

Undressed By The Mafia God #Chapter 141: Its Nauseating To See - Read Undressed By The Mafia God Chapter 141: Its Nauseating To See

Chapter 141: Its Nauseating To See

Julian's smile widened slightly. "My brother seems to be quite taken with you. Its nauseating to see."

Luca began to rise.

But Vee moved faster.

Without drawing attention to herself, she placed her hand lightly on his thigh beneath the table.

Her fingers pressed just slightly. She didn't even look at him when she did it, her attention still on Julian.

Reluctantly, Luca settled back.

"I seem to be quite taken with him too." Vee answered.

"Yeah, he is so smitten he will try to harm his own brother for you."

"His brother wasn't being quite the gentleman at that moment."

Julian smiled and turned to Luca. "You didn't think I stopped father from electrocuting you for a reason? You didn't stop to think? And they say you are smarter than me."

"What do you want Julian?" Luca asked.

"To give you information. See, I connected the dots, little brother. She here is Veronica Scalese. The girl we traded, the one Marco stupidly tried to save is Valentina Scalese. What was that you told father about Bastardi double crossing you? Turns out you double crossed yourself. You turned for a pussy."

Luca's fingers twitched.

And Veronica felt the exact moment his control nearly snapped.

His hand shifted slightly toward the weapon closest to him, the knife.

Under the table, she pressed her palm more firmly into his thigh.

She could almost feel the storm raging inside him.

His eyes remained locked on Julian. "Go ahead and tell father. He got what he wanted, didn't he? Go on. Be the childish fool who tells on his sibling because he didn't get father's legacy. You will always be nothing, Julian except for father's errand boy. And this is exactly why? Focusing on small things. I'd kill you and send your body off to a foreign country and father wouldn't even lose a wink of sleep."

Julian's smile faltered as Luca attacked his wound.

The legacy of their father—power, control, respect—had always hung between them.

Veronica sat quietly.

So Julian knew.

Or at least he thought he knew enough.

Her sister's name being spoken here sent a small ripple of anxiety through her chest. Valentina had already been through enough chaos because of these men.

So much for Luca's "baby steps" toward being a normal couple.

"You're right. Father won't do anything more than punish you for this. But I have my ways, Luca. You handed me the weapon, all I have to do is aim and not miss." Julian finished and got to his feet.

"Julian?" Luca called.

Julian paused mid-step but didn't immediately turn.

"the next time you speak directly to Veronica in any capacity, you'll lose a finger."

The threat was delivered calmly. It sounded like a simple statement of fact—something Luca had already decided and would carry out without hesitation.

Julian finally looked back over his shoulder, the faintest curl of amusement touching his lips. "of course. I have no further use for her."

And then he walked out of the restaurant.

For a moment, no one moved.

The restaurant returned to its eerie stillness, the candle flames flickering gently.

"your father tried to electrocute you?" Vee asked.

The question broke the silence like a stone thrown through glass.

He looked at her as though the question had come from somewhere very far away. "Its nothing." He snapped.

"Its not nothing. Why?"

"it's a form of punishment to keep his kids in the familia in line. It works. We do not question it." He said it the way someone might describe a company policy.

Matter-of-fact. Routine.

Veronica stared at him. Her mind struggled to reconcile the calm tone of his explanation with the actual meaning of the words. "Are you listening to yourself?"

Luca's eyes hardened slightly. "Vee...can we just continue with our nice dinner?" Luca asked.

The request sounded almost desperate.

Like he was trying to shove the conversation back into the box it had come from and lock it.

But Veronica wasn't that easily redirected.

"After that performance from your brother? What did you do? Why did he try to punish you?"

"Because Julian is a tattletale. He told father as soon as he got to Vienna that I tried to stab him." Luca explained.

The explanation came out flat, almost bored, as if he were describing a petty childhood incident.

"Tried being the keyword!" Vee almost yelled.

Luca didn't react the way she expected.

Instead, he gave a small shrug, as if the detail barely mattered. "Like I said, it works. Genovese men are raised to rule. A little torture never hurt anybody."

Veronica stared at him. She wondered if she had misheard him. "And you will raise our child the same way?"

"You don't want to have one with me so that's not even a valid question." Luca said.

"You want one with me! So, I would give you sons for you to torture to keep in line?"

Luca's patience snapped. "Look, my father's methods has never once meant he doesn't care about me. He is tough on me as he should be because the life we lead don't need pussies!"

Immediately afterward he pushed his chair back.

"Lets go home."

Vee blinked at him, stunned by the abruptness.

The evening that had started with laughter and teasing now felt like it had cracked straight down the middle.

"Luca!" Vee tried to argue. She wasn't ready to let the conversation end like this. Not when the things he had just said were still ringing in her ears.

"Now!"

Veronica's jaw tightened. She considered refusing out of sheer stubbornness. But the look in his eyes told her that pushing further here, in the middle of a restaurant full of his men and fresh from Julian's visit, would only make things worse.

So she stood.

Grudgingly.

She grabbed her coat without waiting and stormed toward the exit.

"Vee!" Luca walked quickly after her.

By the time she reached the car, Luca had caught up.

"Vee, come on. I'm just wound up."

She spun around then, fiery eyes snapping toward him. "Is my sister safe?"

Chapter 142: You're A Weird One

Luca looked genuinely confused. "What? Of course she is safe."

But Veronica wasn't satisfied. Her arms folded tightly across her chest. "It didn't sound like it. because I heard the threat in your brother's tone."

"Vee..." Luca stepped closer, his expression softening.

"when I say your sister is safe and so are you, believe that its true because I would give my very life to keep you safe. I would defy the heavens itself to ensure it stays that way. Listen to me." His hands came up to her shoulders, turning her slightly so she had no choice but to face him directly. His blue eyes locked onto hers.

And suddenly the anger in her chest didn't feel quite as solid.

Her shoulders relaxed a little despite herself.

"You don't have to worry about a thing, Bambola. I'm sorry I snapped at you."

The hug came suddenly, wrapping around her with a surprising gentleness.

"You're safe love. You're safe."

His chin rested lightly against the top of her head, his hand sliding slowly up and down her back in a calming motion.

Veronica closed her eyes for a second. She wanted to stay angry. She really did. The things he had said inside the restaurant still bothered her deeply.

But standing there in his arms... it was harder to hold onto the anger.

Because for all his flaws, Luca believed every word he had just said.

And he was definitely going to make sure of it.

Even if it meant going to war with his own blood.

Valentina stood at her door that night when Ricardo came over. It was late enough that the street had grown quiet. She had known it was him before she even opened the door.

The man had been relentless in calling her all week, and each time her phone lit up with his name she had stared at the screen with a stubborn self-preservation before letting it ring out.

She really didn't have anything to say to him.

Or at least that was what she kept telling herself.

