

Undressed By The Mafia God #Chapter 51: Give Me Everything - Read Undressed By The Mafia God Chapter 51: Give Me Everything

Chapter 51: Give Me Everything

Vee's body trembled against him, nails digging into his shoulders, her breath coming in ragged gasps.

"I...God...Luca..." she whimpered, trembling, lips parted, eyes squeezed shut.
"Please...don't stop. I can't...can't hold back..."

He had always been a man who took what he wanted—but with her, it was about building, shaping.

"Luca..." she gasped, "I'm...so close...please..."

"Give me everything Bambola."

Her body quivered violently, a shiver of surrender racing from head to toe. Her orgasm hit her hard, even harder than ever. He wanted to kiss her so badly, but she didn't ask for it, so he wasn't going to.

"Now, see...that?" Luca said as he watched her come down from her high. "That...you cannot fake."

Vee let out a shaky breath, her body humming, the aftershocks rippling through her in slow, traitorous waves. Her legs felt weak, she was still finding her balance in a world that had shifted several degrees off center. She nodded, unable to summon wit.

"I have to go," she said. "Can I go?"

Luca stepped away from her at once. He should have asked her to stay. He knew it. Staying would mean intimacy.

He did not trust himself with that.

"Of course," he said instead, masking the hesitation.

She was just next door. Close enough.

She slid off the dresser. Only then did she notice a darkened patch on the polished wood, unmistakable, impossible to ignore. Evidence. Proof. Her stomach twisted with shame.

She had given herself to him. She had given him permission. She had offered him a yes.

To the man who held her sister's fate in his hands.

To the man who had just told her there was nothing he could do.

She pressed her lips together, blinking rapidly, steadying herself before the swell of emotion could spill over and embarrass her further.

She had let Luciano Genovese make her cum. She had wanted it. She had needed it. And worse, she knew, with a clarity that frightened her, that this would not be the last time. That soon, terrifyingly soon, she would be the one begging him for more. For everything. She would be begging him to fuck her. Whether her sister was safe or not.

Luca watched her quietly as she gathered herself, noting the way her shoulders straightened, the way she wrapped her robe tighter around herself.

Vee took a step back, then another, putting distance between them. With each step, her thoughts unraveled further.

He was right. She had not stepped into this mad world solely for her sister. That had been the excuse she clung to, the noble reason she fed herself so she could sleep at night. But the truth was darker, messier, and far more dangerous.

This world intrigued her.

The rules that bent instead of broke. The power that did not apologize for itself. The man who called himself the devil and did not ask forgiveness for the things he was capable of. It thrilled her. Terrified her. Drew her in.

She wanted Luciano Genovese. The devil. How twisted was that?

She paused, hand on the handle, and looked back at him one last time. He stood where she had left him, watching her.

Neither of them spoke.

Luca watched her go, watched the way she didn't even hesitate, just turned and hurried away from him.

He had just given her the best orgasm of her life. If he could say so himself. And he absolutely did say so himself.

And she ran.

"So this is how it feels?" he muttered, staring at the door. "Well, fuck."

He looked down at his pants.

The outline of his hard cock was unmistakable, straining, offended she hadn't stayed to finish what she started. His body was still locked in her rhythm, still chasing the ghost of her heat.

"Unbelievable," he muttered.

His hand went to it instinctively, fingers closing over the thick length through the fabric. Lord, not again. This was becoming a problem. A real, humiliating problem.

Luciano fucking Genovese. Reduced to a fucking wanker.

He let out a sharp breath and shoved his hand away, pacing once, twice, before stopping short and glaring at himself in the mirror. Marks on his arms where her nails had dug in, red and already blooming darker.

"Fucking great," he told his reflection. "Absolutely fucking great."

The dresser still bore the evidence of what she had done, what he had drawn out of her.

That broke him.

