would never look at him the way she looked at his brother. She played her role flawlessly.

But sometimes...

Sometimes he caught her watching him back.

Not obvious. Just enough to make him question his sanity.

His breathing grew heavier as his imagination spiraled, desire tangling with resentment.

This was what he had been reduced to.

Wanting what he could never touch.

His fingers moved faster, more desperate, chasing a release that never truly satisfied. He came hard and fast into his own hand, jaw clenched, breath sharp in the dark silence of the suite.

It had become a ritual.

Every night since he returned to Vienna.

Every night, the same restless hunger. The same frustration. The same image burned behind his eyelids.

And it never eased.

He lay back afterward, staring at the ceiling, his chest rising and falling as the tension slowly drained from his muscles. Sleep would not come easily. It never did.

His brother was down the hall, wrapped fucking a woman he should not want. A woman he wanted anyway.

Unhealthily.

Morning came too quickly.

Breakfast was already waiting in his suite. He ate mechanically, barely tasting anything, his thoughts already drifting where they should not.

By the time he buttoned his suit jacket, he looked composed. The version of himself the world expected.

He reached for the door handle just as a knock sounded.

He frowned slightly and opened it.

Bianca stood there.

He blinked in surprise. "Bianca? Is everything okay? Did Luca hurt you?"

Her eyes widened instantly. "What? No, no. Of course not."

Relief flickered across his features, though confusion quickly replaced it. "You've never come to my suite before."

"I need to ask you a favour," Bianca said, holding his gaze steadily.

"What's that?" Julian asked.

"I need you to withdraw your accusation," she said quietly, her hands folded in front of her.

Julian's head snapped up. "Wow! The fuck was that good, uhn?!" he spat, exasperation lacing every syllable. His dark eyes flared. "You actually want me to drop it, just like that?"

"Julian, please," Bianca said again, moving slightly closer. "He is my husband. I cannot see him hurt... not by anyone, not for anything." Her eyes glimmered, filled with a tenderness that made him grind his jaw.

"He stabbed me!" Julian barked.

"He didn't stab you," Bianca rolled her eyes, a small, impatient twitch that made him stare. She sounded almost amused at his dramatics.

"He would have! Nonnina had to stop him!" Julian shot back.

"But he stopped," Bianca said firmly, tilting her head. Her composure was infuriatingly perfect.

Julian leaned closer. "You realize he did it because of another woman, right? And you're standing here... to protect him?"

"If anyone needs to be punished, it's the Scalese girl! What right does she have being in my house?!"

Julian froze for a fraction, his dark eyes narrowing. "What did you call her?"

"Scalese... why? You know her?" Bianca asked, genuinely puzzled.

Julian's pulse jumped. His eyes lit up, curiosity cutting through the irritation. "No. The name just sounds familiar. What else do you know about her?"

"She owns a pizza shop. That's basically it," Bianca replied.

Julian leaned back, running a hand through his hair, a sly, incredulous smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Bianca? How is it that you rarely ever leave this town, and yet somehow have more information across oceans than me?"

"A girl has her ways," Bianca said, the curve of her lips playful, and she batted her eyelashes. There was an ease to her charm. It was subtle, refined, lethal—and it unnerved him.

"Why do you keep this version of you from Luca?" Julian asked. His gaze lingered, searching for the part of her that was untouchable, the part that didn't bend for anyone, not even her husband.

"Don Genovese said the first rule of marrying into the Genovese home is to bring Luca peace. I am meant to be his peace."

Peace. She was a weapon. He could see it, feel it, the way she carried herself.

"Sure." Julian forced a tight smile, letting a trace of cynicism slip through. "I have to go." His hand brushed the railing as he moved, but he hesitated, feeling the pull of her presence, the quiet gravity she exuded.

"Will you do as I say?" Bianca asked, her gaze catching his in a rare, unguarded moment.

Julian let out a slow exhale. "Bianca, Luciano gets away with a lot of things. I wasn't planning on letting him get away with this. But for you, I will let the insult go. Everyone seems to forget I am the first son of this family. But when I speak, Father says I sound petty."

"I'm sure one day, Don will see the light," Bianca said softly, a hand brushing against the strap of her sleeve.

"I'll see you later," he said, finally moving away.

About half an hour later, Julian arrived at the Genovese logistics at the wharf—a sprawling, labyrinthine complex where his father commanded the heartbeat of their operations. Cranes loomed over the dark water, and the smell of salt and diesel hung heavy in the air.

Dockhands moved quickly, and the faint hum of radios stitched together the rhythm of the place. Julian's presence drew eyes, subtle nods of respect from those who knew him, the first son whose reputation was both earned and overshadowed.

He stepped into the command room, the space pulsing with energy. Maps sprawled across the walls, screens glowed with the locations of shipments and personnel.

The men around informed him his father was at the yacht.

Julian strode toward the yacht.

Once aboard, the empty space stretched before him. He walked further down and opened the door to a wide space.

At the center of the room, Luciano sat strapped into a chair, rigid, taut. His eyes were now cold, hard, and unflinching. Next to him, a battery sat ominously, wires coiled and waiting, and a bucket of water sat beside him.

Don Genovese spoke up. "We have been waiting for you."

Julian stopped just short of the chair, forcing his expression into neutral territory. "Father, I withdraw my accusation. There is no need for this."

Luciano's head snapped up in shock. No... no... no. If Julian backed out now, it could only mean one thing. He needed Luca to owe him. The cold of his stare sharpened. "I did try to stab you," he said.

"You heard him," Don said.

"Father..." Julian began, stepping slightly forward. "We were just horsing around. It wasn't serious. I meant—"

"No! We were not!" Luca's voice exploded, cutting Julian off with the force of a bullet. "You called my guest a slut. No one does that. No one would do that and still be breathing. I should have stabbed you." His chest heaved. He leaned forward against the straps of the chair, muscles taut.

Julian's hands curled into fists at his sides. "Will you keep your fucking mouth shut?" he snapped.

"You shut the fuck up! Whatever it is you want, I don't fucking have it. So get on with it!" Luca shot back, eyes blazing. There was no fear in his voice, only the raw, unflinching assertion of dominance that had made him untouchable since childhood.

"Enough! Family don't turn on each other. That's my rule. You hurt family, you get punished for it. So I will ask this once and just once. Are you pursuing this fucking accusation?" Don's voice cut through the chaos, carrying the weight of decades of absolute control.

"No," Julian said.

"You fucking pussy!" Luciano snapped instantly.

"Let him go," Don said, hand raised to command his men. He stepped closer to Julian, lowering his voice so that only Julian could hear. "He is right." Don's lips curled just slightly, a faint smirk hidden beneath the harshness. "You are a fucking pussy. What did Bianca do, uhn? Bat her lashes at you?"