In truth, she wasn't exactly mad at him. Not really. The anger she'd shown the night she kicked him out had been dramatic.

She was trying to do the sensible thing.

Protect herself.

Guard her emotions for when he would eventually leave.

"Hi, Val." Ricardo said, hands in his pockets. He looked slightly sheepish standing there.

"Hi. I thought you would have left back to Vienna."

"That's why I have been trying to call you, Val. Luca got me a job at the club. I started a few days ago. Tonight is the first night I had to come see you."

Valentina's stomach butterflies returned instantly.

Traitors.

They fluttered wildly against her ribs, making her pulse jump in a way she absolutely refused to let him notice.

He stayed.

He actually stayed.

But Valentina had spent too much time learning how quickly good things could disappear. So she locked her expression down, crossed her arms loosely against the doorframe, and forced her shoulders into a careless shrug.

"Okay." She said. "So what do you want?"

Ricardo blinked. "What do you mean what do I want?"

"Exactly what it means, Ricardo. Why are you here?"

He looked at her as if the answer should have been obvious. "To see you!" he said.

Valentina leaned lightly against the doorframe, pretending to examine her nails as if his answer hadn't made her heart do a small, embarrassing somersault. "I'm here. You're seeing me. Had your fill?"

"Why the hell are you still being so difficult?" he asked. Ricardo's frustration finally slipped through the cracks of his patience. He had come here prepared for resistance—he knew Valentina well enough to expect a little stubbornness—but the calm, almost indifferent way she was questioning him was slowly driving him insane.

"I'm not being anything. I just want to know what you want." Valentina answered.

"What do you want me to say, Val?" he said, exasperation creeping into his voice. "That I missed you? That...that when I realised I was staying, I have never been happier?"

"What do you want?"

Ricardo stared at her for a long second.

Then he groaned in pure frustration.

"Ughhh...fuck me!" He reached forward, grabbing her by the arm and pulling her away from the doorway.

And then his mouth crashed into hers.

Valentina's brain scrambled to catch up with what had just happened. Then instinct took over. Her hands shot upward, gripping the collar of his shirt as she pulled him closer, kissing him back with equal intensity.

They stood there on the porch like two people who had completely forgotten the world existed beyond that small patch of light.

His hands slid around her waist, pulling her flush against him, while her fingers curled into his shirt.

The quiet street remained blissfully empty as they consumed each other like two people who had been holding their breath for far too long.

Eventually they had to break apart.

Both of them pulled back slightly, breathing harder, their foreheads nearly touching.

Valentina smiled up at him. "I want that too."

A low chuckle escaped him. "You're a weird one."

He leaned in again, and kissed her slower, exploring instead of conquering. His palms slid upward, cupping the sides of her neck, his thumbs brushing lightly along her jaw.

Valentina melted into the touch, her earlier defenses dissolving embarrassingly fast.

He pulled back just enough to look at her again. "Do you want to take this inside?"

"God yes..." Val whispered.

While in bed that night, Luca was running his fingers through Vee's hair as she laid her head on his chest, both of them naked, basking in the afterglow of another session of mind-blowing sex.

Even though their dinner date had been temporarily disrupted by Julian, as usual, they found their way past their issues right into each other's arms.

Her fingers traced lazy circles against Luca's stomach, feeling the hard planes of muscle beneath warm skin. The man was unfairly built. Even now, after everything they had done tonight, just the feel of him beneath her palm made a slow heat coil in her stomach again.

Honestly, it was ridiculous.

The man had completely ruined her sense of dignity.

She shifted slightly, stretching one leg across his, enjoying the low rumble that vibrated in his chest at the contact. Luca always reacted to her touch like she was some rare indulgence he couldn't get enough of. It was flattering.

"I'll be leaving on a trip, Bambola." He felt her stiffen instantly.

Her body reacted before her mind even caught up.

"No! No! I'm not going to Vienna. I swear!"

Veronica relaxed once more. She exhaled slowly, the tension draining from her shoulders as she sank back into his chest. "Where are you going?"

"To visit a family member. I have business to discuss."

"Where?"

"Singapore." He said calmly.

"How long will you stay?"

"I'll leave as soon as my business is conducted."

"I'm going to miss you." She said.

"I'll miss you too and Vee...you can trust that I will keep my word."

"Whats that?"

"You don't have to stiffen everytime I say I am going on a trip." He said.

"I..didnt..." she started to say but he cut her off.

"You did. You never have to lie to me, love. Like I said, I will keep my word. No one else."

Vee nodded. "I believe you."

In truth, she did.

He had never lied to her. Not once.

Even when the truth would make her furious. Luca always chose honesty, and then left the reaction entirely up to her.

It was infuriating. It was also one of the reasons she trusted him.

"When are you leaving?" she asked quietly.

"As soon as I can get a flight out."

"You didn't plan this trip, did you?" she murmured.

A faint smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. He hummed in response not wanting to reveal much.

The events of tonight had made him restless.

Luca wasn't afraid of Julian. He knew better than to come after him directly. That would be suicide, and Julian was many things but he wasn't stupid.

No, Julian wouldn't attack him.

But Veronica?

Valentina?

That was a different story.

Luca's fingers slowed in Vee's hair as the thought pressed heavier on his chest. He had sworn to protect them.

And right now, he wasn't certain.

Which meant he needed help.

Advice.

From the one person in the world who would rather throw themselves in front of a moving train than speak to him.

"Come back to me in one piece," she murmured distractedly.

He nudged her up to sit astride him and pulled her close. "I will always come back to you," he said quietly. "I'll defy every odd to come back to you and if it happens that I don't, know that I did everything and your name was the last word on my lips."

"Do you always have to be so dark?"

Luca smirked, entirely unapologetic. "I'm a dark man with a dark heart currently with dark intentions." He winked at her as his palm went to cup her ass.

Chapter 143: You're Always Ready For Me

Her jaw dropped. "What? Again? Fuck no!" She tried to scramble off him in a hurry, but the sheet wrapped stubbornly around her legs. She barely made it two inches before it tightened and tangled further, trapping her mid-escape.

Luca burst out laughing.

In one swift motion he caught her wrist, pulled her back, and flipped them so she landed on the mattress with a soft bounce.

Vee giggled helplessly as he climbed over her. "Luca!"

"Even gravity wants you under me," he said smugly before leaning down to kiss her collarbone.

"Luca..." she tried again, though the protest had already lost half its strength.

Her earlier determination to escape dissolved quickly. The man had an unfair ability to turn her thoughts into complete nonsense with just a touch.

And he knew it.

The smug bastard.

His mouth moved slowly along her skin. His fingers brushed over her nipples.

Vee inhaled sharply.

The small sound made Luca grin against her skin. "Thought you said 'fuck no,'" he murmured.

