

# **Undressed By The Mafia God #Chapter 31: He's Making Waves - Read Undressed By The Mafia God Chapter 31: He's Making Waves**

## **Chapter 31: He's Making Waves**

They walked deeper into the estate.

Nonnina opened a door and ushered her inside.

It was an apartment.

A sitting area with plush couches. A small dining nook. A kitchenette gleaming with untouched appliances. Beyond that, a bedroom with a bed so large it felt absurd, dressed in crisp white sheets that practically glowed under the soft lighting.

Vee stopped walking.

"Oh," she breathed.

"You will have your own personal maid," Nonnina continued, gesturing vaguely. "The girl from this morning. Luca made a card available for you. It is on the bedside table. If you need anything else, you let me know."

Vee stepped farther in, running her fingers lightly over the back of a chair. "This is much better than my house," she admitted quietly.

Nonnina hummed. "Is it?"

Vee turned to her.

"Is there love in your house?" Nonnina asked.

"Not anymore," she said softly.

Nonnina sighed. "Wherever love lives is a much better place, Zuccherino. Money do not make a home. People do."

"Nonnina," Vee said. "Are you Luca's mother? I mean... he seems to respect you a lot."

"I wish," Nonnina said softly. "I wish he was." She smiled then. "The package is in your bedroom too."

Vee nodded, unsure what to say. She watched Nonnina walk away.

Alone again.

Vee crossed into the bedroom, already bracing herself.

Her gaze landed on the card first.

Of course.

It lay on the bedside table. Matte black. No name. Just his unspoken expectation humming in the air. She picked it up between two fingers, turning it over.

She scoffed softly. "How original."

She dropped the card back.

Not that easy, Luciano Genovese.

Not without Valentina.

Her attention shifted to the bed, where a long, rectangular box rested atop the pristine duvet. It was matte black too.

She lifted the lid.

A coat lay neatly folded inside, the fabric so soft it seemed unreal.

Beneath it was the lingerie.

It was silk. Deep, dark, unapologetic. Straps and bindings crossed and looped. It was beautiful in a dangerous way.

She swallowed.

"I don't even know where half of you go," she muttered to the offending garment.

Her cheeks warmed despite herself.

At the very bottom of the box, was a folded note.

Simple. Clean. Commanding.

You have an appointment for 10pm tonight at Commissioned. Wear these.

"Of course I do," she murmured.

She looked back at the coat. The lingerie. The silent black credit card waiting on the dresser.

Her first instinct was defiance.

Her second was exhaustion.

Her third, the most dangerous of all, was curiosity.

If he wanted to spoil her, to wrap her in luxury and illusion, then fine. Let him. She wasn't a fool. She knew the game. But games could be played in both directions, and if Luca Genovese thought clothes and cash could buy her obedience, he was about to learn she was not that kind of woman.

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Marco arrived at Luca's office with a jaw set hard.

"Marco! You are a sight for sore eyes. I hate to say it, but I missed you."

Marco stopped just inside the doorway, unimpressed. "Thank you, boss, but you could always assign someone else to babysit. The job is beneath me."

"It's just for a few days. Besides, after what happened with the girls the last time, I don't trust anyone else to uphold our code."

"Fine," he muttered. "But we have another problem I need to handle."

"Oh," Luca said dryly, lips twitching. "And here I thought I was going to have a great night."

Marco didn't smile. "Veronica's boyfriend. He's making waves. I just got a call from our guy at the precinct. He's been there reporting her and her sister kidnapped."

Luca's amusement faded into calculation.

"Cassidy," Luca said quietly.

"Yes."

"He thinks the police can save her," Luca said softly. "That's adorable."

"The detective handling the case is quite tight-lipped," Marco said. "Remember the one obsessed with you."

"Yeah," Luca said. "That one. Of course. I'll handle it."

Marco exhaled slowly. "Boss, this is something I can deal with."

Luca's eyes lifted then. "I said I will handle it."

"Boss," Marco said carefully, "what is it with this girl?"

Luca arched a brow, inviting him to finish digging his grave.

"This," Marco gestured vaguely, "this isn't you."

"What isn't me?"

"First, you burn ten million on her at that auction," Marco said, words tumbling faster now, honesty spilling out because it was already too late. "And now you're personally stepping into police interference? Boss, this is detrimental to you. I've known you long enough, Luciano. You don't do this. You take. You command. You discard. You don't orbit."

"Go back to your post, Marco," Luca said.

That was it. The line had been drawn.

Marco nodded, recognizing the finality in the tone. He turned toward the door, resignation in his shoulders. Just as his hand closed around the handle, it opened from the other side.

One of Luca's men stepped in, nodding respectfully to Marco as he passed. "Boss," the man said, "we have her situated in the room."

Marco paused for half a second, curiosity itching, then continued out without looking back.

"You have the viewing room also set up?" Luca asked, already rising to his feet.

"Yes."

Luca adjusted his jacket, smoothing the fabric. "You know what to do."

The man nodded and left.

Luca smiled to himself, a slow, dangerous curve of lips.

Tonight was about observation.

Tonight was going to be quite informative.

And yes.

Delicious.

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Luca entered the platinum suite sat at the very top of Commissioned.

He let his gaze take her in.

She stood near the window..

"Hi there, Reinee," he said, already wearing a smug curl of his lips he reserved for women.

"Hi, Luca," she answered, pleased. She started toward him, fingers already working at the buttons of her coat.

He caught her hand gently, stopping her momentum. "Why the hurry?" he asked. "Can I pour you a drink?"

"Of course."

He stepped past her to the table where the champagne waited in a silver bucket. Commissioned spared no expense for platinum members. Rare bottles. Custom blends. Everything curated to make people forget who they were when they walked in.

### **Chapter 32: I Can't Believe I'm Here**

He popped the cork cleanly, poured two glasses. He handed one to her, then lifted his own and drained it, setting the empty glass down with a careless clink.

Reinee took hers in small, careful sips, watching him over the rim. "I can't believe I'm here," she said, shaking her head slightly. "Standing with you. I honestly thought you weren't going to call."

"You doubted me?"

She smiled, embarrassed and pleased all at once. "A little. Men like you don't usually remember names."

She took a step closer. "And tonight, I matter?"

"Tonight," he said, "you're exactly where you wanted to be."

She stepped into his space, fingers brushing his chest. "I've wanted this, you have no idea how much."

He smiled down at her, the Devil everyone knew. The man women whispered about and men feared. He slid a finger beneath her chin, lifting her face just enough to meet his eyes.