His fingers went into his shorts this time without hesitation, without restraint. His palm wrapped around his angry dick, stroking hard, fast, punishing himself. His other hand dragged across the dresser, thumb dipping into the slick she had left behind.

Fuck.

He smeared it between his fingers. Her moans replayed in his head, unfiltered. The way her voice broke when she begged. The way her body locked when she came. The way she said his name.

He grunted, hips jerking forward as his hand worked faster, rougher. He let himself feel the sting of the marks she'd left on his arms.

This was not supposed to happen.

Women didn't do this to him. He fucked, he finished, he moved on.

But Vee had crawled under his skin and set up camp.

Everything inside him bubbled and twisted, pleasure and fury colliding, until it finally exploded. His release shot hot against the dresser, proof of how far gone he was.

"Shit!" he snarled, head dropping forward.

Then, louder, angrier, "Fuck!"

Even that wasn't enough.

The pleasure faded too quickly, leaving nothing but raw irritation and a deep, ugly rage that had nowhere to go. Anger at himself for letting her get this far. Anger at her for leaving him like that, for daring to walk away while his body still burned for her.

Anger at Cassidy, breathing on borrowed time and not even knowing it.

Anger at the Genovese legacy, at the men before him who had taught him how to own, how to destroy, how to dominate—but never how to want without losing his mind.

He straightened slowly, breathing hard, staring at the mess on the dresser.

As furious as he was, as humiliated and unmoored—

He already knew he'd do it all again if she stepped right back in that room and still leave him wanting more.

Marco was already at Commissioned when the city was still rubbing sleep from its eyes.

He sat in his office, jacket off, sleeves rolled to his forearms. Head shining, eyes ringed with exhaustion he couldn't quite hide. He'd slept maybe an hour. Two, if he was generous. The rest of the night had been spent on a couch that was too short for him, with Valentina curled up, crying until her throat went raw and her tears soaked through his shirt.

He ran a hand over his face now, jaw tight.

He had come here to brief Luca about the meeting with Bastardi, to explain what had been said, what had been done, how he had reacted and the next steps. That was the role. Trusted right hand. The man who did not have feelings.

And yet all he could see was Valentina's face.

Red-rimmed eyes. Trembling fingers clutching at his sleeve. Her trying so hard to be brave, to stand tall the way she thought grown women did, while everything about her still screamed girl.

He hadn't understood it until he spent time with her.

That was the part that gutted him.

There really is something about the Scalese girls. Christ.

First it had been the older sister, slipping under Luca's skin. Now Valentina, getting under Marco's skin in a completely different way. Not desire. Not like that.

It had been his idea.

That truth sat heavy in his chest, an iron weight he couldn't shift.

Marco had been the one to suggest Valentina.

He swallowed hard, remembering the moment Bastardi's gaze had lingered too long on her, assessing, calculating.

For the life of him, Marco didn't understand how he could have come up with something so cruel.

The Bastione family had always been a thorn in the Genovese side. Old money. Older grudges. Renato Bastione ran his empire without ever tipping his hand, never moving without three contingencies in place. You didn't touch Bastione territory without consequences, and you didn't touch Bastione blood at all. Any move against them risked a mob war that would light up half the coast.

Information was everything. And Bastardi had it.

Or claimed he did.

Bastardi had never belonged to the Bastione family, not really. Blood, yes. Allegiance, never. He was Bastione's mistake, a living reminder of a night that should have stayed buried. The nickname had stuck early. Bastardi. Bastard. The Bastiones kept him on the periphery, fed him scraps, tolerated him.

Which was exactly why he'd taken Luca's deal without blinking.

Blueprints to the Bastione mansion in Italy. Full architectural plans, underground passages included.

In exchange for Valentina.

Marco stared at the wall opposite him, eyes unfocused, jaw clenched. He had been the one to suggest it. He hadn't pictured her face when he said it, he didn't even know her. Hadn't pictured how small she looked when she cried, how she tried to wipe her tears away angrily.