She groaned and covered her face with her hands. "Luca, I swear to God—"

He gently pulled her wrists away.

"Relax," he said softly, pressing a kiss to her knuckles as his fingers drifted lower.

The slut in her gave in instantly. It had been twice that night already. Once in the car and then when they returned home from dinner. What in the world was wrong with them?

"You're always ready for me." he whispered in her ear as he felt her wetness.

"That's because you drive me crazy." Her gaze held his.

"Same here, love. Same here." He asserted as he slid inside her, riding them both to a place where they never tired of going.

Veronica clutched at his shoulders, her fingers digging lightly into his skin as he moved with her. Luca buried his face against her neck, breathing her in.

Their rhythm slowed, unhurried, neither of them rushing toward an ending. It wasn't about that tonight. It was about the closeness, the warmth, the quiet reassurance of skin against skin.

The bell above the door jingled softly.

"Welcome to Scalese Pizza parlour, what can I..."

The words froze in her mouth once she identified the man standing at the counter.

Her entire face lit up. "Cassidy!" Valentina shrieked.

The quiet afternoon inside the pizza parlour shattered instantly as she rushed around the counter and threw her arms around him.

Cassidy barely had time to react before she squeezed him tight.

"How are you?!" she demanded, pulling back just enough to look at his face.

"I'm good," he said with a small laugh. "I'm alright."

Valentina leaned back, still gripping his arms as she studied him.

"Oh my God, you look different."

And he did.

The last time she had seen Cassidy, he had looked exactly like what he was—a painfully polite high school teacher who wore pressed button-down shirts and sensible shoes.

Now?

The transformation was... noticeable.

His usual formal, good-guy outfit was gone, replaced by much darker colours. A simple black t-shirt stretched across his shoulders, paired with worn jeans and a dark jacket. His hair was a little longer too, less carefully styled.

But that wasn't the most shocking thing.

"Is that a tattoo?" Valentina bent forward, squinting at the side of his neck.

Cassidy instinctively stepped back. "Oh—uh—yeah. It's nothing. I was just playing around with something. Ended up getting it."

Valentina gave him a weird look, one brow lifting slowly as she studied the small inked design that disappeared beneath the collar of his shirt. Cassidy had never been the tattoo type. In fact, the Cassidy she remembered would have probably lectured someone about the permanence of body art and the importance of "making thoughtful decisions."

"Is it a heartbreak tattoo?" Valentina asked, narrowing her eyes at him.

"What? No! God no! That Chapter has long since been closed." His response came quickly, reflexively.

"I'm glad you're doing great," she said finally.

"Thanks. I'm guessing your sister isn't here," Cassidy said.

Valentina hesitated. "No... she...." She paused, then waved a hand quickly as if brushing the thought away. "You know what... never mind."

Cassidy tilted his head slightly, giving her a look. "Come on, Val. It's me. How is she doing?"

"She is good," Valentina said. "She's happy."

Cassidy nodded once. "Good." His gaze drifted around the pizza parlour then, taking in the familiar space. "The store has gotten some improvement too, I see,"

Valentina brightened immediately. "Yeah, thanks to Luca." The words slipped out before she could stop them.

The moment they left her mouth, her hand flew up to cover it.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"I swear to you, Val," he said calmly, "I'm okay with all of it. I just came by to get a pizza. Been missing the Scalese touch."

"Your usual?"

"Yeah. My usual." Cassidy gave her a small smile.

Valentina nodded and hurried back around the counter, grabbing the tablet to enter the order. Her fingers moved quickly across the screen, but the excitement bubbling in her chest was impossible to hide.

"Oh my God!" she started as she rounded the counter once more. "Vee is going to flip when I tell her." She glanced up at him while finishing the order. "I haven't been seeing you at mass and I kind of got worried."

"Wasn't exactly feeling Christian." Cassidy smiled.

"Are you sure you are doing okay?" Val asked once more, passing the printed sheet to Rosa.

Rosa took it without looking up, already moving toward the kitchen.

"Val, your sister is not the only woman in the world."

"I know... I know," she said. "But don't fault me for worrying about you. I did like you when you were going out with her."

Back then, Cassidy had fit so naturally into their lives. He was polite, dependable.

It had felt safe.

"Now that I think about it," she continued, leaning her hip against the counter, "you were her first boyfriend ever."

Cassidy's mouth curved into a small, thoughtful smile. "I guess she stepped up real nice then, uhn?" he said.

(Hi. Please if you would like to beta read the first few Chapters of a new novel by me, please, please, please, I would appreciate it. Just let me know where to send it.)

Chapter 144: You Do Seem Happy

Valentina narrowed her eyes at him. "You're different," she insisted.

He shrugged slightly. "I think what you are seeing as different is me no longer giving a shit about women."

Val immediately shook her head. "No, it's not that."

She studied him again, more carefully now. It wasn't just his clothes or the tattoo. It was the way he carried himself. There was a confidence there that hadn't existed before.

"Okay, Val... stop analysing me and tell me about yourself," Cassidy insisted.

"Fine, fine. Uh... I'm seeing this extremely cute guy."

Cassidy raised an eyebrow.

"Oh my God..." she sighed dreamily, her head tipping back slightly as she smiled to herself.

Cassidy chuckled.

It was an expression he recognized instantly. He had seen it many times before.

Too many times, maybe.

Valentina looked exactly like her sister.

The same expressive eyes.

The same way her lips curved when she smiled.

The same dark blonde hair falling around her shoulders.

Even the way she sighed dramatically felt painfully familiar.

For a brief second, Cassidy's mind tried to wander somewhere it absolutely shouldn't.

He snapped his thoughts back quickly.

Nope.

Not happening.

He forced his attention back to the conversation, shaking the thought away.

Valentina was still talking, completely lost in her dreamy excitement.

The sight made him smile faintly.

Some things, at least, hadn't changed.

"He makes you happy?" Cassidy confirmed.

"Yeah." She answered.

"You do seem happy."

Valentina didn't realize how much that simple observation meant until she heard it said out loud. Her smile softened slightly, less dreamy and more genuine. For all her teasing and dramatics, the truth was simple—she was happy. Nervous, confused sometimes, but happy in a way that felt new and fragile.

Once his order was ready, Val grabbed it from the counter. She set it carefully in front of him and added a cold can of soda beside it without asking.

Cassidy reached into his pocket and placed a bill on the counter. "Keep the change."

"Thank you. Come again!" she said brightly.

Cassidy picked up the pizza box, then paused for a moment before leaving. His eyes rested on her face, thoughtful. "Always keep your smile, Val. Don't ever lose it."

Before she could respond, he was already turning toward the door.

The bell above it jingled softly as he stepped out onto the street.

At the exact same moment, Ricardo was stepping inside.

The two men passed each other in the doorway without stopping. Ricardo glanced instinctively at the stranger, the same quick assessment he had developed from working around Luca's world.