"Oh, I know," he said.

And that was the truth.

What she didn't know was that tonight wasn't about her desire at all. She was a mirror. A message. A performance.

Luca glanced briefly toward the hidden cameras temporarily embedded in the dark corner of the suite, invisible unless you knew where to look.

"You are absolutely, breathtakingly gorgeous," he said, eyes moving over Reinee. His gaze was appraising.

Reinee laughed softly, tilting her head. "We live on the same street. There's no way you haven't seen me at least once before. I know I've seen you. A couple of times."

Luca smiled. "Then it's a tragedy," he said smoothly, "that I never noticed you before."

His phone vibrated in his pocket.

He slid the device out, glanced at the screen. Confirmation received. The viewing room was occupied.

Good.

"Don't tell me you have to go," Reinee said quickly, the smallest edge of insecurity slipping into her tone.

"No way," Luca replied, slipping the phone away. "Even if the sky is falling."

He crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed, sprawling. He leaned back on his palms, eyes never leaving her.

"Why don't you model that underwear for me, gorgeous."

Reinee smiled, pleased, flattered, validated. She reached for the jacket, letting it slide from her shoulders and fall to the floor in a soft whisper.

The lingerie beneath was intricate. Silk straps crossing skin. Expensive. Provocative.

Identical.

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When Veronica was ushered into the viewing room, she knew immediately that this was off.

The room itself was dark. Plush seating. Soft lighting. One wall carried a big screen.

She had dressed exactly as instructed. Let the maid fuss over her hair, her makeup, her posture. Let herself be molded.

And then the screen brightened.

Miss Porsche. Miss CEO. Miss woman Luca had flirted with on the street.

Veronica's eyes widened when she saw the lingerie.

The same silk bindings.

The same cruelly elegant design.

Of course.

Of course this was the point.

On the screen, Luca looked relaxed. In control. He hadn't touched Reinee yet.

The realization that she had never been meant to be special stung.

Her eyes betrayed her.

She watched Luca's face more than Reinee's body. Watched the way his smile never quite reached his eyes. Watched the way his attention flicked, briefly, toward the hidden camera.

Toward her.

"Oh," she whispered. "You bastard."

It was about dominance.

About showing her how replaceable she was. How easily he could summon another woman. How little her resistance mattered in his world.

If he was trying to break her, he was failing.

Veronica leaned back in her chair, eyes locked on the screen, lips pressing into a thin line.

Fine.

If he wanted to put on a show, she would watch.

And she would remember every second.

Ten minutes in, and Veronica was done pretending she was unaffected.

Was this supposed to make her jealous? Of what, exactly. Of the fact that Luca Genovese could snap his fingers and summon women? That wasn't news. Power attracted devotion the way heat attracted moths. She understood the math.

And yet.

Her eyes betrayed her, drifting back to the screen. Anger rose in her chest, refusing to be reasoned with.

On the screen, Miss Porsche laughed softly and settled onto Luca's lap. Luca's hand rested at her waist, confident, possessive.

Veronica's jaw clenched.

Then Luca looked up.

At the camera.

At her.

"Oh, you asshole," Veronica muttered, pushing herself to her feet. She crossed the room and banged on the door with the flat of her palm. "Let me out of here! I'm not your damn toy!"

Silence answered her.

Behind her, the room filled with sound. Soft laughter. Breath catching. Murmured words she didn't need to hear clearly to understand. The intimate rhythm of two people very comfortable with each other's closeness.

She turned just in time to see Luca's hand move between her legs, the way Miss Porsche's body reacted instantly, the way she clutched at his shoulders. Luca's expression never changed. Still calm. Still in control. Still devastatingly aware of the lens.

Still watching her.

"Enough," Veronica whispered.

She slid down the wall, folding to the floor. She squeezed her eyes shut, pressing the heels of her palms against them.

It didn't help.

The sound was everywhere. It seeped into her skin, crawled along her nerves. She could hear the smile in Luca's voice even when he wasn't speaking. She could hear the satisfaction. He wanted her to hear it. Wanted her to feel small, replaceable, foolish for thinking she mattered.

Her throat burned.

Stupid, she scolded herself. This was the world he lived in. She'd walked into it willingly, thinking stubbornness could shield her. Thinking love for her sister could armor her heart.

Anger braided with humiliation.

Because somewhere beneath the fury and the hurt was the unbearable knowledge that he wanted her reaction more than he wanted the woman in his arms.

Veronica drew her knees to her chest and rocked slightly, breathing through the storm. She would not cry. She refused to give him that too. She would endure this. For Valentina. For herself.

### **Chapter 33: Luca Is Riding With Us**

Veronica planted her feet firmly on the plush carpet, and forced herself to look directly at the screen. Her gaze was unflinching, locked on Luca as he leaned back into the moment with Miss Porsche astride him. Every touch, every push and pull of the woman's body against his, every breathless gasp that filled the room, seemed designed to pull her apart, to strip her of composure—but she refused to give him that satisfaction.

He was nothing to her, just a man with too much control and an ego the size of Manhattan. His tactics were predictable, childish even, but that didn't stop her body from responding in ways she mentally scolded herself for. She remained stubborn, rooted to the spot, eyes tracing every line of his body, the way his hands moved, the way Miss Porsche reacted to his rhythm with surprising obedience and satisfaction.

Then her eyes caught the subtle, cruelly intimate detail she hadn't anticipated. The way his fingers threaded into the curve of Miss Porsche's neck, his grip firm and possessive.

The grunt that escaped him as he came, the way her back arched and she gasped against him—it should have been ugly, mechanical, even violent, but her moans were lust-laced, melodic, and impossibly addictive to the ear. Veronica shook her head in disbelief.

The way he moved, the way he dominated the room, the way the woman leaned into him. Her body betrayed her, pulse hammering against her wrists where she tried to steady them, a warmth pooling low in her belly that made her squirm with confusion. Anger and fascination warred inside her with every heartbeat.

Minutes passed, stretching unbearably. The room grew quiet, save for the faint settling of the sheets and the heavy, satisfied breathing that Luca exhaled once the act was over. Miss Porsche rose gracefully, putting her coat back on, walking toward the door and gave a call me sign. Luca pulled out his phone, thumbs moving.

Then the lock clicked. The viewing room's door swung open slowly. She straightened her coat, and forced her legs to move.

She walked to the garage and got in the car. The driver got in, started the engine, but didn't move.

"Everything okay?" Vee asked.

The driver kept his eyes forward. "Luca is riding with us."