Chapter 52: The Mighty Luca Has Arrived

Now, he no longer had the heart to hand her over to the life Bastardi had prepared for her.

And yet, there was nothing he could do.

Genovese Senior had already signed off on the exchange.

That signature might as well have been carved into stone.

Marco dragged a hand down his face, exhaling slowly.

Soon, one of the guards appeared at the door, knocking once before stepping in. "Boss. Luca's arrived."

"Thanks," he muttered, already on his feet.

Then he headed down the corridor toward Luca's office.

He knocked once and stepped inside.

"Luca?"

Luca Genovese stood near the window, backlit by the morning sun bleeding through the glass. He was unbuttoning his jacket.

"Marco," Luca said, not turning around. "I'm guessing you bring me bad news."

Marco huffed, a tired sound. "I'm not exactly sure under which category I'm supposed to classify this news."

That made Luca turn.

He studied Marco for a beat. Something had been off about him since he'd started babysitting Veronica's sister. Luca had noticed. Of course he had. He noticed everything. But he hadn't called Marco out on it. Not yet.

"I have business to take care of," Luca said finally. "Walk with me?"

They walked in silence. Luca reached for a seemingly ordinary section of wall, fingers brushing over until it clicked. Stone shifted soundlessly, revealing the hidden passage beyond. Then he opened a door.

Cassidy sat tied to a heavy chair in the center of it all. His head hung forward, chin slick with blood that dripped slowly onto the floor, each drop a quiet punctuation mark. One

eye was already swelling shut, the other sharp and bright with defiance. Even beaten, even broken, he still looked annoyingly alive.

He lifted his head as Luca and Marco entered, lips pulling into a crooked smile that split painfully at the corner.

"The mighty Luca has arrived," Cassidy said. "Guess I should feel honored. I was worried you would leave all the fun to your goons."

Marco stayed back, arms folded.

Luca pulled a chair from the wall and placed it directly in front of Cassidy. He sat, long legs spread, posture relaxed in a way that made it infinitely more threatening.

"I thought you'd be more of a fight, Cas," Luca said casually. "This... seeing you like this, it's not worth my time. You're not a challenge. I've come to realize that."

"Then why am I here?" Cassidy asked after a beat, tilting his head. "If I bore you so much."

Luca's eyes locked onto Cassidy's with predatory focus. "Because you and I need to have a conversation. I'm going to give you a choice, because it seems no one ever bothered to explain how this was really going to end."

Cassidy's smile faded just a fraction. "I've only got one choice in front of me," he said quietly. "And that's rescuing Veronica and Valentina from you."

Marco stiffened.

"You and what army? And please don't say the police. You will just sound stupid," Luca advised.

Cassidy lifted his chin despite the way the movement pulled at split skin and bruised muscle. His jaw was set in stubborn lines. "Then why do I seem to scare you so much?" he shot back. "Why do you see me as a threat?"

"I don't," he said calmly. "But right now, you're clouding Veronica's mind. She thinks she loves you."

"That's because she does."

Luca exhaled. "Then why was I finger fucking her last night," he said evenly, "why was it my name she was screaming into the night?"

Cassidy lunged against the restraints, the chair legs scraping violently against the concrete. "You're lying," he snapped, eyes blazing.

"And why would I do that?" Luca asked mildly.

"If you're telling the truth," Cassidy continued, "then she's doing it to get her sister away from you."

"Her sister is going nowhere. At least for now." He stood, hands slipping into the pockets of his tailored trousers as he began to pace. "See, I'm not the bad guy here. I don't know why everyone seems to think I am. I don't go around begging people to ask me for favors. Her father wanted a favor..."

People knocked on his door because they had nowhere else to go, then cursed him for the price of entry.

"You talk too much," Cassidy spat, blood and saliva mixing as he jerked against the restraints. "Get to the point where you kill me."

Luca smiled.