Don knew exactly why Julian had backed down. "The next time you waste my fucking time, it will be you strapped into the chair," Don finished. Then, without another word, he turned and walked away.

### **Chapter 123: I Do Not Owe You**

Luca stretched, freeing himself from the rest of the bindings. He rose and walked toward Julian with a fluid, predatory grace

"I didn't ask you for a favor," Luca said. "You get nothing from me. I do not owe you."

"Why? The devil afraid of collecting debts?" Julian snarled poisonously.

Luca's jaw tightened. "Fuck you, Julian. And now that I think about it, I should have gutted you."

Julian stepped closer, the air between them sparking. "I am willing to let this tiny disrespect go, Luca. Because I just found out you are personally handing me the rope to hang you with." A thin smile cut across his face, sharp as a blade catching light. Then he turned and walked out, his footsteps echoing against the deck in the tune of a countdown.

Luca stood there a second longer, chest rising, fury fizzing under his skin. Rope? What rope?

Fuck it.

He rolled his shoulders, shoving the irritation aside. He couldn't wait to get the hell out of this place. Vienna felt smaller every time he returned, the walls leaning in just to watch him breathe.

His phone vibrated again in his pocket. It had buzzed several times while he was strapped to that chair, but there had been bigger problems then. He pulled it out now, ready to bark at whoever thought their issue mattered more than family discipline.

Debit notifications.

His black card.

The one he had given Veronica.

A slow smile tugged at his mouth.

"What are you doing, little vixen?" he muttered under his breath, amusement replacing irritation. Was she planning to bankrupt him out of spite? Spend him into a coma?

He disembarked the yacht, the cool air caressing his heated skin. The wharf complex hummed with activity, forklifts whining, crates shifting, men moving. This was to his father what Commissioned was to him. This was Don Genovese's powerhouse where he ruled with metal, money and fear.

He still needed to speak to his father before leaving.

The office door was already open when Luca approached. Inside, his father sat behind the massive desk authoritatively.

Luca closed the door behind him and remained standing.

"Luciano... I'm guessing an heir should be expected soon. I am informed your wife was quite vocal last night," Don said calmly in the tone of voice one used when discussing shipment volumes.

"I wouldn't jump to conclusions just yet, Father."

"Tell me," Don continued, steeping his fingers. "Was she untouched as expected?"

"Yes, Father."

A slow nod. "Good. I was afraid your brother would get there before you."

Luca gave a faint casual shrug borne from boredom of the topic.

"You do not seem to mind your brother's stupid obsession with your wife," Don observed.

"Maybe she should have been married to him instead."

"She was betrothed to you long ago, Luciano. What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing." He inhaled, then let it out slowly. "I need to speak with you about something else."

Don lifted a hand slightly. "We will. First, we discuss the issue of your mistress."

Luca exhaled through his nose. "Dad, it's inconsequential. Like I said, it's just someone who keeps me company. Nothing more to it."

"Inconsequential," Don repeated softly, tasting the word judgementally. "Look," Don said at last, leaning forward. "You may not know it, but you are my legacy. You will raise the next Don. You need to rise beyond fault, Luciano. I know your brother thinks I am being unfair, but you..." His eyes sharpened intensely. "You are made of steel. You are me. And in your hands, I hand our future."

Luca held his father's gaze. Steel. That was the word everyone used for him. As if he had been forged instead of born. "I need you to back off, Father," Luca said, a subtle edge of steel beneath the words. His eyes were fixed on Don, unblinking, unyielding.

"Excuse me?" Don's brow lifted slightly, the faintest curl of surprise breaking his otherwise unshakable composure.

"Sending Ricardo to take over from Marco without informing me first. Involving yourself in my business. You trust me to handle the familia, then let me handle it," Luca continued.

Don exhaled slowly, leaning back in his massive chair. That calm, calculating presence that had intimidated every one in the familia faltered just a fraction when dealing with Luca. What he loved about this boy—the arrogance, the steel, the fire—was also what irritated him when it was aimed directly at him. "Fine," Don said. "Anything else?"

"Yes. I'm leaving."

"You've barely been here. Does your wife know about this?" Don asked.

"I didn't come here for her. I came here to talk to you," Luca said.

"When is she coming to New York to be with you?" Don persisted.

"When the dust settles," Luca replied.

"Make it soon," Don said dismissively, spinning his chair slightly to retreat behind the fortress of his desk, his fingers already dancing across the keyboard. The conversation was over.

"Goodbye, Father," Luca said. He exited the office with the same grace that marked his every movement.

By the time he reached the garage, a luxury car was waiting. Luca slid into the seat.

Curiosity got the better of him. He pulled his phone from his pocket, black screen lighting up with a faint glow in the otherwise dim interior of the vehicle. He swiped open the transaction details on his black card. His eyebrows lifted.

What in the hell was she buying?

The list scrolled endlessly.

Luca smirked, the corner of his mouth twitching with amusement. Vee had his card, and she was turning it into an art form of revenge.

He scrolled through the transactions again, watching the names of boutiques, high-end appliance stores, even a few service companies flash by. Then the last one caught him off guard, pulled him up short: an adult store. His fingers froze above his phone for a heartbeat. An adult store?

Curiosity spiked through him. What exactly was she buying? His pulse kicked up a notch, blood humming in his ears. He didn't even think—he just reached into his contacts, typed in her name, Bambola, and hit dial.

(Here is to 200 power stones. We made it!!!)

\*So, I know I said I wouldn't be writing today but I couldn't help myself. Missy Dionne, I love you so so much. you always come through to pick me out of my bullshit. Reading comments just seems to pick me out of my funk almost immediately. Thank you all so much.

## **Chapter 124: I Missed You**

The line connected, and the moment her voice filtered through, soft and utterly his, Luca's body responded with electricity shooting straight to his groin. "Hey you..." Her words wrapped around him, he was unable to breathe, utterly undone.

"Bambola..." he whispered, closing his eyes.

"I'm guessing you are alone, if you're calling me that," she said, a small smirk in her tone, teasing him through the distance.

"Sort of," he admitted. "It's... nice to hear your voice. I missed you."

Silence answered him. Of course she was silent. She was probably fuming. Understandably. "What are you doing?"

"Shopping," she said, crisp, clipped.

"I know that. But... why are you shopping at an adult store?"

"Preparing your welcome-back-home package," she answered smoothly, as if that explained everything, as if it should.

"Vee..." he growled, shaking his head, the corner of his lips tugging into a smirk. "It's not a lingerie store. I am... quite familiar with that store."

"I said what I said," she fired back, mischief dancing through her voice.

He ran a hand down his face, brushing the tension from his jaw. "What are you up to?" He could practically feel the heat of her smirk through the line.

"You'll see... soon."

Luca's pulse doubled, a grin tugging at his lips. She was dangerous. She was clever. She was his. And she was waiting to remind him exactly why he couldn't, and wouldn't, ever control her.