"Oh hell no!" Vee practically launched herself out of the car. Heaving breaths fogged in the cold air as she slammed the door behind her, the coat brushing against her bare thighs. "Miss Scales!!!!" the driver shouted after her.

"He can ride with you. I'm not spending a minute with him," she shot back over her shoulder. She headed out of the garage, out of the club.

Her heels clicked on the pavement, reminding her with every step that she was out of place, out of control, dangerously exposed in more ways than one. Her coat barely covered her skin, and she could feel the fabric of the lingerie digging into her, a constant, intimate reminder of how impossible Luca made her feel.

She didn't know where she was going. Her mind was spinning, reckless. Her chest felt tight, her breath uneven, and she hated herself for even considering that maybe, just maybe, a tiny part of her had wished she were the one in his arms.

Tears burned her eyes before she realized they were coming. Stupid, absurd, uncontrollable tears. She wiped them away hastily, cursing herself under her breath. What the hell was wrong with her? Was it the effect of that ridiculous, infuriating display he'd put on? Or was it that she hated herself for wanting him to do that to her?

The car slowed right beside her. Luca rolled down the back window, his blue eyes glinting. "Get in," he said.

"Fuck off! You son of a bitch!" she spat as she kept walking, head high. Her coat swished around her thighs.

Luca tsked. He signaled for the driver to stop and climbed out. His lips quirked into that maddening smirk. At least now he knew his performance got the desired effect.

He hadn't expected it to go this smoothly. She had wanted him. She wanted him. And the thought made his pulse thrum in his veins.

He was there, yanking her backward by her wrist. Her back slammed against the cool metal of the car. Reflexively, her free hand shot up, aiming for his face, a sharp slap meant to sting. He caught it effortlessly, tilting his head to the side and she growled.

Her knee shot upward instinctively, connecting with his stomach with a satisfying, painful whoosh. He staggered, a sharp inhale escaping him, but it wasn't enough to break her out of his grip. She had underestimated his strength—or maybe he had underestimated the fury tucked inside her small frame.

Luca grunted, spinning her with effortless force until her chest pressed against the hood of the car. Her arms were trapped behind her now, immobilized by his hands.

Vee bit her lip, and hissed, "I hate you."

Luca's hands tightened, just enough to make her shiver.

"When I give you instructions, I expect you to follow them to the letter," he snarled.

"Fuck you!" Vee shot back, hissing the words, trying to tilt her chin up, even as her chest heaved and her blood felt impossibly hot under her skin.

His fingers wrapped around her neck with the same precise, terrifying control she had just seen him exert on Miss Porsche. The grip should have hurt—it looked like it would—but it didn't, at least not in the way she expected. Luca knew exactly how far he could push, where the line was, how to make her tremble.

Her pulse spiked, erratic, wild, a thousand conflicting emotions crashing together in one impossible storm.

Right there on the slick street, bent over the hood of his car, he had her. He had her utterly and completely. She prayed, quietly, fervently, that he didn't know it. That he didn't see the part of her that had already surrendered.

(Still having electricity issues. (Inside The True Heiress was supposed to get a mass release today but I had to edit this Chapter in the dark. As soon as i get some light, I'm a get to typing.)

This Chapter is brought to you by: Jennifer Willard

### **Chapter 34: I Was Right**

Her prayer dissolved in the instant his next words left his lips.

"I was right. You want me to fuck you, Bambola. There is no fight in you," he murmured, his hot breath ghosting along her ear, a whisper that threatened to shatter every fragment of control she had left.

"You are dreaming," she spat, head whipping to the side in defiance.

"Am I?" His fingers drifted, impossibly slow, tracing the curve of her thighs, brushing over the lace of her underwear, and she felt herself betray herself entirely. The wet patch that betrayed her desire bloomed under his touch.

"Lie to me once again," he purred.

"You just made me watch a live porn show. What did you think was going to happen?"

Luca chuckled softly. "I thought you hated me for taking your sister, for taking you..." he murmured. "And yet, you're dripping for me. Right here. Right now. Admit it and I will give you what you want and more."

His hands moved to her ass, cupping it hard, fingers digging in with unapologetic possession. The pressure made her gasp before she could stop it. The car beneath her was unyielding.

"Let go of me," Vee snapped. "I hate you. I don't want you. All you did tonight was humiliate me by making me watch that. This... this will not happen unless you force it out of me."

"The night is not over yet, Bambola," he said. "I am still going to punish you. You did dress up for me," he added smoothly, tilting his head. "Didn't you?"

"Because you asked me to, asshole."

"True," Luca agreed easily. "But now you know something else." His grip tightened just enough to remind her he was still in control. "I can have any woman I want. Whenever I want."

"Trust me," she said. "I know I'm nothing special."

That stopped him.

"But you are," he said quietly. "Bambola, I chose you. I don't do that."

His fingers moved then, slipping up her coat, unfastening a button. His hand slid inside, warm against her skin, cupping her breast.

"What are you doing?" she asked, and this time there was no hiding the way her voice shook.

"Let me show you why I chose you."

His fingers brushed her nipple, a slow touch that sent a jolt straight through her spine. She sucked in a breath, wanting making her dizzy. When he squeezed, a sharp sound escaped her.

"Fuck," she whispered, furious with herself.

Her mind screamed at her to fight, but her body was already betraying her, arching just slightly into his hand.

"You see that," Luca murmured near her ear. "That's why I chose you. The way you want me and fight me at the same time."

She squeezed her eyes shut, fighting the ache in her chest, the pull she didn't want and didn't know how to escape.

"You just want to fuck me, Luca. Who are you kidding? That's why you chose me," she said.

"It's much... much more than that," he said quietly, "But that too."

Before she could respond, his mouth brushed her neck. Her breath stuttered as his fingers rolled her nipple. When he pinched harder, she gasped again.

"Luca please..."

"Please, what... Bambola," he murmured into her ear. He was painfully aware of his body's reaction, of how his cock had already betrayed him, twitching in his pants despite the very recent exertion.

Her hands curled against the car. "Please," she said again, the fight draining out of her. "Let me go."

He released her abruptly, stepping back. She swayed slightly, stunned by the sudden absence of him.

"Get into the car," Luca said. "We're going to see your boyfriend."

She turned slowly, disbelief flickering across her face. "Why?"

"Because he's going to get himself killed," Luca replied flatly, "and you have to talk some sense into him."

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Cassidy's house sat in a quiet stretch of street. Low lights. Trim hedges.