"Yeah," Luca said thoughtfully, rubbing his jaw with his thumb. "That's a bit of a conundrum. I've been thinking about it since last night. You know... right after I almost fucked her."

Cassidy's head snapped up.

"So," Luca continued, unbothered, "I'm going to lay out the choices you have, Cassidy Grant. Simple ones. I like simple. On one hand, I kill you." He lifted one finger. "You become a tragic story she tells herself at night. She's strong, she'll get over it. And in time... she will fall in love with me."

Cassidy let out a sharp, disbelieving laugh.

"On the other hand," Luca went on, lifting a second finger, "I let you go. You limp back to whatever hole you crawled out of. And she will still fall in love with me."

Luca watched them sink in, watched Cassidy's breathing change, watched anger war with fear.

Cassidy scoffed, forcing bravado where cracks were already showing. "Vee would never love a murderer."

"That's adorable," Luca said softly. "Truly. But she already knows who and what I am."

He stepped closer now.

Luca crouched in front of Cassidy, their faces inches apart. Cassidy could see the calm in his eyes, the terrifying certainty.

"It's left for you to choose," Luca said quietly. "I beg of you... choose wisely."

Cassidy swallowed. His throat burned. "You think she's yours," he said hoarsely. "But she's using you. She's doing whatever she has to for her sister."

Luca's jaw flexed. Just once.

"Maybe," he said. "Or maybe she stepped into my world because part of her wanted to. People don't like admitting that part."

Chapter 53: I'll Make This Very Clear

"The next time you touch my woman," Luca said evenly, "the next time you look at her funny, it will be the last time you look at anything."

Cassidy's pulse thundered in his ears.

"And since you do not value your own life," Luca continued, "I'll make this very clear. I will find your parents. Your siblings. Your friends. Every single person that matters to you. And I will snuff the breath out of every single one of them."

Silence swallowed the room.

Marco looked away. He'd heard threats like this before, had watched them become reality more times than he cared to remember. The Genovese didn't bluff.

Luca straightened fully now, towering over Cassidy. "Again," he said, "choose wisely."

Cassidy sagged back against the chair, bravado stripped bare.

"And next time you want to fight a man like me," Luca said, adjusting his cufflinks with maddening calm, "get some power first. I have no idea how a dung beetle convinces himself he has any chance against a storm."

Cassidy laughed. It came out wet, broken, but real. He lifted his bruised face and grinned through blood-swollen lips.

"I scare you, Luciano," Cassidy said. "That's what this is. You're afraid of me."

Luca paused at the doorway.

"I'm so drilled into your head," Cassidy went on, "that you live and breathe me. You know why? Because you know she loves me. Veronica loves me. And that gives you no chance whatsoever."

Luca did not turn around.

"You can fuck her as much as you want," Cassidy continued, eyes burning now. "Use your money. Your power. Your devil tricks. She will always belong to me. And I'll be damned if I stop fighting for her."

Luca turned just enough for Cassidy to see his profile, the hard line of his jaw.

"I'll give you a couple more days to think about it," Luca said. "Enjoy the hospitality."

And then he stepped out.

The heavy door closed behind them, sealing Cassidy back into the Commissioned underworld where time meant nothing and mercy even less.

They walked down the corridor in silence.

Marco finally broke the silence. "Why not just kill him?" he asked. Curious.

Luca didn't slow his stride. "Because Vee would hate me for it."

Marco stopped walking this time. Luca made it three more steps before he realized he was alone. He turned, brow lifting slightly.

"She matters to you that much?" Marco asked.

Luca exhaled. "I have no idea why."

They resumed walking.

Luca pushed through the door into his office. This was his kingdom. He ruled it effortlessly. Deals bent to him. Men feared him. Women desired him. Enemies disappeared.

And yet.

He loosened his tie, irritation sparking under his skin. Cassidy's words replayed against his will. You live and breathe me. She loves me.