She had him exactly where she wanted: anticipating, wanting, and completely under her spell.

Luca leaned back in the seat, phone pressed to his ear, smoldering, already imagining what welcome home would really mean. "Are you still mad?" Luca asked.

"Should I not have a reason to be?" Veronica's answer came smooth and cool. No raised tone. No dramatics. Just that controlled quiet that was far more dangerous than shouting.

For a moment he said nothing. His silence was cowardice.

Because what could he say?

How could he tell her that while he was fucking his wife, fulfilling his marital duty, it had been Veronica's name burning behind his eyes? How could he explain that when it was over, he had finished himself off into lace that did not belong to his wife?

It sounded depraved even in his own head.

"I'll see you later," he said instead, retreating into the one safe promise he could offer.

"Bye." She did not linger. The line went dead.

He stared at the screen for a second longer before letting out a sharp curse. "Fuck." He dragged a hand down his face, fingers pressing hard against his eyes.

He was going to pay for this.

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Back at the Genovese estate, Bianca moved through their bedroom. Fresh roses stood in a crystal vase by the bed. She had replaced them that morning.

The maids would have handled everything. But she wanted her hands on his things. Wanted the ritual of folding, sorting, touching.

It made the absence quieter.

Luca's travel bag lay open on the bed. She packed it methodically, shirts folded. His scent clung to everything. She pressed a shirt briefly to her face before placing it down.

She picked up the clothes he had discarded when he arrived. The pants first. She checked the pockets automatically, emptying out a receipt, his lighter. Folded them. Into the laundry basket.

Then the shirt.

Then the T shirt and shorts he had worn to dinner.

She slipped her hand into the pocket of the shorts without looking.

Her fingers brushed fabric.

Lace.

She paused.

Slowly, she drew it out.

White lace underwear. Delicate. Not hers.

She sat down on the edge of the bed, lace dangling from her fingers.

The memory of the night before replayed. Luca's intensity. The way he had held her hips. The way his breathing had changed toward the end.

She had assumed it was hunger.

Now she wondered whose name had been in his head.

A humiliating sting pressed behind her ribs.

She knew instantly it wasn't hers. Bianca did not buy lace that came in plastic wrapping or labels that needed introduction. Her drawers were curated. Milan. Paris. Brands that did not advertise because they did not need to. She did not wear anonymity.

This was anonymous, cheap.

"Luciano..." she whispered, his full name sliding off her tongue.

So he had brought a souvenir.

Had he slipped it into his pocket in a rush? Had he kept it deliberately? Had he touched it after touching her?

Was he thinking about the slut while he was fucking her?

Unrefined anger tightened her features. The softness she wore for him vanished.

She walked to the fireplace.

The lace dangled for one more breath between her fingers before she dropped it into the fire.

It caught quickly. Curled in on itself. Blackened. Gone.

Bianca watched until there was nothing left but a faint flicker and the faintest scent of burning fabric.

Ash suited it better.

She folded her arms across her chest. She had grown up watching women in this life. Some endured. Some turned blind eyes and clung to jewelry and titles while their husbands paraded other women.

Julian's mother had been one of those.

Bianca remembered the way the staff used to gossip about her especially when Luca's mother visited with him. The way invitations always included Luca's mother's preferences.

It had hollowed Julian's mother out.

It would not happen to her.

Over her dead body would some inconsequential bitch gain standing in the Genovese home. Bianca had not been groomed, educated, and positioned for years to lose her place to a distraction.

No.

She crossed the room and picked up her phone. Her reflection stared back at her from the black screen. Beautiful in a way that did not beg for approval.

She tapped Ricardo's name.

He answered, his face appearing on the screen.

"Ricardo..."

"What's up?"

"The girl," she said evenly. "She has to go."

Ricardo's posture shifted. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," she said quietly, clearly, "she has to die. Do it."

Ricardo chuckled amusingly. "Why would I do it?"

## **Chapter 125: I Owe You Nothing**

Bianca's grip tightened around her phone. "Because you owe me."

"I owe you nothing," he replied smoothly. "We are even. As a matter of fact, I got nothing from our exchange. Luca doesn't want me here. I have to come back to Vienna soon. So tell me exactly how I owe you?"

Her jaw locked. The audacity. "Ricardo, don't test me. The girl must die or I will have your head," she spat.

"Imagine that," Ricardo said lightly. "You know, I am quite happy you are miserable with Luca, Bianca. You didn't think I would ever be enough. Well, who is laughing now?"

The cruelty in his tone was designed to wound.

The call ended.

Bianca stared at her reflection in the dark screen for a split second before something inside her snapped. A raw, animal sound tore from her throat as she hurled the phone across the room. It struck the wall and shattered, fragments scattering across marble.

Her scream echoed through the suite.

For a moment, she stood there breathing hard, chest rising and falling, fists clenched at her sides. She hated this feeling. The loss of control. The helplessness. The reminder that despite the ring on her finger, power still had conditions.

She sank onto the sofa minutes later. The fire had burned low. The room smelled faintly of smoke.

Footsteps approached and Luca entered, jacket slung over one shoulder, tie loosened. He looked devastating as always.

He stopped in front of her.

"I'll be leaving in a bit," he said. "Is there anything you need?"

Anything you need.

The simplicity of it almost made her laugh.

Bianca looked up at him slowly. "Were you thinking of her?" she asked simply.

"Excuse me?" Luca raised a brow.

"Were you thinking of her while you were fucking me?"

Luca's jaw tightened. "I am not having this conversation." He turned and walked into the bedroom.

Bianca followed.

He picked up his travel bag from the bed. His gaze swept the room once, scanning for the shorts he had worn to dinner. They were not where he had left them. His eyes landed on the laundry basket.

Understanding dawned.

"It's in the fireplace," Bianca said from behind him. "I'm sure it's already a pile of ashes by now. You couldn't respect me enough to keep her out of our marriage," she continued. "You brought her underwear into my home."

Still no raised voice. No hysterics. She had been raised for this. Trained in posture, restraint, presentation. Even jealousy had to be handled with elegance.

Luca turned slowly, prepared to dismiss her, to walk past her, to end it.

Then she spoke again.

"She is going to die, Luca... painfully."

There was no emotion in the statement. Just cold intent.

That made him pause.

He placed his bag back down. Then he moved toward her with that familiar, infuriatingly calm smile. He stopped close. "I am only going to speak about this once," he said quietly. "You come even a hair's breath around her, Bianca...I will have you killed and delivered to your parents' house in pieces."

Bianca had always been intoxicated by Luca's ruthlessness. It wasn't just the way he carried himself—the taut muscles, the dangerous elegance—but the way he ruled every room he entered. She had been raised around men with power, men who thought their dominance was a birthright, but Luca...he wasn't just power; he was art, sculpted danger, every curve of his jaw, every slash of his blue eyes, meticulously designed to unsettle and enthrall in equal measure.