Luca's driver invited Cassidy outside. Vee was already standing there, arms wrapped around herself, coat pulled tight. Luca didn't let her be alone. He stayed in the car, windows rolled down, posture relaxed but eyes razor-sharp, watching everything.

As soon as Cassidy stepped out and saw her, his face lit up with relief so fierce it hurt to look at. One eye was still blackened, an ugly bruise blooming across his cheekbone.

"Babe!" he breathed, rushing forward and pulling her into his arms.

Veronica stood stiff, detached. She let the hug happen without returning it.

"I was so worried. Are you okay?" Cas asked.

"Yes." Vee nodded quickly. "I've been trying to call you all day."

"That asshole's muscle had my phone broken last night," Cassidy said, jerking his thumb in Luca's direction without even looking.

Vee's eyes flicking briefly toward the idling car at the curb.

"Cas," she said gently, stepping closer, lowering her voice. "What are you doing going to the police? I'm fine."

He stared at her. "Are you?" His jaw tightened. "Your dad told me everything. The debt. The threats. All of it. I don't give a damn what the debt is. You and Valentina are going to get your lives back."

"Cas, please," she said, reaching for his arm, fingers light, careful. "You're just making it worse for us. Please. Trust that I know what I'm doing. Please."

The second please broke him a little. He searched her face, eyes frantic, desperate for an explanation.

"What does that mean for us?" he asked quietly.

Vee swallowed. Her throat burned. "I'm sorry, Cas," she said. "I'm truly sorry."

He shook his head immediately. "No. No, I refuse that. Vee, I love you." He laughed weakly. "Maybe I should have told you a while ago, but I was afraid you'd take off. But I do. I love you."

Her eyes shimmered, tears gathering stubbornly.

"Please, Cas," she whispered. "You need to let me go."

He stared at her, stunned. "Let you go?" he repeated. "Vee, I'm trying to fight for you."

"I know," she said softly. "You deserve better than this," she continued, forcing the words out before she could lose her nerve. "Better than cleaning up messes that aren't yours."

### **Chapter 35: I'm Going To Kill Him**

"No." Cassidy stepped closer, hands cupping her face. His lips crashed into hers in a bruising kiss, clumsy and desperate and far too full of everything he hadn't said soon enough.

She let herself feel it.

Then the world detonated.

Luca saw red instantly.

One second he was sitting in the car, jaw tight, watching the scene unfold with a predator's stillness. The next, he was out, door slamming, shoes hitting pavement with lethal intent.

"You really are looking to get yourself killed, aren't you?" Luca was suddenly there.

Cassidy turned, placing himself instinctively between Luca and Vee. "For her? Yes!" he shot back. "And then she'd finally be free of you."

Vee surged forward immediately, panic flaring in her chest. She shoved herself between them, hands out, heart hammering. "Please. Please, Luca," she begged. "It's nothing."

"I'm going to kill him!" Luca snapped, eyes never leaving Cassidy's face.

"You do that!" Cassidy barked. "At least then the police would know who to come for. You're a slippery one, Luciano Genovese. Not anymore."

Luca smiled.

It was slow. Wicked.

"Better men have tried, fool," he said softly. "Better men than you have fucking tried." He leaned in just enough to make the threat intimate. "I own the fucking NYPD."

"Please, Luca," Vee said again. "Let's just go. Please."

"Vee..." Cassidy said quietly, turning to her, ignoring the threat looming inches away. "Please. I'm not going to give up on you."

Her heart shattered.

She looked at him fully then, really looked. The bruised eye. The stubborn tilt of his chin. The love written all over his face.

"You have to," she whispered. "Cas, please."

"For what?" he asked. "For him?"

"For me," she said, tears spilling freely now. "For Valentina. She's just a child."

Cassidy's shoulders sagged, the fight draining out of him as reality finally punched through adrenaline. He looked past her, at Luca, and then back at Vee, eyes glassy.

"I have to save you," he said hoarsely.

"I know," she whispered. "To do that, you have to walk away."

Luca watched, jaw tight, fury coiled beneath his skin.

"Vee." Cas sighed. "I... I love you."

Vee turned instinctively toward Luca first.

Then she turned back to Cas.

Tears blurred her vision. She didn't know why she said it. Maybe it was the intensity of the moment. Maybe it was stubbornness. Maybe it was the desperate need to know that somewhere inside all this chaos, something was still hers. "I love you too."

Cas smiled, and it broke her.

It was soft and fractured.

"Let me go," she whispered.

Cas nodded. "Okay," he said quietly. "For now."

She stepped away from him slowly, every step toward the car feeling heavier than the last. Behind her, Luca stood motionless, imagining all the ways he could and would dismantle Cassidy piece by piece.

Both men stood there, locked in a silent standoff, eyes sharp, daring the other to make the wrong move.

"Luca..." Vee called softly. "Please. Let's leave."

She thought he might refuse her.

Then he turned.

He got into the car beside her. The driver pulled away smoothly, the street sliding past them.

Inside the car, Luca's jaw remained set, anger clouding everything else. Jealousy sat heavy in his chest, bitter and sharp. She loves him. The thought echoed, relentless.

Him. Cassidy. A teacher. A man with absolutely nothing to offer her.

A nobody.

And yet he had dared. Dared to stand in front of him. Dared to say he loved her. Dared to believe he could battle Luciano Genovese, the devil himself, for a woman.

The nerve.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Vee staring straight ahead, shoulders tight, tears drying on her cheeks. She looked smaller somehow. Tired.

"Take us to Bastardi's place," Luca instructed the driver.

"Yes, sir."

Vee shifted beside him. "Luca, I'm tired. I just need to sleep."

Silence answered her.

It pressed in around them, until she knew, with a sinking certainty, that she had done it. She had poked the bear.

The car moved forward, city lights thinning into darkness, until a structure loomed ahead. The house was enormous, sprawling wider than Luca's, louder too, but without

elegance. Where Luca's place whispered old money, this one shouted indulgence and rot.

Music thudded from somewhere near the pool, bass heavy enough to vibrate the air. People moved everywhere. Women draped over furniture and men alike, skin bare. Gum snapped. Smoke curled. Glasses clinked. It was excessive decadence.

Vee swallowed.

"What are we doing here?" she asked quietly.

"It's time you learned," Luca said, already opening his door.

"Learn what?"

He paused just long enough to look at her, really look at her, his eyes dark and unreadable. "What would most likely have happened to you if I hadn't won that goddamned auction."