Something about the man triggered his instincts immediately.

Maybe it was the quiet confidence in his walk. Maybe the way his eyes briefly scanned the room before he exited. Or maybe it was the glimpse of dark ink peeking out just above the collar of his jacket.

The tattoo.

Ricardo's eyes narrowed slightly.

Valentina waved cheerfully toward the door. "Bye Cassidy!"

Then she turned back toward the counter just as Ricardo approached.

"Hey boyfriend," she greeted easily.

Ricardo didn't return the smile immediately. His attention was still lingering on the door Cassidy had just walked through.

"Who is that?" he asked.

Valentina blinked, slightly confused by the tension in his voice. "Uh... that's Cassidy," she said casually. "He's Vee's ex. It's a whole story."

Ricardo's brow furrowed. "Vee's ex works for the Bastione familia?"

Valentina stared at him like he had just spoken a different language. "What familia?" she asked. "Cassidy is a high school teacher," Valentina said firmly, as if correcting a ridiculous mistake.

Ricardo slowly looked back toward the door. "Judging by the tattoo I just saw peeking out of his jacket," he said quietly, "that guy is not a high school teacher."

Valentina's head snapped back toward the front of the shop, her eyes darting to the door as if Cassidy might still be standing there.

But he was gone.

The street outside had already swallowed him up.

"Oh no! Oh no... oh my God." Her hands flew to her head, fingers digging lightly into her hair as panic started creeping up her spine.

"Whats wrong?" Ricardo asked.

Valentina turned to him slowly, her face pale with sudden realization. "It's a long story, Ricardo." Val sighed.

And it was.

Bianca's name flashed across the screen of his phone as Ricardo drove back to Commissioned.

"What does she want now?" he muttered under his breath. He already had a bad feeling.

Bianca never called without a reason lately, and those reasons were rarely pleasant. He swiped to receive the call and her face immediately appeared on the screen, looking as immaculate as ever.

Perfect makeup. Perfect hair. Perfect posture.

"Is she dead?"

"I haven't gotten news of anyone's obituary, Bianca."

"You think you are sleek, uhn, Ricardo." Bianca smiled.

"Okay, listen to yourself," he said calmly. "It's quite flattering that you think I am the kind of man to butt heads with Luciano. Thank you for your strong faith in me."

Bianca's eyes sharpened slightly at the sarcasm. "I could always let him find out about our little affair back in school, Ricardo. A whisper there, a gossip here..."

Ricardo almost laughed.

Of all the things she could threaten him with, that one barely made the list.

"I have been in New York long enough to know Luca would not give one cent of a crap about that," he replied. "Find something else to threaten me with. Get creative, Bianca."

The car slowed at a red light as he continued.

"I know you well enough to know that when it comes to being brutal, you're quite good at it." He didn't wait for her response. Ricardo ended the call. He knew she would be fuming.

Bianca's temper was legendary, though most people in the Genovese circle had never seen the full extent of it. They only knew the polished version of her.

Ricardo knew better. He drummed his fingers lightly against the steering wheel as he drove, his mind racing through possibilities. He had to do something about Bianca very soon. He couldn't exactly go to Luca and tell him, hey your wife plans on putting out a hit on your mistress.

PS: If you haven't, please drop a review. The book is getting a promotion in about five hours, and reviews do help a lot. Thank you.)

Chapter 145: You Picked The Wrong House

But he couldn't sit back and watch either.

His grip tightened slightly on the wheel.

If anything happened to Veronica, Valentina would break.

He had seen it too clearly in the past weeks—the way Valentina clung to her sister, the way Veronica's happiness seemed to give her a kind of quiet peace. He had to do something.

But what?

Every option carried risk. Every path led into dangerous territory. Bianca wasn't someone you could simply warn off or intimidate. She was married into one of the most powerful families in Italy. Her family weren't any less frightening either.

If his mother could have found the farthest place from the Genovese name, she would have taken it.

But it didn't matter how far she went.

He still found her eventually, a few years after he took over the New York familia.

Singapore had been her refuge.

A city loud and alive enough to swallow old names and dangerous histories. The crowded streets, the endless lights, the mixture of languages and cultures—it was the kind of place where someone could disappear if they truly wanted to.

She had tried.

Luca remembered the first time he stood outside her small apartment building, staring up at the modest balcony with a strange tightness in his chest. For a moment he had felt like a boy again.

At first, she had been pleased to see him.

The shock had softened into a brief, fragile happiness when she opened the door and recognized him. For a moment she had pulled him into a hug like nothing had changed.

Like the years hadn't passed.

But as soon as she heard he had followed in his father's footsteps, everything changed.

The warmth disappeared from her face almost instantly.

She stepped back from him like he had suddenly become a stranger.

She had wanted nothing to do with him after that.

The disappointment in her voice had cut deeper than any insult ever could.

She had said she had higher hopes for him.

Luca remembered standing in her living room, hands in his pockets, listening to her speak about the life she had wanted for him.

A life far away from blood.

But that had never been an option.

The Genovese name didn't release its sons so easily.

And now, he had returned but this time to seek her help. He needed to know how his father kept her safe while they were together.

She was the mistress. Julian's mother was the wife.

History was repeating itself.

He didn't like the comparison. His father had built his life around two women and Luca had always despised that. The way everyone had simply accepted it as part of the life.

Yet here he was.

A wife who belonged to his world and a woman he would burn the world down to protect.

It took about twenty four hours for him to arrive in Singapore and when he did, it was late in the midnight.

He knew the house well enough.

The neighborhood was quiet, lined with modest houses and small gardens.

Luca approached the door and studied the lock briefly.

Old habit.

It took him less than ten seconds.

He found his way into the house as quietly as he could, picking the lock.

The interior was simple.

It looked like the home of someone who had built a quiet life.

Luca moved toward the kitchen, suddenly aware of how dry his throat felt. The flight had been long, and he had barely slept. He needed a drink of water. He had just opened the fridge when he sensed her behind him. He pretended not to hear her move. He shut the fridge slowly, the cold bottle of water in his hand, and heard the click of the gun behind him.

"You picked the wrong house!" came her voice.

He took a small sip of water before responding. "Hello, mother." He said calmly, turning around with the bottle still in his hand. "It's been a while."

She stood several feet away, the pistol raised and pointed directly at his chest.

She stared at him in shock, anger. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"I just need you to answer a few questions and I will be out of your hair."

"Get the hell out of my house." She said.

"Mum...I need your help."

Carol lowered the gun then. "What the fuck makes you think I would want to help you? What do you need uhn? Need me to help you make someone disappear? Smuggle drugs? Establish your familia in Singapore? I'm not helping you."