It made her pulse spike, made her think about things she shouldn't in polite company.

"I don't care," she spat. "I am a Vitale, Luca. I will not be disrespected. If she breaches the sanctuary of my home again, I will be the one serving her to you in pieces."

His hand wrapped around her throat, enough to hurt. Anger danced in his eyes. "I thought you knew me," he said. "I am disappointed...really disappointed that you have no fucking idea who you married."

She swallowed against the pressure of his palm, caught in the insane thrill that always followed him. "I am not Julian, who cums at your every word," he hissed. "I am not one of those men hoodwinked by your beauty. I didn't marry you, Bianca. My father did. Deal with what you get."

Her pulse thudded violently in her chest, caught between indignation and arousal.

He released her throat but didn't step back. His hands lingered, grazing her shoulders. "Oh...try this with me again," he murmured, dark amusement in the corners of his mouth. "I will build you a mansion, Bianca, and attach a cuff to your ankle. Make you my prisoner. Test me..." He leaned so close she could feel the brush of his lips on her temple. "...Bianca."

"I am your wife," Bianca said quietly.

"Then that should be enough for you. You have the title. You are the queen."

Bianca finally realized, with a pang of bitter clarity, that she'd been going about this the wrong way. Her beauty—her carefully honed weapon, the subtle sway of hips, the right smile at the right time—had always gotten her what she wanted. Always. But with Luca, it was useless.

Her charms were inert against him, her usual arsenal of flirtations disarmed and laughed at in the face of his dominance.

This other woman—the one who had entangled her husband in invisible chains she could neither see nor touch—had done what Bianca could not. Cast a spell over Luca, a spell that bent him in ways Bianca had never imagined.

"I'm sorry," she breathed, a whisper to the room. Apology wasn't weakness; it was acknowledgment of the rules in a game she was only beginning to understand.

Luca left the house, leaving nothing but a trace of danger she could almost taste. Bianca smiled, small, amused. Why get her hands dirty when others could do the work for her? Why risk her marriage, when outsiders could execute her will, leaving her clean, untarnished? She just had to get to know her target adequately.

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard)

## **Chapter 126: I'm With Luca**

Rosa was conducting her own brand of education. She watched as Vee bent over the trunk, tying down the haul of adult store paraphernalia.

"All of these," Rosa said, sweeping a hand over the trunk, "will be useless if you cannot stand your ground, Vee. The man you deal with is a dominant in his right. The best way to punish a man like that," she continued, "is to give him a taste of his own medicine. Make him understand what it feels like to meet resistance, to face a will that refuses to bend."

The lesson was simple: she could not cave back into her natural role, her habitual submission, until her message was fully delivered, carved into the mind and body of the man across from her.

"Is that clear?" Rosa asked.

"And what if this isn't a message that can be passed?" Vee asked, fidgeting with the hem of her jacket. "What if it's...something I'm going to have to deal with for as long as this goes on?"

"I...don't really know what advice to give, not without knowing the full context."

"Uhm...you know that I...ah...I'm with Luca, right?"

"I do. I just pretend not to. The less I know, the better for me."

"Yeah, I know. Scary guy..." Veronica laughed.

"Scary?" Rosa echoed, raising an eyebrow. "Honestly, he doesn't look scary. He looks...normal. Clean-cut, almost angelic if you don't know who he is. If no one told you he's the New York mafia god, you'd never guess."

Veronica leaned back, a slight flush coloring her cheeks. "That's...actually how I got entangled with him in the first place. I had no idea who he was. Just a... long story. But look...he's married."

Rosa smirked. "The beautiful ones are always off the shelf."

There was a pause, a quiet beat of acknowledgment, and then Vee added reflectively: "You're not being as judgmental as I thought you would be."

"Hey...we all have our kinks," Rosa said, raising her palms in mock surrender, a sly grin tugging at the corner of her mouth. Her eyes sparkled with mischief.

Vee ran a hand through her hair. "Dating a married man is not my kink, believe me," she said. She hated the sting of jealousy, the helpless thrum of desire that Luca always seemed to provoke in her without even trying.

Rosa arched an eyebrow, tilting her head. "So you're trying to punish him because he didn't tell you he's married?"

"No..." Vee said, shaking her head, exhaling sharply. "I'm planning to punish him because he is with his wife right now. And I'm hurt and...jealous. God, Rosa, I love the man." She shrugged. Her heart pounded as she admitted it to someone else aloud. "And...even if I didn't, he has this...gigantic obsession with me. I cannot handle him being married. I want him to feel what it's like—the hurt, the frustration...what this is doing to me. I want him to hurt as much as I am hurting."

Rosa's eyes softened. "Uh, love...this isn't going to hurt him the way it hurts you. But it will make him remember what it is that you will not tolerate. He'll feel the edge, the boundary, and he'll respect it."

Vee exhaled, a long, shaky sigh. She felt exposed, naked in ways she hadn't intended, and yet Rosa's presence made her feel grounded.

Rosa leaned closer, a conspiratorial lilt threading through her words. "I understand the situation you're in, Vee. Luca...he's not the kind of man you can simply say no to. Not like I would want to anyway." She chuckled. "I mean the man is...delicious. And you're lucky, because you get a taste of that while it lasts. Enjoy it. Invest in yourself while you can, have mind-blowing sex while you're at it, and learn as much as you can about what you want for your future. It won't last forever—he'll get bored someday, or life will shift in ways you can't predict. But right now, this...this is yours to own. Your youth, your desire, your fire. Take advantage of it while you can."

Vee let Rosa's words settle, a bittersweet ache blooming in her chest. On the surface, the advice was liberating, practical even. But beneath it, a heavier truth lingered: she dreaded the day Luca would tire of her, would find novelty in someone else or some other distraction, or maybe even dedication to his wife.

Because yes, the sex was otherworldly, intoxicating, mind-consuming, but what she felt for him went far deeper than lust. It was tangled in love, in admiration, in a craving for intimacy and acknowledgment that went beyond the physical.

She swallowed, her hands trembling slightly as she wrapped her arms around herself.

And somewhere deep in her chest, beneath the jealousy, the heat, and the ache of longing, a tiny ember of determination sparked. She would claim her space, her boundaries, her voice. She would make Luca see, in every glance, every touch, every exchange, exactly what he had.

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Ricardo strolled down the tree-lined street with Valentina. Each held a cone of ice cream, the melting sweetness dribbling slightly down their fingers as they laughed, sharing quiet jokes that seemed too intimate for a casual walk. He had asked her to show him the hidden gems of the city, but so far their adventure had been limited to a cinema, where they had spent hours teasing each other, whispering through previews, and flirting.