Her throat tightened as she stepped out of the car. She let her gaze wander, unwilling and drawn all at once. Girls perched on men's laps, laughter a little too loud, eyes a little too empty. Others lounged on chaise chairs, legs draped, waiting to be noticed, chosen, consumed.

A chill slipped down her spine.

Luca took her wrist firmly, guiding her forward. His touch burned with fury. As they walked, men turned assessing Vee openly, their eyes lingering too long.

Luca's grip tightened.

The entrance hall was grand.

They stopped and Vee saw a man across the hall, loud and ugly, pulling a girl closer as if she were a prize he'd just paid for. Vee flinched.

"Stay close," Luca said.

Luca handed over his card at the entrance. The man at the door glanced at it, stiffened, then swiped it. A quiet click sounded, followed by a nod that carried more fear than respect.

They were waved inside.

The living room opened before them. Vee's steps slowed. Her eyes widened from the way her mind refused to accept what her senses were reporting.

Women passed them wearing collars. A few walked obediently beside men, eyes downcast. Others were on their knees, being dragged casually. No one looked shocked. No one hurried. This was routine. This was business.

### **Chapter 36: I Want Your Body**

They passed open doors, and there was no attempt at discretion. In one room, a woman lay naked and suspended, wrists and ankles bound, her body stretched into an arch that looked cruel. A man sat before her, a canvas propped on an easel. He painted as if she were a landscape. As if her breathing body were still life.

Behind closed doors came sounds she couldn't quite separate. Screams threaded with moans, pleasure tangled with pain so tightly they were indistinguishable. Vee pulled her coat tighter around herself.

Luca walked steadily beside her, his presence solid, dangerous. Every few steps, someone glanced his way and quickly looked elsewhere.

They stopped before a heavy door. A simple sign screwed into the surface.

BASTARDI.

"Wait here," Luca said.

The door closed behind him.

And suddenly, Vee was alone.

The absence of him was startling. She wrapped her arms around herself, her heart thudding too fast, her thoughts spiraling.

This is what would have happened to you.

The words replayed in her mind.

If he hadn't won that auction, where would she be? On her knees? On a canvas? Behind one of those doors where screams meant pleasure? Would she still be Vee? Or would she have learned how to disappear inside herself?

And Valentina.

Would this place have swallowed her too? The idea made bile rise in Vee's throat.

She pressed her back against the wall, breathing shallowly.

She knew, with a clarity that cut sharper than fear, that she had run out of options. If she had to kneel, beg, bleed dignity onto the floor to keep Valentina safe, then so be it.

He came back out moments later, a key dangling from his fingers. He took her hand again, and led her farther down the hall. The noise from the lower rooms faded. They climbed a short flight of stairs, until they stopped in front of a matte black door that seemed to absorb the light around it.

"What's going on?" Vee asked as Luca slid the key into the lock.

The door opened.

She stepped inside and forgot how to breathe.

The room was washed in deep red light. At its center stood a heavy bench. To the left, thick chains hung from reinforced beams, beside a sling. On the far wall loomed a St. Andrew's cross. Whips and paddles were arranged with meticulous care. Everything had a place.

"Luca," she whispered, turning slowly, her pulse roaring in her ears. "What is this?"

He didn't answer.

Instead, he walked past her into the room. He took off his jacket and tossed it onto the only sofa. Then he reached for the buttons of his shirt, undoing them one by one. The fabric slid from his shoulders, revealing skin marked by strength.

Vee swallowed hard. "Luca, what are you doing?" Panic climbed her throat fast and sharp, turning her voice thin. He moved toward her. His fingers went to the buttons of her coat, undoing them one by one.

"Luca, you said you weren't going to force me," she cried.

He didn't answer.

That silence was worse than shouting. It swallowed her protests whole.

He turned her so her back was to him and slid the coat from her shoulders.

God, what a body, he thought.

He tossed the coat onto the couch, and then he was on her again, steering her firmly toward the bench. His fingers traced down her bare back.

"Relax," he murmured close to her ear. "I'm not going to fuck you."

Her breath shuddered out of her. "Then what are you going to do?"

Instead of answering, he lifted her arms, guiding them forward above her head. Metal clicked softly as cuffs closed around her wrists.

The red light seemed darker now.

"I want your body," Luca said. "Badly. But until you give it to me... I suffer in silence."

She swallowed hard, her chest rising and falling too fast.

He stepped back.

"But you need to remember something," he continued. "I own you."

"I paid for you. I saved you. I pulled you out of a pit that would have swallowed you whole. Having another man touch you, kiss you, fuck you..." He stopped, dragging in a sharp breath, his jaw flexing. "That does things to me you don't understand."

"No one gets to touch you until you are ready for me," Luca said. "Only I get to touch you. Only I get to fuck you."

Part of her bristled, a spark of defiance flaring hot in her chest. But another part of her felt the strange, traitorous comfort of certainty.

He turned away from her and crossed the room, the red light catching the planes of his back as he moved. The wall of implements loomed.

Vee swallowed hard.

He reached out and selected a whip, the tassels at the end soft-looking. He weighed it in his hand, testing the balance, then turned back toward her.

"You stood in front of me," Luca said, "in my goddamned presence. And you told him you love him."

"I..." A thousand explanations crowded her throat.

The whip came down.

The sting bloomed across her ass stealing the air from her lungs.

"Luca!" she shouted in surprise.

He exhaled slowly. "Because this is your first time, I'll go easy on you. Ten. And the only words that come out of your mouth better be you counting. Anything else, and I start again."

She shook her head, breath ragged. "Is this what you mean by punishing me?" Vee asked, breaking the rule instantly.

"You will learn, Bambola. And you will learn to be grateful. Again."

The whip fell a second time.

"One." She sighed. Her pulse thundered against her temples as the sharp sting of each strike settled into a strange, searing rhythm. It was a rhythm that demanded attention, focus, surrender, and she obeyed.

He went again and again, the whip slicing through the air with a controlled crack that made her ears ring and her skin bloom fire. Her fingers dug into the bench beneath her, heels pressing into the cool floor, muscles coiled tight. With every count, she reminded herself of what had brought her here.

### **Chapter 37: It Will Help You Cum**

By the time she reached ten, her breath came in jagged bursts, her chest rising and falling with the exertion and the fire that still lingered across her skin. She sagged slightly against the bench, relief mingling with a dissonant thrill, a part of her warring with the other.

She hated him, and yet... a small, treacherous part of her couldn't deny the pull of this man who was at once danger and obsession.

He dropped the whip and moved to one of the desks that lined the room. The metal can of soothing cream caught the dim light. He knelt behind her. When he pressed a kiss to her reddened skin, her breath caught.