Luca sighed under his breath and rubbed the back of his neck. The jet lag, the tension, the twenty-four hours of flying with nothing but worry gnawing at his brain—it was all catching up with him. "I need you to tell me how dad protected you."

Carol laughed. "Protected me? That's funny. The one I needed protection from was himself."

"And I gave that to you! It's time to repay that debt."

Carol's eyes flashed immediately. "You call saving your own mother a debt."

"A mother who wants nothing to do with me!" Luca snapped.

The anger came faster than he meant it to. Years of it lived just under his skin, waiting for the smallest crack to escape.

"Because you became the man I was running from in the first place."

Luca let out a slow breath through his nose, forcing his temper back down. He had not flown halfway across the world to argue about the past.

"Mother, I know you hate me. Trust me, I'd have never graced your door if I had any other choice. But please...please...I need your help."

This version of her son was unfamiliar. The Luca she remembered had always been proud, stubborn, dangerous even as a boy.

Slowly, she stepped forward and placed the gun on the kitchen counter.

"Whats going on?"

He took another sip of water, mostly to buy himself a second to organize his thoughts.

"I met a woman." He began.

(Ladies and gents *Dont know if we have gents here* 100 power stones!!! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!)

Chapter 146: I Already Married Bianca Vitale

Carol's eyebrow lifted slowly. "Then marry her."

"I already married Bianca Vitale."

Carol smiled then. "Your father finally did it uhn. He always wanted control of the Vitale's docks. He finally got it."

"Yes." Luca's answer came flat.

There was no point pretending otherwise. Everyone who knew the Genovese family knew that marriage had never been about love. It had been a transaction the moment it was arranged.

"I birthed him a weapon." Carol looked up at her son. "And you embraced the life so easily, it's as if there is no part of me inside you."

"Mum, focus."

"Have her join the familia under the Genovese protection, specifically yours. Any one in the familia who hurts her would have committed treason. But that doesn't keep her safe from your rivals."

Luca nodded slowly. He could work with that.

"Thank you." Luca said. "I'll be out of your hair." He slid the empty bottle of water onto the counter, pushed his hands into his pockets, and headed toward the door without another word. His footsteps were almost at the door when her voice cut through the silence.

"Luciano!"

Luca stopped just at the door. He turned slightly, looking back over his shoulder.

Carol stood in the kitchen doorway now, arms still folded. "It's the middle of the night." She said.

Luca shrugged lightly. "There is a hotel nearby."

"You can stay. I'll prepare the guest room for you."

He genuinely hadn't expected that.

She had made it clear she wanted nothing to do with the life he represented.

Or with him.

So the invitation felt strange.

Suspicious, even.

Luca shifted his weight slightly, unsure what to say.

Staying meant proximity.

The same thing she had spent years avoiding.

Luca turned then and looked at his mother, hesitation flickering across his sharp features. "I...I don't think I should."

Carol's glare was instantaneous. "Luciano Genovese! You get into this house, and you get some sleep or I am going to aim that gun at your leg and I promise you, I will not miss."

The way she wielded authority made him pause. It wasn't fear exactly—it was respect. "Yes ma'am," he said quickly, surrendering. He strolled back into the house.

Carol followed behind. She guided him up the stairs into the guest room, her hands moving as she arranged sheets, blankets, and pillows. "Have you had anything to eat?" she asked, not looking at him but adjusting the pillowcase so it would lie perfectly flat.

"No."

"You didn't eat on the flight?" Carol asked, pausing to meet his gaze.

"No."

Her lips pressed into a thin line in exasperation. "Like your father, you think someone will poison you?"

"Paranoia has kept me alive, mother," he said quietly.

Carol stopped short, her eyes narrowing at him, flickering with intensity. "Every mother prays their children will outlive them. Mothers in the familia pray that their kids get to come back home alive each night. This woman you hope to protect—" she gestured vaguely, "is this what she is signing up for?"

Luca's jaw tightened. "She doesn't want a child with me," he admitted.

"Smart woman." Carol commented.

Luca huffed faintly at that, the ghost of a tired smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. He leaned against the doorframe of the guest room, arms loosely folded, watching his mother adjust the blanket at the edge of the bed. "From the first day I met her, she reminded me of you." Luca said. "Your stubbornness is still legendary in Italy. She's..." He paused, searching for the right word and somehow finding none that fully fit.

Veronica was many things—fierce, infuriating, stubborn enough to challenge him without fear. She fought him every step of the way and somehow still found herself wrapped in his arms at the end of the day.

Carol chuckled. "It's weird that you are looking for your mother in girls."

"I wonder why." He said sarcastically.

Carol shot him a look that said she heard the bitterness under the joke. She reached up and gave him a quick pat on the chest. "I'll get you something to snack on. I promise not to poison you." She finished and left.

Her footsteps faded down the hallway and then down the stairs, leaving Luca alone in the quiet guest room.

The house felt strange around him.

He pulled off his jacket first, shrugging out of it. The leather hit the sofa in the corner with a soft thud. His shirt followed next, tossed carelessly beside it.

The long flight had left his muscles tight and his shoulders sore. Twenty-four hours of sitting still did strange things to a man who was used to constant motion.

He rolled his neck once, then reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone.

The screen lit up instantly when he pressed the power button.

Vee's smiling face ignited the screen as the wallpaper. "I miss you babe." He whispered.

He glanced quickly at the top of the screen, confirming what he already knew.

Airplane mode.

Still on.

Good.

He placed the phone carefully on the dresser.

The last thing he wanted was for any signal to trace back here.

He had no idea if his father knew exactly where his mother was but he wasn't going to be the reason he found her anyway.

His father had many talents. Finding people who didn't want to be found was one of them.

Luca walked to the window and pushed the curtain aside slightly. Singapore glittered outside in the distance—quiet streets, glowing buildings, palm trees shifting faintly in the night breeze.

Peaceful.

He wondered briefly what Veronica would think of this place. She would probably drag him through every street market in the city and force him to try foods he couldn't pronounce. Then complain loudly when he refused.

God, he missed her.

Missed her attitude. Missed the way she glared at him. Missed the way she melted against him.

Soon Carol came back in with a tray of pancakes, strawberries, honey and hot cocoa.

(Brought to you by Jennifer Willard)

PS: If you haven't, please drop a review. The book is getting a promotion in about five hours, and reviews do help a lot. Thank you.)

Chapter 147: You Are My Son

He looked up from where he had been sitting against the headboard. "You said something to snack on." Luca said.

"Sue me. I don't get to cook for my own son very often."

"Mum don't make it look like its my fault we do not have a relationship." Luca said as she placed the tray beside him on the bed.

Carol sighed and sat on the edge of the bed, smoothing her hands over her jeans. "How is Bianca? Last time I saw her she was four to five years old."

"She is good."

"Still pretty?"

"Stunning." Luca said.