Valentina's laughter was infectious, and Ricardo found himself stealing glances at her whenever she wasn't looking, memorizing the way her eyes lit up, the little crease that formed between her brows when she concentrated, the way her lips curved when she smiled.

She had an intelligence that made every conversation feel effortless, a sharp wit that kept him on his toes, and yet there was an innocence in her that made him want to protect her, to cherish the moments they shared, fleeting though they might be. He knew he could fall for her. Easily. Dangerously so.

Yet even as he felt the pull toward her, there was a shadow lingering in his chest, a fresh ache from a heartbreak he hadn't fully processed. Bianca. Three years together in

school, a forbidden romance tangled in secrets and rebellion. Bianca, the Vitale heiress, always destined for Luca, yet daring enough to defy her fate with him.

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard)

## **Chapter 127: I Had A Great Time**

Ricardo remembered the nights they had sneaked into clubs, dressed in anonymity while her reputation as the Genovese betrothed remained intact. He had been her accomplice, her confidant, her escape from the gilded cage she was born into. Their laughter, their stolen kisses, the thrill of defying rules—it had been intoxicating.

They had even dreamed together of eloping, far from the unrelenting expectations that shadowed every step Bianca took.

He had loved her. Truly, fiercely, even when he knew the odds were stacked against them. And then the world had shifted beneath his feet. The whispers, the rumors, and finally, the truth that Bianca was marrying Luciano—a calculated, politically advantageous match that left no room for his heart.

He remembered the shock, the sting, the way the air had seemed to thicken in his lungs when he heard the news. A love that had felt infinite was suddenly rendered impossible, a cruel reminder that some stories were never meant to have happy endings.

Now, walking beside Valentina, the warmth of her hand brushing his, the light teasing in her voice, he felt that old ache transform. Pain mixed with hope, heartbreak mingled with desire. Bianca was a Chapter he had closed, whether he liked it or not. Valentina was the promise of something new, something untarnished, something that could heal the fractures in his heart if he allowed himself to trust again.

He couldn't bring himself to tell her he wouldn't be staying.

The truth hovered at the back of his throat all day. But every time Valentina laughed, every time her hand brushed his arm in careless familiarity, the confession retreated. He was enjoying the distraction far too much. Enjoying her far too much.

And in the short time he had spent with her, he had learned something crucial.

Valentina's world revolved around one person.

Her sister.

Veronica.

Luciano's mistress. The woman Bianca despised. The woman Bianca suggested should die.

Ricardo had refused outright. He had laughed in Bianca's face when she floated the idea of a hit. But he knew Bianca. She did not surrender grudges. She nursed them.

If Bianca wanted Veronica gone, she would not abandon the idea easily.

And now here he was, licking the last sweetness from his thumb beside Veronica's baby sister.

By the time they reached Valentina's house, their ice cream cones were reduced to sticky napkins and sugar-sweet fingerprints.

Valentina unlocked the door and turned, leaning back against the frame instead of stepping inside. She crossed one ankle over the other.

Ricardo stood in front of her, hands sliding into his pockets to stop himself from reaching for her.

"I had a great time," he said.

"Me too," she replied.

"So... uhm... can we do this again sometime?" he asked.

She tilted her head, eyes narrowing playfully. "Ooookay, but you didn't actually ask me out on a date."

He blinked. "I did not?"

"No. You said, hey, you wanna show me around town? That's not a date. That's tourism."

A laugh escaped him before he could stop it. It felt good. "Technically, you haven't shown me around town," he countered. "You took me to see a movie. And I'm sorry, but that was a very crappy movie."

"What??? Hobbs and Shaw? Are you kidding me?"

"Sweetheart, the only thing you contributed to that film was a running commentary about how handsome the bald one is."

She gasped. "Excuse me! Jason Statham is a hottie."

"Ah," Ricardo nodded gravely. "So that's what this is about."

"What is what about?" She narrowed her eyes, but she was smiling.

"You clearly have a thing for men with accents."

"You have an accent," she shot back instantly, pointing at him.

"Case in point."

Her lips twitched. "Who said I have a thing for you?"

Ricardo stepped toward her, closing the distance. "Don't do that," he said quietly.

"Do what?" She held her ground, chin tilted in defiance, but her pulse betrayed her.

"Shy away from what you feel."

"I'm not..." she began, but the protest dissolved when his hand came up.

He held her chin between his fingers, lifting her face until her eyes met his. "I want to kiss you," he said.

Her lashes lowered. "Then why don't you?"

He exhaled slowly, eyes flicking past her shoulder to the reflection in the dark glass of the door. "Because Marco is across the street glaring daggers at me."

Valentina blinked. "What?"

Ricardo's mouth curved faintly. "He is in his car."

She twisted to look, and sure enough, there he was. Marco, still as a statue, his gaze unapologetically fixed on them.

Valentina turned back, smiling. "He's protective."

"Protective?" Ricardo scoffed lightly. "Of what? Your virtue? I assure you, it's in excellent hands."

"Marco doesn't have a crush on me, if that's what you're thinking."

"Then why is he watching me like I just insulted his ancestors?"

"We just... spent some time together when I... was about to be..."

She stopped.

Ricardo felt the shift immediately. The air tightened. The playful tone dissolved.

"When you were about to be what?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Never mind."

He dropped his hand from her chin but didn't step back. "Valentina."

She looked away, toward the street, toward Marco, toward anything but him. "It was a complicated time."

"I'll see you tomorrow?" Ricardo asked.

Valentina lingered in the doorway, fingers curled around the edge of the frame. "I'll be at the pizza shop," she said. "I need to be with my sister. She's very worried about sales and stuff. I want to make sure she's not stressing herself into an early grave."

"Maybe I'll stop by," Ricardo replied.

"Maybe you will..." she tilted her head, eyes glinting mischievously, "bring ice cream if your maybe becomes definitely."

"Good night, Valentina."

"Goodnight."

She hesitated for a fraction of a second before stepping inside. The door closed slowly, almost reluctantly.

Ricardo stood there for a breath. Then another.

Then he turned.

His shoes crunched lightly against the gravel path as he made his way toward the sidewalk. Across the street, Marco sat in his car, window halfway down, elbow resting on the frame.

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard)

## **Chapter 128: You're Being Creepy**

Ricardo raised a hand and gave him a small, exaggerated wave.

Marco did not wave back.

Ricardo approached the car, stopping just outside the window. "You're being creepy," he said lightly.

Marco's gaze didn't shift. "I told you to stay away from her."

Ricardo leaned down slightly so they were eye to eye. "And I told you I will. When she asks me to."

Marco's jaw tightened. "When are you going back to Vienna?" Marco asked.

Ah.

There it was.

Ricardo smirked. "Wow. Are you itching to get rid of me because of Valentina or because of your job?"

"My job is stable," Marco said evenly.

"Valentina then?"