"You have the most beautiful skin." He sighed against her. Vee's mind flitted between anger and shame. The awareness that he wanted her, desired her, and that he had to hold himself back until she truly chose—stirred a conflicted warmth in her.

He opened the can, scooped out the cream, and his hands returned to her. His fingers massaged her raw flesh. She shivered, body betraying her in ways her mind resisted acknowledging. His fingers traced patterns, caressing without taking, teasing without violating, and she felt herself caught in a tangle of fear and desire.

"I want to slide this underwear down, Bambola. You have no idea."

Her stomach fluttered. She pressed her thighs together reflexively.

"You torture me with every word out of your mouth. When you eventually let me, I'm going to fuck your mouth and fill it with my cum."

"I'm not going to." She said it firmly, stubbornness etched into every syllable.

He smiled, a predator enjoying the contradiction in front of him. Her lips said one thing, her body said another, and Luca knew it instantly. He moved. His fingers brushed over the objects laid out there until he selected a small vibrator.

He uncuffed one of her hands, letting her exercise the sudden freedom. "I hear what you don't say, Vee," he murmured.

"You hear what you want to hear," she shot back, the edge in her voice masking the tremor of anticipation she couldn't quite hide.

He turned the vibrator on. He pressed it lightly into her hand, letting her feel the vibration hum through her fingers. "Use this. It will help you cum," he said.

"I don't want it," she said. Her pride fought hard against the undeniable pull in her body.

"You either do it, or I do it for you," he countered.

Vee's hand tightened instinctively around the device. Her hand moved, directing it between her legs, over the thin barrier of her still-on underwear. She gasped sharply as the contact made her body tremble, a delicious torment she both resisted and craved.

The sensation was overwhelming, her pride screaming to stop, yet her body betraying her in the most exquisite way.

"Do you want me to take off your underwear for you?" His eyes were watching every tiny movement, every shiver, every gasp. He knew she wanted it, even as she refused to admit it.

Vee hesitated. Yes, she wanted more, she needed more—every nerve in her body screamed for it—but the idea of Luca standing there, so close, seeing all of her, exposed and trembling, made her chest tighten with shame. The heat pooling between her legs didn't help; the dampness was a betrayal she didn't want him to revel in.

She wasn't ready—not fully—to give him that satisfaction, to let him see just how undone he made her.

He noticed the hesitation immediately. Luca's brows lifted ever so slightly. "Suit yourself. But you will cum before we leave here, sweetie," he said, leaning back slightly on the sofa, his eyes never leaving her.

"Why does it matter to you that I do?" she asked.

Luca's lips quirked. "Because...I'm the perfect lover." The confidence in his voice, the pride, the challenge—it was infuriating, intoxicating, maddening all at once. "I'll know if you fake it," he added smugly, daring her to try.

Vee couldn't help herself. She stuck her tongue out at him. He chuckled softly. "You're something, you know that?"

"Would you not watch me?" she asked.

"I'm watching, love. You watched me today too." The memory made her blood boil.

"I wasn't in the same room!" she snapped.

"I'm watching, Bambola," he said, steady, low, commanding. "I said I wasn't going to force you—but I am definitely going to do everything else."

Vee adjusted the vibrator, letting it press firmly against her clit again. Every slide, every hum of the motor sent a shiver up her spine, igniting a heat she could no longer pretend to resist. She pressed her hips forward subtly, searching for the angle that would bring the kind of release her body craved, but the cuffs on one wrist held her back, keeping her pinned.

The half-layer of her underwear dulled the sensation, making her ache for more pressure, more contact, more... everything.

A quiet moan escaped her lips, despite her insistence that she remain stoic, controlled. It drew a response from Luca. He grunted low in his throat, the movement of his hips betraying the hard length straining against the fabric of his pants. His fingers absently patted the bulge. She caught the twitch in his eyes, the quick hitch of his breath.

She was turning him on.

Her thighs were beginning to tremble, muscles unable to sustain the awkward, exposed position any longer. One hand remained trapped above her head, cuffed to the bench, and she couldn't shift it. The other hand moved with desperation, guiding the vibrator with a determination born of raw need.

She knew she could go over the edge soon—if only someone would give her the right pressure, the right push—but she would be damned if she asked Luca to do it for her.

With a glint of mischief in her eye, she adjusted herself slightly and leaned into the challenge she knew he couldn't resist. "You know you want to touch yourself, Luca," she said.

**Chapter 38: I Have Never Had To**

He looked amused. "I have never had to, Bambola," he replied smoothly.

"Till now," she countered, her cheeks flushed. "You never met a woman who would say no to you."

His lips tipped in amusement. He knew exactly what she was doing. He also knew why. And he also knew, it was dangerous. "If you want me, Bambola, all you have to do is ask," he said calmly. "I would be right there in the blink of an eye. Your reverse psychology... it won't work on me."

Vee felt suspended in time, caught between stubborn pride and a body that was betraying her with every breath.

"Won't it?" she shot back, lifting her chin despite the pulse between her legs. "I bet you wish you had your cock inside me right now."

The sensation from the vibrator drew another sound from her throat. Luca shifted again, his need quite obvious.

"Never denied that," he said.

She smiled then. "You want to fuck this tight pussy."

"I'll be the judge of how tight you are, Bambola."

"Oh, its tight believe me," she scoffed, breath hitching anyway. "You act all noble and shit, but all you really want is having me trapped like this, fucking me like this while I beg you to stop."

Luca scrubbed a hand over his face. "How long does it fucking take for you to cum?"

"You want me. You're obsessed with me. I think, in your psychotic twisted way, you love me!" Vee challenged him.

His jaw tightened, a muscle ticking near his temple, and then the restraint he had been clinging to snapped clean in two.

Luca sprung to his feet. "Fuck this!" he unbuckled his pants hurriedly, standing right in front of her. "Keep talking, Bambola and I will fuck you whether you are ready or not."

The threat vibrated in the air. Vee should have been terrified. Part of her was. Another part, the reckless, furious part refused to bow.

"I don't think you will." She raised her eyes to meet his. "Not because you do not have the power to but because you believe it will make you a lesser man."

She saw him clearly and wasn't afraid to name his limits.

"Is that so?"

Vee swallowed, her throat dry, but she didn't look away. If she was going to fall, she would fall standing.

"let my sister go, Luca and I will let you fuck me."

Luca chuckled then. "God, you are good! No deal."

He unzipped his pants, and pulled out his cock, fisting it in his hands.