Carol nodded slowly, absorbing that. "Wasn't enough?"

Luca picked up a fork and stabbed a pancake. "A year ago, it was. The prettiest girl, the familia getting more control, more power...it was really supposed to be enough." He finally took a bite.

It was annoyingly good.

"And now?" Carol asked.

He glanced at her, irritation flashing in his eyes. "Why are you asking me all these? Its not like you give a shit!"

"Hey! You will watch your language around me. You may be a killer boss out there, in here, you are my son! Are we clear?"

Luca held her gaze. The power struggle flickered between them—two stubborn people refusing to back down.

Then Luca sighed and dropped his eyes back to the tray.

"Yes ma'am." He took another bite, chewing slowly.

"This girl, she makes you happy." Carol asked.

Luca let out a slow breath, leaning back against the headboard with the tray still balanced awkwardly over his lap. The pancakes were half gone now, the honey sticky on his fork, the cocoa cooling slowly beside him. He stared down at the plate for a moment before answering. "More than that. She makes me...feel."

"Why not divorce the wife?"

Luca gave a dry laugh under his breath. "Have you forgotten how close our family and the Vitales are?"

Carol shrugged lightly, as if the weight of mafia alliances meant nothing in her quiet Singapore home. "What are you afraid of?"

"The fallout."

"So you are just going to keep your happiness on the side. And how does she feel being the other woman? Or are you exactly like your father and didn't tell her?"

Luca's jaw tightened. "She found out. Mom, it's complicated. Okay? That is all I can say." Luca snapped.

"You have a picture?"

"Okay, this is absurd! Totally absurd. Ten years ago, you wanted nothing to do with me and now you want me to download my entire life into your lap?"

The frustration finally spilled over.

Years of distance. Years of silence. Years of knowing his own mother had chosen to walk away from his life the moment he had found her again.

Now suddenly she wanted details.

Carol stood up abruptly. "Fine! Carry your cross by yourself. Die a little bit more inside everyday. Good night!" She moved toward the door, pausing just long enough to throw one last remark over her shoulder. "And clear and do your dishes when you are done. I am not your Nonnina."

Then she left the room.

"Jesus Christ," he muttered under his breath.

He picked up the fork again.

The truth was... she wasn't wrong.

He was carrying a cross. He considered turning off airplane mode and calling her.

Just to hear her voice. Just to know she was safe.

But the thought vanished almost immediately.

He had already exposed enough by coming here.

Instead he reached over to the dresser and picked up his phone again.

The screen lit up instantly.

Veronica's smiling face filled it.

Luca stared at the picture for a while before muttering quietly into the empty room.

"Fuck!"

"What do you mean he joined the mafia?" Veronica yelled as Valentina gave her the story she got from Ricardo.

"You should have seen him Vee. You would know something had changed."

The idea didn't just feel wrong. It felt absurd.

"Why...why in the world would he do that?"

"You?" Valentina said.

"What does that even mean?"

Valentina shrugged lightly. "Maybe he thinks that's what you want in a man. I mean you did leave him for a mafia boss."

"I didn't...leave him! I...I...okay maybe I did. But it wasn't like the conventional girl breaks boy's heart. Luca was relentless. I..." Veronica kept stammering as she spoke. Her words tripped over themselves in her rush to explain something she hadn't even fully processed herself.

Because the truth was messy.

Luca had entered her life like a hurricane. There had been no slow transition, no careful emotional shift from one relationship to another.

One moment she had been dating Cassidy, living a perfectly normal life.

The next moment she had been pulled into Luca Genovese's orbit—dangerous, intoxicating, impossible to escape.

And she hadn't exactly fought very hard.

The realization made her stomach twist with guilt.

"Do you think I should talk to him?"

Valentina tilted her head thoughtfully. "I think you should tell Luca first."

Veronica groaned immediately. "I don't know. Luca would consider that information threatening. Especially since he works for a rival family. How did he even get in there?" She muttered. Her thoughts spiraled rapidly.

Cassidy had been a teacher. A normal, decent guy who spent his weekends grading papers and complaining about school board meetings.

What kind of chain of events turned that man into someone wearing a mafia tattoo?

"Oh my God," Veronica whispered suddenly. Her eyes widened in horror. "This is all my fault."

If she hadn't met Luca... If she hadn't broken Cassidy's heart... If she hadn't gotten tangled in this insane world of crime families and dangerous men...

Maybe Cassidy would still be grading math exams instead of carrying guns.

"Wouldn't it be neat? Two mafia dudes fighting for you." Valentina chuckled.

Veronica shot her a look of pure disbelief.

Valentina shrugged again, unbothered. "I'm just saying."

"Tina...do you really think Cassidy can go up against Luca." Veronica gave her sister a silly look.

"I think he can try."

"It's suicide." Vee said.

"I think he knows that."

Chapter 148: Something Didn't Sit Right

That answer didn't help.

If anything, it made Veronica feel worse.

"What is it with these men?" Veronica sighed in exasperation.

Seriously.

One mafia boss who would apparently burn the world down for her.

One former boyfriend who had somehow decided the correct response to heartbreak was to join the fucking mafia.

"He made it sound as if he had genuinely moved on though but after Ricardo told me that, I just...something didn't sit right. And Ricardo thinks he should be banned from the store. A member of the Bastione familia coming around the shop of a Genovese's girlfriend is trouble."

"Tina, we sell pizza. Anyone can walk in here and get whatever they want and I get their money. I am not banning anyone from the store unless they make trouble."

Valentina sighed, clearly recognizing the argument was already lost. "My advice? Stay away from Cassidy. Do not engage. Not even a little bit." she said.

"Yeah...maybe you are right."

"I am definitely right."

Veronica rolled her eyes slightly but didn't argue further.

Deep down she knew Valentina had a point.

The next morning, Luca was ready to leave.

He moved quietly through the guest room, already dressed, jacket back on, phone safely in his pocket. He checked the time briefly then stepped out of the room and headed downstairs.

The house was quiet.

The living area was empty when he reached it.

He frowned slightly. "Mum?" he called. He walked through the living room slowly, scanning. He turned and headed back up the stairs once more, listening carefully. "Mum?" he called again as he moved down the hallway, heading toward the direction he had heard her moving the previous night. "Mum?" He paused outside one of the doors.

He opened the door to her bedroom and found her still on the bed asleep.

For a moment Luca simply stood there, leaning lightly against the doorframe, watching the slow rise and fall of her breathing.

He rubbed the back of his neck quietly.

He did keep her up too late anyway.

Their conversation had dragged well into the night, bouncing between awkward tension, uncomfortable honesty, and the strange, almost normal moments that kept surprising him.

His eyes drifted to the bedside table.

The thermometer caught his attention immediately.

Luca frowned slightly. "Mum?" he said softly, stepping closer and gently shaking her shoulder.