Marco scowled, reached into the glove compartment, and pulled out a gun.

"Wow. Wow. Wow." Ricardo threw both hands up instinctively, stepping back with exaggerated caution. "Let's not escalate from glaring to homicide in under sixty seconds."

"Relax, fool," Marco muttered, inspecting the chamber with professional indifference. "I came here for her shooting lessons."

Ricardo blinked. "Her shooting lessons?"

Marco gave him a look that suggested the conversation was already exhausting. "You think I sit outside polishing my personality?"

"Oh," Ricardo exhaled, lowering his hands slowly. "Thought you were going to shoot me there for a second, papa bear."

"I'm seriously thinking about it," Marco said flatly.

He shoved the door open without warning. It swung wide and smacked Ricardo squarely in the thigh.

"Jesus—"

Marco stepped out, shutting the car with deliberate force. "Stand closer next time. I'll improve my aim."

Ricardo rubbed his leg. "You're a delight."

Marco ignored him and adjusted his jacket, the gun disappearing into the holster at his back.

"Any word from Luciano on when he'll be back?" Ricardo asked casually.

Marco froze.

Then he turned slowly.

"I cannot believe the Don thought you could replace me. What's your business with when Luca is going to get back? He'll be back whenever he wants."

Ricardo shrugged. "Just asking a question. You know. Making conversation."

"Well, shut up," Marco snapped. "Nobody wants to hear you speak."

Ricardo let out a low laugh. "Touchy."

Marco didn't respond. He turned and strode up the path toward Valentina's house.

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Luca arrived back in New York that night. His jet lag clung to him, but excitement burned hotter than exhaustion. He headed straight to Veronica's annex apartment.

His pulse was steady but charged. He had replayed her voice in his head for the entire flight.

He reached the door and pushed it open.

It didn't move.

Locked from the inside.

His brows lifted slightly. He knocked. "Bambola..." he called. He rested his palm flat against the door.

"Veronica," he tried again.

There was the soft shuffle of feet, the faint drag of fabric, then her voice filtered through the door.

"Who is there?"

"Vee, it's me."

A pause. Long enough to be deliberate.

"Oh. You're back."

Not I missed you.

Not finally.

Just observation.

"Yeah," he said, impatience creeping in despite himself. "What's going on? Open the door."

"I'm a tad bit tired tonight," she replied. "I'll see you tomorrow. Good night."

He stared at the door.

Then his jaw tightened.

"What the fuck. Bam... open this fucking door."

"Will you try not to throw your usual tantrum and respect my decision?"

Luca inhaled sharply, dragged a hand down his face, forced control back into his bloodstream. He lowered his voice, smoothing it with effort.

"Bambola... I know you're mad at me. But please... open the door. Let's talk."

"Luca," she said, and his name in her mouth sounded tired rather than tender. "You didn't think I was just going to welcome you back with open arms, did you?"

He closed his eyes.

"I am exhausted. I've had a long day. So please... we will talk tomorrow."

He heard her footsteps retreating. "Bam... Bambola... Veronica Scalese! You get back here and open this fucking door!" He ran an agitated hand through his dark hair. "Oh, you think you bad, huh?" he muttered under his breath, pride stinging. "Fine. Tomorrow it is."

He turned sharply and stalked back toward the main building, every step radiating fury.

He had landed in Vienna and twelve hours later he was back on another plane, ignoring reason, ignoring the Don's raised eyebrow.

For her.

And she had locked him out like an unwelcome salesman.

Oh, she was going to have it.

She was going to feel exactly what it meant to deny him.

Nonnina noticed the mood the moment he crossed the threshold.

When Luca's shoulders were set that rigidly and his jaw worked, you did not probe.

Dinner appeared before him without commentary. Not a single unnecessary word floated across the table.

Afterward, she ran his bath, by the time he stepped out of the water, she had vanished entirely.

Questions about Vienna could wait.

Tonight, the bear had teeth out.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning, Luca woke late, sunlight already stretching across the ceiling in golden lines. His body felt wrong. Heavy. Out of rhythm. Jet lag pressed behind his eyes.

Still, habit overrode fatigue.

He swung his legs off the bed, shrugged into a robe, and grabbed his phone from the nightstand and headed to the apartment once more.

The scent of citrus cleaner met him.

One of the maids stood near the window, cloth in hand, polishing the glass.

"Good morning, Mr. Genovese," she said, startled but polite, already gathering her supplies.

"Where is she?"

"Miss Scalese?"

Luca turned his head slowly, eyes narrowing. "Who else? The Queen of the Netherlands?"

The maid swallowed. "She left for work already."

Of course she did.

The maid disappeared with impressive speed.

He stood there for a moment, scanning the space.

He walked to the sofa and dropped into it, leaning back, robe falling open slightly at the collar. He dragged a hand down his face again.

What the fuck was she trying to pull?

He had expected a little frost.

Not this.

He unlocked his phone and tapped her name.

It rang.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

His jaw tightened with each tone.

The call continued ringing.

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard)

### **Chapter 129: I Do Not Answer To You**

He exhaled slowly, forcing himself not to end the call first.

The call went unanswered.

Luca stared at the screen until it dimmed, his own reflection staring back at him. He swore under his breath and called again. He should stop. He should let her cool off. Let her process whatever storm she had decided to build around him. He leaned forward on the sofa, elbows braced on his knees, phone dangling loosely from his fingers.

He needed to see her. Needed to look at her face when she was angry. Needed to read the truth in her eyes rather than guess at it through silence. Needed to touch her, if only to reassure himself that she was still within reach. Without her, everything else dimmed. All background noise. He opened his messages and typed two words.

**I'm sorry.**

He stared at them.

It felt insufficient. Thin.

What did she want to hear? What did she need? Would she want explanations? Promises?

He swallowed. He would do anything. He sent the text.

The message delivered. No response.

His jaw flexed. Fine.

If she would not answer him privately, he would go through the front door.

He searched for the number and pressed call. The line rang twice before a bright, professional voice answered.

"Hello, this is Scalese Pizza, can I take your order?"

He recognized her immediately. Valentina. Even over the phone, there was sunlight in her tone.

"Hey, Val," he said, smoothing his voice. "Can I talk to your sister?"

There was a brief pause. "Who is this?"

"It's Luca."

"Oh. I'll just get her." The phone shifted. Muffled sounds followed. Voices drifting in and out.

Then, faintly, he heard her voice. "No."

Valentina murmured something he couldn't fully catch. A softer tone, persuasive. A sister's voice trying to broker peace. Another "No," quieter but no less resolute.

Footsteps returned. The line shifted again. Valentina came back on. There was no sweetness in her voice now. "What did you do?"

"I do not answer to you, Valentina," Luca said, voice cooling several degrees.

"You will," she replied without missing a beat, "if you want me to tell you how to get back in her good graces."