The sight sent Vee into a frenzy, she moved the vibrator faster to the rhythm of Luca stroking himself.

She shut her eyes, chasing her own orgasm but Luca was there, lifting her chin up. "You wanted to watch. Watch!"

Her eyes flew open, meeting his dark, feral stare.

She realized then that this moment would divide her life into before and after. Before she understood the cost of catching Luca Genovese's attention. After she learned how deeply it could carve into her, whether she surrendered or not.

He was closer now, she could see him, feel his need, feel his torture. His hand worked faster just as she reached her climax. She let out a loud moan, and without thinking, he kissed her hard just as his own cock twitched and his orgasm hit. He grunted in her mouth, his knees buckling at the same time the vibrator dropped from her fingers to the floor.

Luca pulled away, locking his gaze on hers. This was madness. Whatever was happening to him at that moment was madness. The most dangerous thing a mafia God could do was have a weakness and this infuriating woman in front of him was quickly becoming his.

The realization hit him harder than the release had. Hunger he understood. Hunger could be fed, controlled, redirected. This was the disorienting fear that someone had slipped past his armor and was now standing inside his chest, rearranging things without permission.

Quickly, he pulled his cock back into his pants, and released the rest of her bindings. The metal cuffs clicked open. Vee's legs couldn't carry her anymore so she slid off the bench but he was there in an instant, holding on to her. "I got you," he murmured.

Vee sagged against him, her forehead resting briefly against his chest. Her body was still humming, oversensitive.

"Let her go, please," she muttered weakly.

"I can't. I wish I could." he said.

She let out a breath that sounded like a sob.

"It's the only way I can give myself to you, Luca," she said, more to convince herself than him.

He sighed, lifted her into his arms, picked up her coat, draping it over her body. He picked up his shirt and jacket earlier discarded, holding them in his fingers and walked out with her still in his arms, her fingers on his chest.

The hallway felt longer on the way out. The sounds changed too. Less moans, more murmurs. Luca felt her warmth as he walked. Real. Still trembling.

He held her close, afraid she might break even further even when she had just been the strongest and stubbornest woman he had ever experienced in his entire life. The woman was something. A storm. A mouth that could undo the most powerful men. A spine made of pure refusal.

Just as they got to the down floor, Bastardi approached him, his gaze flicking immediately to the woman in Luca's arms. "The virgin girl...Is she still available?"

Luca felt Veronica stiffen in his arms, her body going rigid. His jaw locked.

"Not now, Bastardi. Not now. Call Marco for information."

The dismissal was final. Bastardi scowled, wanted to argue, thought better of it, and gave a thin smile that didn't reach his eyes. Luca turned and kept walking.

He strolled out of the house, heading to the garage. Luca lowered her gently into the back seat, making sure her feet were steady before stepping away.

"You okay?" he asked.

She nodded.

### **Chapter 39: Time Got Away From Me**

Nonnina was waiting for Luca to arrive. She couldn't sleep a wink. Whenever he wasn't home after dark, she was always worried. The man had been shot more times than she could count.

She sat in her chair by the window, rosary wound around her fingers. Every passing car made her straighten. Every distant siren tightened her chest.

He had once spent a year in the hospital, recovering from a gunshot. Tubes everywhere, machines breathing when his lungs refused to, doctors whispering words they thought she couldn't hear.

He had once been in jail for months. That nearly broke her more than the bullets ever did. Jail meant walls she couldn't cross, doors she couldn't push open. It meant waiting for phone calls that came too short and ended too fast. It meant reading his moods through the tone of a single "I'm fine, Nonnina," knowing damn well he wasn't.

So she worried. Constantly. Worry had become her second heartbeat.

Whenever he didn't come home, she waited. Always waited. No matter the hour, no matter the ache in her knees or the scolding from the doctor about sleep. Luca might command fear in the streets, but in this house he was still her boy. Her diavolino.

So when she heard the car roll in at about three in the morning, tires crunching softly against the driveway, she heaved a sigh of relief. She slipped her feet into her flip-flops, and shuffled toward the stairs.

"Keeping an old woman awake until dawn. This boy will kill me yet."

She had a speech prepared. A good one too in Italian.

But then she saw him step out of the car slowly. And in his arms was Veronica. Her head tucked against his chest.

Nonnina stopped.

Her anger died instantly.

Her diavolino had finally become a man.

She could see it. In the way he held her. In the way he adjusted his grip unconsciously, shielding her from the cool night air. In the way his face softened when he looked down at her.

Most of all, she saw it in his eyes.

"Madonna santa," Nonnina whispered.

He didn't see her at first.

Who was this woman who had got her diavolino wrapped around her thumb?

She was glad. Truly glad. She had prayed for this moment longer than she cared to admit.

But she also knew the price.

The Genovese men frowned on love because love was a weakness the world would happily exploit.

Luca walked toward her. "I'm sorry, Nonnina. Time got away from me."

Nonnina watched him as he passed.

He laid Veronica gently on the bed of the flat behind the mansion, the one Nonnina had prepared for her earlier. He tucked the blanket around her.

Nonnina followed him out. "This is trouble, Diavolino," she said finally.

"Yes, Nonni. It is."

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Come on. Head to bed. Get some rest. She will be fine." Nonnina's hand rested lightly on his shoulder. He nodded, feeling the tension of the night ease slightly but not disappear. His thoughts were already circling back to Veronica.

He walked back into the mansion proper. Every room seemed to whisper her name, every echo a reminder that he was no longer untouchable. In his mind, the memory of her lips, her voice, and the defiance in her eyes replayed.

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Cassidy stepped into the bullpen of the precinct at seven sharp, the early morning hum of printers and chatter doing little to calm the tight coil of anxiety in his chest. He was looking for one person, and one person only: Detective Voss. Voss was the man who refused to let Luca Genovese slip through the cracks, the one person who had connected the dots from the quiet businessman who looked like an angel to the feared mafia God who was actually the devil.

Voss slumped at his desk, half-asleep, an open file labeled Luciano Genovese on his desk.

Cassidy slammed a fist on the desk, rattling the papers and shaking Voss fully awake. The detective jerked upright, eyes wide, hair mussed. "Mr. Grant? Everything okay?" he croaked.

"No. Everything is not okay!" Cassidy shot back, leaning over the edge of the desk. "You said you would call me with updates, Detective Voss. You said you'd keep me in the loop!"

"I'm still waiting for my captain's approval for this case," Voss muttered, rubbing his eyes and attempting to regain composure.