Carol stirred slowly, blinking up at him through half-lidded eyes. She stretched lazily and gave a dramatic yawn, bringing a hand up to her nose. "Hey, what time is it?"

"Are you okay?"

Carol sniffed faintly and rubbed her nose again as if proving a point. "Just a little under the weather." She said and faked a sneeze. "I'll make you breakfast."

Luca immediately shook his head. "No! Stay. I'll get you something warm." He reached automatically for the blanket, adjusting it slightly where it had slipped down her shoulder.

Carol watched him quietly for a moment, the corner of her mouth twitching like she was suppressing a small smile. "Don't you have a flight to catch."

Luca hesitated.

Technically... yes.

There were meetings waiting for him in New York. Problems waiting for him. Enemies waiting for him.

His phone sat quietly in his pocket, still on airplane mode. "I can stay to take care of you...that...is...if...if...you want." He wasn't sure what to think here.

The woman was giving him whiplash.

One second she wanted him gone, the next she was feeding him pancakes in the middle of the night like a perfectly ordinary mother.

"Of course, if its not too much trouble. I don't have anyone around anyway."

For years he had convinced himself she didn't need him. That she had chosen this life away from the Genovese name because she wanted nothing to do with him.

But hearing the quiet admission that she was alone here in this big quiet house...

"I'll stay."

Carol nodded slightly. "Thank you." she said, lying back on the bed once more.

Luca reached down and pulled the blanket snugly over her shoulders, tucking it in slightly. He cleared his throat quietly and stepped back.

"I'll make tea," he muttered.

"Do you know how to make tea?" Carol questioned.

Luca chuckled under his breath, glancing back at her with a raised brow. "I'll do my best. Then I can order some food. I might step out for a bit, use a payphone in the city but I will be right back, okay?"

Carol nodded slowly, pulling the blanket a little higher around her shoulders like someone settling comfortably into the role of a patient. "Thank you."

Luca gave a small nod in return and stepped out of the room, pulling the door closed gently behind him. His footsteps faded down the hallway and then toward the stairs.

Carol waited.

One second.

Two.

Three.

The moment she heard the faint creak of the stairs and the distant movement in the kitchen below, her eyes opened again.

And she smiled.

Apparently the boy still cared about his mother.

For years she had worried that the world Luca had chosen—the violent, ruthless, unforgiving world of the Genovese familia—had burned every soft thing out of him.

That the boy she raised had been replaced entirely by the man his father had molded.

But seeing him fuss over her this morning, awkwardly offering to stay and take care of her like he wasn't one of the most feared men in New York...

It told her something important.

Somewhere in there, the boy was still alive.

Carol turned slightly on the bed, staring at the ceiling. She still didn't agree with the life he chose. She probably never would.

But he was still her son.

And she had missed him more than she liked to admit—even to herself.

If he would stay for a couple of days, that would be splendid.

Not because she needed taking care of.

But because time was a strange thing. It slipped away faster than anyone expected.

And mothers rarely got second chances with sons who had walked too far into darkness.

Downstairs, a cabinet opened and shut loudly.

Carol smirked faintly.

Judging by the noise, Luca was currently losing a fight with the kettle.

Chapter 149: You Will Not Believe Me

Julian arrived at the airport right on time to pick up the rest of the family. He stood near the entrance with his hands in his coat pockets.

He had been sent ahead a few days ago to inform Luca that a relative of theirs was getting married in New York, a flash marriage sort of.

The kind of sudden wedding that usually meant one of two things in their world—either a political alliance needed sealing quickly, or someone had gotten themselves into trouble that required immediate fixing.

Julian didn't particularly care which it was.

Family events in the Genovese circle were rarely about romance.

He glanced briefly at his watch.

Because while the rest of the family believed he had simply come ahead to deliver a message to Luca...

Julian had used those extra days for something else entirely. Information. Observation. Preparation.

Don Genovese didn't like announcing his travel plans over the phone. He considered it careless. As a matter of fact, he didn't like using the phone period. So instead of risking loose words on an open line, he had told Julian to come to New York in person to inform his brother ahead of time.

Of course, Julian had gone to see Luca.

He had disrupted his brother's dinner date, but left the part out about their father and his wife coming into town.

He couldn't wait to see the look on Luca's face.

Luciano Genovese prided himself on always knowing what was happening around him. Being caught off guard—even by something this simple—would grate on him.

Julian smiled faintly to himself.

The first figure to show up was Don Genovese.

Julian straightened immediately.

But the moment his eyes shifted past his father—

His lungs stopped functioning. He knew she was coming.

Bianca exited the doors with effortless elegance. The wind caught lightly at her hair. She was always a marvel.

A dream. A sensation.

Julian felt the familiar ache settle quietly in his chest, the same one that had followed him since the day she married his brother.

It never got easier seeing her.

But somehow he never tired of it either.

Once Don reached him, Julian stepped forward immediately and bowed his head slightly, taking his father's hand and kissing the heavy ring resting on his finger.

"Welcome."

Don Genovese nodded once, his sharp eyes already scanning. "Where is Luciano?"

Julian lifted his shoulders slightly in a mild shrug. "I don't know. I thought he would be here too."

"Did you tell him I was arriving today?" Don asked.

"Yes, I did. Must have skipped his mind."

Behind their father, Bianca stepped forward gracefully, clearly waiting for a pause in the exchange before inserting herself into the conversation.

"Julian..." she greeted softly. She gave him a small smile.

And in that small smile was a quiet appreciation for the role he was playing in this little surprise.

For keeping the element of shock intact.

Julian returned the smile politely. "Bianca...welcome to New York. First time?" Julian asked. He opened the car door for her.

"No. I visit from time to time. But I haven't been in years." She smiled as she slid gracefully into the back seat.

Don Genovese settled into the seat beside her.

Julian circled the car and got behind the wheel.

The engine purred to life smoothly as he pulled away, guiding the car out onto the road that led toward the heart of the city.

New York stretched ahead of them.

Julian kept his eyes on the road, but his mind was already playing several moves ahead.

This was shaping up to be quite the reveal into Luca's life in New York.

And Luca had absolutely no idea it was coming.

He almost admired the poetry of it.

"I cannot believe Luca didn't deem it fit to be here." Don Genovese complained suddenly from the back seat. "What is wrong with that boy?"

Julian hid the faint twitch of amusement that threatened to cross his face.

If his father only knew.

"If I tell you, you will not believe me." Julian said calmly.

Don Genovese scoffed immediately. "You have always had it out for your brother. I can't take anything you say seriously. You came all the way to Vienna to give me crappy stories about the ship Luca is running here."

Julian let out a soft breath through his nose.

There it was again.

The quiet assumption that anything negative said about Luciano must automatically be jealousy.

It had followed him his entire life.