"I went on a trip," he said after a pause. "She didn't like it."

There was silence on the other end, then a soft exhale. "Uh... okay. That's manageable. Just show her you're sorry," Valentina continued. "You don't have to drown her in speeches. Do things that tell her you care about her feelings. That you respect them. And that you're sorry. Actions speak way louder than words."

He was taking relationship advice from an eighteen year old. That was how far he had fallen. "Right," he muttered. He hung up before she could add anything else and immediately scrolled to another name. Marco. He had never executed such a campaign before. He needed help.

\*\*\*\*\*

At the pizza parlour, new ovens were being installed. Electricians moved in and out with tool belts clinking. A fresh coat of deep red paint was drying along the exterior walls. The old sign had been removed, replaced temporarily with a simple banner that read Renovations Underway.

Veronica stood outside. She was issuing instructions calmly but firmly. She barely had time to breathe. The renovation had been necessary. Sales had dipped. Equipment had aged. The place needed renewal. She needed distraction.

So when a man stepped in carrying an enormous bouquet of roses, she did not even look up at first. "Delivery for Veronica Scalese," the man announced.

Veronica continued scanning a clipboard. "Just leave it on the counter in the shop," she said absently.

The bouquet was absurdly large. Deep red roses, wrapped in black paper with a satin ribbon tied around the stems. The first bouquet had barely settled into its throne of dramatic apology when another delivery van rolled up.

Then another. And another.

Men in uniforms carried armfuls of flowers as if they were unloading produce. They didn't ask questions. They simply placed towering arrangements along the storefront and walked off.

White lilies. Crimson roses. Orchids in sleek black boxes. Peonies bursting open. Within minutes, the sidewalk outside Scalese Pizza was less pavement and more botanical garden.

Her eyes swept the scene.

The shop's exterior, freshly painted and still faintly glossy, was now framed in color and perfume. Bouquets lined the door. Floral stands flanked the windows.

Inside, Rosa pressed both palms to the glass, grinning.

Valentina stood beside her, waving exaggeratedly at Veronica.

"What the hell is he doing?" Veronica muttered under her breath. Trying to bury her in flowers?

The construction workers paused their drilling to take in the spectacle. One of them let out a long whistle. "Damn...Somebody's gone full Shakespeare."

Pedestrians slowed their pace. A couple of teenagers stopped entirely, phones already lifted, recording.

Scalese Pizza Parlour, a modest neighborhood cornerstone fighting to modernize its ovens and boost sales, was about to go viral for reasons that had nothing to do with its dough recipe.

Veronica exhaled slowly, hands settling on her hips.

Another truck pulled up. This one was sleeker. Tinted windows. The driver stepped out and opened the back.

Veronica's stomach dropped. "Oh no," she breathed.

Two men carried the first stack of shopping designer bags inside without greeting her.

Chanel. Gucci. Valentino. Hermès. The names practically hummed with expense. Delivery after delivery, each bag whispering excess.

Valentina's eyes widened to comical proportions.

Outside, the crowd was growing.

Veronica pinched the bridge of her nose. This man. "This is insane," Veronica muttered.

Valentina went giddy instantly. She screamed. She squealed. She grabbed Rosa's hands and jumped. Her dark curls bounced wildly as she darted between bags, already mentally dividing the spoils.

At least thirty percent of everything was going to be hers. That much was understood. Sister tax.

Outside, the sidewalk had transformed into a spectacle. People were no longer pretending to pass by casually. They were gathering. Phones lifted. Whispers floating.

Then finally, a courier came with a smaller delivery. A single envelope and a small velvet bag.

The noise around her blurred into a low hum. She accepted the envelope, her fingers steady despite the tremor simmering under her skin.

Scalese Pizza, a family business had become the backdrop for a public declaration of obsession.

Veronica pulled a small stool and sat down. Her legs felt weak. She had already spent a small fortune on his black card during the renovations.

Now this.

She stared at the envelope resting on her lap.

Guilt crept in.

Was she being unfair?

She could not just let it slide. She could not reward extravagance without addressing the wound. Maybe, a darker part of her thought, she should simply accept her place. The other woman. The hidden one.

She glanced inside the shop.

Valentina was in the back office now, stacking shopping bags, her laughter spilling. She looked radiant.

Well, at least he made her sister happy.

A small, reluctant chuckle escaped Veronica's lips. She wanted him to suffer a little longer. Just enough to taste the sharp edge of what he had made her feel. She could not reduce herself to one of those women who went pliant at the mere sight of him. Women who folded when he entered a room, whose knees liquefied under the weight of his gaze.

She knew what he did to women. She had seen it. The authority in his posture. The calculated calm. The way his voice could press against skin without touching it. She felt it too.

But he did not need to know that.

Still, this... this was excessive.

Her fingers trembled as she slid a thumb beneath the envelope's seal. The paper was thick, expensive. Of course it was. Everything about him was curated.

She unfolded the card.

'Kill me instead but don't keep me from you.'

That was it.

Kill me instead but don't keep me from you.

It was dramatic. It was manipulative. It was Luca.

Her hand slipped into the small velvet bag. Her fingers brushed cool metal. She pulled it out slowly.

A seven inch pocket knife rested in her palm. The handle was shaped like a cupid's heart, lacquered in a glossy rainbow sheen.

She stared at it. Then a sound escaped her, something tangled between a laugh and a sob. "Crazy man," she whispered.

Of course he would frame his apology in violence.

The symbolism wasn't subtle. If she wanted to wound him, here was the weapon. If she wanted to cut him out, she could.

He had given her the choice.

Or at least the illusion of one.

Her throat tightened.

She pulled out her phone almost instinctively. Her thumb hovered over his name. One call and this circus would end.

She glanced inside the shop.

Rosa stood behind the counter, calm as ever, sliding a pizza into a box while handling a customer's change. But her eyes flicked up for a brief second and locked onto Veronica.

Rosa shook her head slowly.

A quiet reminder.

Stand your ground.

Don't give in because he showed up loud.

### **Chapter 130: I Care About Luciano**

Make him understand the depth of the bruise he left behind.

Veronica swallowed.

The phone felt heavy in her hand. If she called now, what would he learn? That spectacle worked. Her thumb moved away from his name. She locked the screen. Slipped the phone back into her apron pocket.

The decision steadied her spine.

She rose from the stool, the pocket knife still in her hand, card folded carefully between her fingers.

She was not weak.

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By the time Veronica returned to the annex that evening, the city had already swallowed the last of the sunlight. Inside the Genovese estate grounds, everything felt insulated.

She was exhausted.

Nonnina had taken it upon herself to prepare a tray. Pasta still steaming. A small bowl of roasted vegetables. Fresh bread wrapped in linen. A glass of water with lemon. She walked down to the annex corridor slowly. The door was locked. She knocked lightly. "Zuccherino, it's me."