"Screw approval!" Cassidy barked. "Luca—he said something last night when he came over to my house...with Veronica..."

"He came to your house? With her?"

"Yes," Cassidy replied.

"Is she okay?"

"How can she be okay?" Cassidy shot back, fists tightening. "This man has her captive. She might not look harmed but I know her. I know that look in her eyes when she's terrified, and she's doing everything in her power to make herself look composed."

"Listen, Mr. Grant. Women get floored by Luca all the time. I've dealt with him long enough to know. I don't think your girlfriend would be any different."

"You're wrong," Cassidy snapped. "She's stubborn, she's smart, and she's...she loves me. She said it—right there, in front of him. While he was standing there." His jaw clenched, and his hands curled into fists, trembling with fury.

Voss's eyes narrowed. "So what did he say?"

Cassidy's eyes darkened. "He said he owns the NYPD. That's exactly what he said. That means he's untouchable. Voss...you can't run this by anyone. The moment you do, someone in his pocket will know. Someone will alert him, and then...then she won't have a chance."

Voss looked around the bullpen. He was right—Voss couldn't deny it. The last time they had Luca, they had him cornered, with evidence stacked high enough to bury him, and yet somehow it had all slipped through their fingers. Witnesses vanished, files disappeared, even the men inside the department who had been loyal enough to feed information had gone silent.

Of course, there was always that unsettling rumor that someone in the NYPD answered to him, but claiming that he "owned the NYPD" sounded like the kind of exaggerated bravado a criminal always displayed.

## **Chapter 40: I Am Being Careful**

"Listen," Voss said. "I am being careful. And whatever I have on Luca, I promise to keep to myself until I can build a case against him."

"You need to get Veronica away from him!"

"Unless she makes a report, there's nothing we can do. Legally, I can't storm his house without evidence of a crime being committed right now. You know that."

"Then send cops to question Veronica herself! Send a team to his house! I know he has her there!" Cassidy barked, his frustration boiling over, chest heaving.

"You said Luca has her sister. Maybe that's the leverage he's using over her," Voss said carefully. "She won't say anything if she believes her family's life is in danger."

Cassidy's shoulders slumped slightly. "Then what am I supposed to do? Sit back and watch for how long? Days? Weeks? Until she's... until she's..."

Voss ran a hand through his hair, letting out a slow exhale. "Mr. Grant, I assure you, I am working as hard as I can, as fast as I can. Luciano Genovese is a menace to this city. He's dangerous, calculating, and he doesn't play by any rules we know. I am personally invested in him. I will get him. But I cannot promise you it will happen on your timeline."

Cassidy's eyes glistened. "Whatever you need me to do, Detective Voss. Please. Tell me what I need to do. I can't... I can't just let him have her. I have to save her."

Voss nodded slowly. "Of course. I'll keep you updated. Every lead, every development. I need you to stay patient, stay smart, and—most importantly—stay safe. Don't let your own emotions make you reckless. But I promise you this... I will get him. And when I do, we will bring her home."

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Luca woke up the next morning to the sound of his vibrating phone. He groaned, rolled onto his back, and squinted at the screen through one half-open eye. It was a video call from Bianca. He let his head fall back against the pillow and stared at the ceiling.

He had been ignoring her calls for a reason.

They had gotten married about a year ago, when he visited Italy on the insistence of his father to produce a Genovese heir. The senior Genovese had found him the most beautiful of women, the envy of models and celebrities alike, raised and bred to become a Genovese bride.

Bianca had walked into his life already knowing how to sit, how to smile, how to keep her opinions folded neatly away unless invited. She understood the rules of the familia. She understood silence. She understood sacrifice.

She understood everything except him.

A mob boss could not be distracted. Could not afford weaknesses. A Genovese wife was meant to be her husband's peace, not his storm. That had been drilled into her since she was a child, shaped into her.

He wasn't ready for an heir. He couldn't tell his father, of course. So he had stalled. Delayed. Lied by omission. New York was unstable. Business was complicated. Enemies everywhere. He would send for her soon.

Soon had stretched into months.

Luca answered the phone, holding it at a length where it could catch his face, angling it just enough.

"Luciano..." Bianca's voice drifted from the phone.

"Bianca, how are you?"

"I'm fine. You haven't been picking my calls."

He exhaled slowly, already bracing himself. "Been busy," Luca said.

"Not so busy that you cannot make a few minutes for your wife."

Luca scrubbed a hand over his jaw. "Why the fuck are you talking to Julian?"

"Well... he is your brother," she answered innocently, her brows knitting together.

"Only in the loosest sense of the word."

"Oh, I'm sorry about that. That won't happen again."

"Make sure it doesn't," Luca said, sitting up and placing the phone on the nightstand so he could get up.

"I'm really sorry, Luca," she said.

He ignored her apology, swung his legs over the edge of the bed, and got to his feet buck ass naked. He crossed to the closet, pulled out his pyjamas.

"Did you need anything else?" Of course she did. They both knew what she needed. She needed to get fucked so she could produce the next Genovese heir.

"Yes," she said, sitting straighter on the other end of the call. "I want to know when you want me to come to America. I need to fulfil my duties as your wife."

"You don't have to rush," Luca said carefully. "Things are... complicated here."

"They are always complicated," Bianca replied gently. "That is why a wife is meant to stand beside her husband. To ease his burden."

"I'll let you know."

"When?" she pressed.

"Soon."

"I don't mean to bother you, Luca. Lungi da me. But it's been months already," Bianca said.

"Like I said, I am busy." Luca pulled on his pants, threw the robe around his shoulders.

"Of course," Bianca replied, nodding once. "How is work going?"

"As well as can be....Listen, I have to go."

She hesitated, just a fraction, then nodded from the screen, her lips curving into the polite smile expected of a Genovese wife. The call ended cleanly.

Luca checked the time. Ten a.m. Nonnina would normally have dragged him out of bed by now but she must have let him sleep after his late return.

He left the bedroom and headed down the staircase. Halfway down, voices reached him. Raised voices. One of them unmistakably Nonnina's, speaking in Italian.

Rapid. Furious.

When Nonnina argued in Italian, it confused outsiders, unsettled them. Luca picked up his pace.

At the front door stood Nonnina, with one hand braced on her hip, the other gesturing. Two NYPD officers stood opposite her, guns drawn, eyes flicking nervously between her and the interior of the house.

Luca's vision went red.

"You better put those goddamned guns away, you sons of bitches! What are you going to do? Shoot her? Why the hell do you even have them drawn? Does she look armed?"