Ridiculous.

And still, his chest felt tight.

"You're losing your edge," Marco said lightly. "Never thought I'd say that."

Luca shot him a glare. "Careful."

Marco smirked. "Just saying. Women usually don't get this much real estate in your head. Whats your plan for her? A mistress? Side chick. Because you cannot marry her, Luca."

"I know," Luca said. "I haven't worked out the kinks yet."

"That's a first."

Luca shot him a look, one brow lifting in warning. Marco held up his hands in surrender.

"Whats that you need to tell me?" Luca asked, turning back to the window.

Marco straightened. The humor drained from his face. "The meeting with Bastardi didn't go so well, last night."

"Why?"

"I lost it," Marco admitted. "He was being...ungentlemanly with her."

Luca turned fully now. "Ungentlemanly?" he repeated slowly. "Never thought I would hear that word from you. What is happening with you?" His gaze sharpened. "This was your idea in the first place, Marco. A good idea at the time."

Marco exhaled, rubbing a hand over his face. "Yes, I know. I know. Anyway. Bastardi sent a message."

"Go on."

"He is coming for the girl this Friday," Marco said. "Says he has a client lined up already."

"No auction this time?" Luca asked.

"No."

"Crap!" Luca swore. "Fuck it. It has to be an auction!"

Marco frowned. "Why?"

Luca's shoulders slumped, just a fraction. "Because I asked Winn Kane for a favour. He was supposed to go for the auction and get the Scalese girl, And the bastard wants something in return too."

"Whats that?" Marco asked.

"He wants me to give up my spot in Kane Designer Mall."

Marco let out a low whistle. "Well, fuck."

Luca dropped into his chair with a dramatic thud, rolling his head back against the leather. "How much are the Scalese girls going to cost me?" he whined, hands flung up in mock despair.

"That mall is gold," Luca snapped. "Prime territory." He sighed.

"What are you going to do?" Marco asked quietly.

Luca stared at the desk, fingers tapping once, twice, then stopping. "At this point, there is nothing more I can do."

That alone made Marco straighten.

"Father will not pull out of this deal," Luca continued. "And finding a replacement will raise alarms with him. He already is sending Julian to nose around. So. We proceed as planned. Just keep watching her. Friday comes, hand her over to Bastardi."

Marco nodded automatically.

He left the office.

As he moved through the corridors of Commissioned, past guards who greeted him with respect and fear in equal measure, his thoughts drifted. To Valentina.

He had to stop himself from clenching his fists.

He knew in his gut there was no way he could hand Valentina over to Bastardi. He couldn't do it.

The girl was too innocent. Too pure. Too good.

There was steel under her softness, a quiet resilience that reminded him uncomfortably of her sister. Veronica had fire. Valentina had light. Different weapons. Same danger.

Maybe that was the same thing Luca saw in her sister.

Marco slowed his steps, his mind spiraling. How did girls like that come from a man like Scalese? It didn't track. It offended some deep, unexamined sense of order inside him.

Chapter 54: Did Someone Order Entertainment?

Marco exhaled slowly.

Luca had tried. That much was true.

Now it was his turn.

And whatever choice he made next would either damn him or define him.

The girls were opposites of Luca and Marco. Where the men were forged in shadow, compromise, and bloodline loyalty, the Scalese girls were all light and stubborn goodness.

He stood alone in the corridor, staring at nothing, his mind scrambling for a solution. A way out. A way to get Valentina to safety without detonating everything around him. Every path he traced ended the same way.

There was only one answer.

Marco would have to betray the familia he owed his life to.

The realization settled into him slowly, heavily. He had been a soldier since he was barely old enough to shave. Luca's shadow had always been there. The Genovese name had fed him, protected him, given him purpose. Going rogue was suicide.

If he had known this was how it would go, if he had known this was how it would be, he would never have suggested the vile idea in the first place. Never would have opened his mouth. Never would have turned a young girl into a bargaining chip.