From inside, there was the faint sound of movement. Then Veronica's voice. "Is it just you?"

"Yes."

The lock clicked. The door opened just enough before Veronica stepped back, allowing her in.

Nonnina entered without fuss, balancing the tray.

Veronica closed the door behind her and leaned against it briefly. She had changed out of her work clothes but still looked wound tight. Her dark hair fell loose over her

shoulders now, slightly damp from a rushed shower. "Nonnina, I could have come get that. Why did you have to bring it yourself?"

Nonnina set the tray down carefully on the small dining table. She arranged the napkin. Adjusted the fork.

"Because I need to talk to you."

Veronica straightened.

"This madness going on between you and Luciano, end it. The man is already a live wire and you messing with him will only make him explosive."

"Nonni... are you saying then that I should just swallow whatever he does."

Nonnina sighed. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it to come out that way."

She moved closer. "It's just... I care about Luciano. His pain is my pain and right now, he is in pain because of you."

Veronica looked away. Pain because of her. She was in pain because of him.

"I'm not saying bend over. I'm saying he's fragile when it comes to you..."

Luca was many things. Dominant. Calculated. Ruthless when necessary.

But fragile?

Nonnina had watched Luca grow.

Veronica understood that.

But she also understood herself.

She was not someone who absorbed impact quietly. She just wanted to be seen fully.

To be chosen openly.

Vee sighed and pulled out a chair at the dining table.

"Is this because he went to Vienna? Because of his wife?" Nonnina asked.

"Yes." Vee answered.

Vienna was the reminder that no matter how passionately Luca claimed her, there was a ring somewhere else, a life somewhere else, a woman whose title carried more legitimacy than love ever could.

"Zuccherino...." Nonnina walked over to her and pulled a chair so she was facing her. "You remind me so much of Luca's mother. She was the same." She said with a smile. "She didn't like the idea of being the other woman. She didn't like the violence in the familia either."

"So she left?"

"Yes but she was only allowed to leave alive because Don has a soft spot for Luciano. Luca begged for his mother's life when he was no older than ten."

It explained too much. It explained the obsession with control. The need to orchestrate every room. The refusal to ever appear vulnerable. A child who learns that love can vanish at someone else's discretion grows into a man who refuses to let anything slip from his grasp.

"Is that what is going to happen to me?" Vee asked. She was not naïve. She knew the world she had stepped into.

"No one can know the future, Zuccherino. But what Luciano feels for you isn't even anywhere close to what he feels for Bianca."

"It doesn't comfort me, Nonnina."

Because it shouldn't.

Being loved more intensely than a wife did not erase the existence of the wife. Passion was powerful, yes. But structure was stronger.

"He loves you, that should be comfort enough. Love him, please." Nonnina begged.

"I do."

But love was not the argument.

"No, I mean... love all of him... the bad, the annoying, the depressing."

Vee exhaled slowly, eyes lowering to the table.

Loving a man like Luca was not a soft occupation. It required spine. It required endurance. It required the ability to stand inside a storm without dissolving.

"Will you let them notify me when he gets back?"

Nonnina's face broke into an exaggerated smile, relief flashing openly across it. She rose from her chair and leaned down to press a warm kiss against Vee's head. "I will, Zuccherino. Thank you! Thank you. Now eat your food and finish it. You haven't been eating much."

"I'll try."

When the door closed behind Nonnina, Vee remained seated for a moment, listening to the silence. The tray sat untouched. Steam no longer rose from the pasta.

She stood slowly and walked into her bedroom. She opened the closet and reached toward the back where she had placed her purchases.

She unzipped it carefully.

Inside lay tools.

She had let him stew long enough.

It was time to remind him that power in this relationship did not belong solely to him.

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Meanwhile, elsewhere in the city, Ricardo was under a different kind of spell entirely.

He had walked Valentina home from the pizza shop earlier, arms loaded with designer shopping bags swinging from his hands. Chanel. Gucci. Valentino. The sister tax she had claimed with shameless delight.

Ricardo settled into the sofa, stretching his long legs across the low coffee table, which was cluttered with bags.

"So what in the world brought on this monstrosity of stuff?" Ricardo asked as his eyes traveled over the carefully arranged avalanche of packages and shopping bags, each tagged with the unmistakable logos of high fashion.

"Luca's apologising for something. I'm guessing he took my advice."

"You advised Luciano to do all of these?"

"Well, not in these exact words..." She gestured toward the piles, arms extended in an elegant shrug. "But I told him action speaks louder than voice."

"I better not get on your bad side then, cause there is no way I can afford all of these."

"I thought you work for the familia," Valentina asked, brow slightly arched.

"Well, I thought I had a spot with Luciano, turns out I don't. So, I'm just spending a couple more days with my Zia and I'm heading back."

"Heading back to where?"

"To Vienna."

"Oh..." She stepped back as she tried to mask the sudden tension tightening around her chest. "Oh...Uh...I, yeah...oh... How long have you known?"

"Known what?"

"Known you wouldn't be staying?"

Ricardo rose from the sofa. He took a single step toward her, but Valentina mirrored him instinctively, stepping back.

"How long?"

"Since the day we met." Ricardo answered.

Valentina stared at him. "So what is this? What are we doing?" she asked.

"Enjoying each other's company?" Ricardo ventured.

"You should go."

"Val!"

"Go, Ricardo. Now!"

He raised his palms in surrender, stepping backward toward the door before turning.

The click of the door closing behind him echoed through the room. Valentina sank into the couch as soon as the sound faded. Her fingers dug into the soft fabric, her mind spinning in loops. Men were so stupid...stupid...stupid...stupid. Enjoying each other's company? Then what?

He would just fly away into the sunset, right when she was only just beginning to like him. Her chest tightened, a little pulse of heat in her stomach as the thought of his departure pressed against her. Stupid!

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Luca was just peeling off his clothes, muscles coiling and stretching. He had not seen Veronica in three days, and three days was already far too long.

Every step she had taken away from him hammered against his heart. He felt hollowed out, restless, a storm of anticipation and frustration swirling beneath the surface of his skin.

The bedroom door slid open silently. She stepped through.

"Bambola..." he whispered.

"I didn't come here to talk. I came here to give instructions."

Every muscle in his body coiled in reaction to her audacity.

He noticed the set of her shoulders, the careful tilt of her chin, the way her eyes seemed to dare him to challenge her, to defy her without a single word being spoken. He knew he was utterly powerless in the face of her authority. Three days without her had sharpened every nerve. Three days of longing had left him raw and fraying.

A ghost of a smile threatened the corners of his lips, fleeting but the presence of her, the sharp command in her eyes and the sway of her posture, made him reel. "Okay?"

"Freshen up and come to my annex. But you have to do everything I say, exactly how I say it. Is that understood?"