Luca the golden son. Luca the natural leader. Luca the man who could apparently do no wrong in their father's eyes.

"I already said you wouldn't believe me, Dad." Julian replied evenly. "Case closed." He shifted gears smoothly as the car merged into the flow of traffic.

"I think you should take Julian seriously, Don." Bianca chipped in. "Something is going on with Luca," she continued. "I just... I can't understand it. He doesn't even pick my calls."

Don Genovese frowned slightly. "Well, he will explain himself when I see him, wont he?" he fumed in his seat.

When Veronica got home that night, she had a quiet evening planned.

Luca had informed her that he would be staying a bit longer wherever he was. He had called the pizza parlour and couldn't give details. But his business needed more time.

Still, she missed him. Terribly.

The apartment had felt unusually empty for the past few days. Without Luca's presence filling the space—everything felt strangely quiet.

So basically, her night was supposed to be dinner, wine, TV and then sleep.

Without Luca, there was no excitement.

Just routine.

She pushed open the door to the annex, kicking off her shoes lazily as she stepped inside, already mentally planning which bottle of wine she would open first.

But when she entered and found Bianca sitting on the sofa waiting, her stomach dropped.

The sight of her froze Veronica halfway across the room.

She knew exactly who it was. She had only seen Bianca briefly once before—on a video call—but even that short glimpse had been enough to leave an impression.

(This is in advance to 200 power stones. See you at 400)

PS: If you haven't, please drop a review. The book is getting a promotion in about five hours, and reviews do help a lot. Thank you.)

Chapter 150: I've Been Waiting For You

Still, the screen had done her no justice.

In person, Bianca was something else entirely.

The woman was a walking menace.

Tall. Elegant.

Her hair fell perfectly around her shoulders.

If she hadn't settled to be a wife, Lord knows she would have made it as a model breaking millions of hearts.

There was a cold sort of perfection about her that made Veronica suddenly aware of every crease in her clothes and every strand of hair that had escaped her ponytail during the long workday.

Bianca looked like she had stepped out of a magazine.

Veronica looked exactly like she had stepped out of a pizza kitchen.

"I've been waiting for you." Her accented voice cut through the silence.

The Italian in it was unmistakable—carrying the quiet authority of someone who expected to be listened to.

Veronica forced her feet to move again.

Of all the things she had imagined happening tonight, running into Luca's wife in her living room had not been one of them.

"Hello." Veronica said, placing her bag on the sofa.

Bianca's eyes moved slowly over Veronica, studying her. "At least you have the decency not to fuck my husband in the main building." she said, getting to her feet.

Even standing there delivering insults, she looked composed—like cruelty was simply another accessory she wore well.

Veronica did not like this. She did not like this one bit. Her pulse began to thud louder in her ears, the quiet evening she had planned dissolving completely into something tense and ugly.

Because what exactly was supposed to be her retort to a woman whose husband she was sleeping with?

What moral high ground did she stand on?

This was what Luca had reduced her to.

Veronica forced her shoulders to stay relaxed.

Forced her voice to remain steady.

"What can I do for you?"

"You?" Bianca chuckled. "Nothing...Where is my husband?"

Veronica swallowed once before answering. "He went on a business trip."

"Isn't that just cliché," she said lightly. "The wife asking the mistress for the whereabouts of her husband."

Veronica felt the sting of her words even though she had already accepted the role.

Accepted it because of Luca. Accepted it because loving him had somehow become stronger than her pride.

"Do you need anything else?" Vee asked, staying calm.

The politeness in her tone was deliberate.

A line she was trying to hold.

Bianca laughed softly again, shaking her head like the entire situation amused her far more than it should. "Again, no! I merely came to see the shameless slut who had the audacity—"

"I'm going to stop you right there! I refuse to be insulted. If you have a problem, take it up with your husband."

Bianca pulled her hand back and slapped Vee in the face.

Veronica's head snapped sideways from the force as the sting exploded across her cheek.

The sharp burn spread slowly under her skin, her ear ringing faintly.

Oh hell no.

The thought flashed through Veronica's mind with blinding clarity.

Without even thinking much about it, she returned the hit instantly.

Bianca stumbled backward from the force of it, clearly not expecting retaliation. Her balance faltered and she tumbled down onto the couch behind her, her breath catching sharply in her throat.

Veronica's chest rose and fell rapidly as the adrenaline surged through her veins. Her palm still tingled from the impact, the reality of what she had just done beginning to settle in. She had just slapped Luciano Genovese's wife.

Bianca slowly lifted her head, one hand touching the side of her face where the mark was already beginning to bloom.

Shock flickered across her expression first.

Then fury.

"Like I said," Veronica said, "I will not be insulted or abused."

She barely finished the sentence.

Bianca's hand disappeared into her handbag and came back out holding a gun.

It appeared so suddenly that Veronica's brain barely had time to register it.

Bianca shoved it straight toward her.

Vee quickly stood still, the words dying in her throat as the cold muzzle pressed into the soft skin of her neck.

"You American women! You think everyone should bow to you!" Her grip tightened around the weapon as she pushed it harder against Veronica's throat. "I am a Vitale heiress! The legal wife of Luciano Genovese and I can make you disappear with just a flick of my hair."

Veronica's mind raced through a dozen possibilities at once.

Run. Scream. Fight.

None of them seemed particularly smart when there was a gun pressed against your neck.

Bianca leaned closer, her eyes blazing now. "You don't have anything to say anymore, uhn?" she demanded.

The gun nudged harder.

"Nothing to say?"

Veronica considered staying silent.

Letting the moment pass.

Surviving the encounter by swallowing her pride.

But then she had learned that in Luca's world, you had to risk everything, everything to assert dominance over the one who thinks they can intimidate you.

If she was going to die, she better die swinging hard.

"Just one." Vee said quietly. She lifted her chin just enough that the barrel pressed more firmly against her throat. "You were wrong earlier. Luca fucked me for the first time," she continued, her gaze locked with Bianca's, "in the main building, on his bed."

Bianca's expression froze. She knew she shouldn't.

Even through the red haze clouding her vision, some part of her mind understood exactly how catastrophic this moment was about to become. Luciano would not forgive this. He had been very clear about Veronica. Very clear.

But standing there with the woman's words still echoing in her ears, Bianca could feel something inside her snap.

It was too much.

Too humiliating. Too vivid.

Her grip tightened around the gun. Her jaw clenched hard.

Then Bianca let go of her rage.

But not in the way Veronica expected.

Instead of aiming at her, Bianca swung the gun sideways and pointed it at the nearest lamp.

She squeezed the trigger.

The explosion shattered the quiet of the annex.

Glass burst everywhere as the lamp exploded, the bulb popping in a bright flash. Veronica screamed instinctively, her hands flying up to protect her face.

(Brought to you by Janelle Fox)