Valentina's face flashed through his mind. The way she tried to smile when she was terrified. The way she trusted him, inexplicably.

"Fuck," he muttered under his breath.

Somewhere along the line, he had crossed from loyal to damned.

As usual, Dante sent Luca his weekly dose of sin.

It arrived precisely at ten. Luca didn't bother looking up when the door opened. He already knew why it was opening. This ritual had existed long before Veronica, long before everything had started to feel...off.

This one was voluptuous. That was the word that came to mind. Curves that seemed engineered to distract. Dante had an eye for packaging. Luca would have admired that once.

Usually, he didn't fuck these drop-offs. That wasn't their purpose. They came, they sucked his dick to take the edge off, and they left with an envelope.

But Luca was wound so tight now he felt like he might snap.

Veronica had lodged herself under his skin, burrowed into places no one had ever reached. Every thought circled back to her.

He needed distraction.

The woman stepped fully into his office, closing the door behind her. She wore a dress that could quite easily pass as a rag if one were feeling charitable. Fabric clung where it shouldn't, dipped where it definitely shouldn't. The only parts truly covered were her breasts and crotch, and even those looked negotiable.

When the code words dropped from her lips, to be sure she was sent by Dante, it was sultry, it was sinful. "Did someone order entertainment?"

"Yes, I definitely did," Luca said, stretching in his seat, voice lazy, body anything but.

She walked to him, held his tie, and pulled him close as she bent over him. Her breasts brushed his chest. "Then let me blow your mind."

"Fuck! Please..." he chuckled. She got to her knees, fingers patting his shaft through his trousers.

Luca surfed through his brain, a quick inventory taken on instinct, to be sure he had protection in his office as she freed his cock from its restraints.

When her mouth closed around him, Luca shut his eyes.

That was the mistake.

Because the second he stopped looking at her, the fantasy betrayed him.

In his mind, Vee was the one kneeling. She was the one touching his cock. Her lips were warm around him, sucking, licking, messy.

"Fuck..." he muttered again, but it wasn't for the woman between his legs.

His fingers tangled in her hair, only it wasn't this woman's hair. He watched Vee's beautiful face take all of him, eyes wide, trusting, wicked. His beautiful, pure Bambola.

Pure. Christ. There was nothing pure about wanting her. About imagining her mouth when he was supposed to be using someone else's. About the way his body betrayed him so easily, responding to the thought of her instead of the reality kneeling obediently before him.

The woman hummed around him, proud of herself, probably thinking she was doing something exceptional. Dante's girls were always technically flawless. That was the problem. They never surprised him. Never challenged him. Never looked at him like he was more than a man with power and a cock.

He exhaled, dragging a hand over his face, trying to banish the image of Vee kneeling on his office floor.

This was supposed to be relief.

Instead, it was punishment.

Because every pulse of pleasure came tangled with her name. Every thrust of his hips reminded him of everything he couldn't touch, couldn't claim, couldn't ruin without damning himself completely.

He groaned, pushing himself further into the woman's mouth, hips jerking. But even as his body responded, his mind was elsewhere. Vee. Would she be able to take him like this, really take him, like he imagined? If she couldn't, he would gladly teach her. Teach her to gag on his cock, to choke and show it what he wanted, to take him with unrelenting hunger.

Her hands moved to cup his balls, fingers kneading, rolling, holding him just the right way. Oh God...Dante always sent him the best. Every curve, every whisper of skill, everything calculated to undo him in minutes.

Her tongue danced over him again, teasing, and then her lips sucked and squeezed, taking him in and out with precision that made his toes curl. Then she held him in the deep throat position, jaw stretching, muscles straining, and the curse ripped from his throat.

He could hear Vee's moans, syncopated perfectly with what was happening now. Every gag, every squeak, every tremble of pleasure he imagined her making was tattooed into his memory, making the present feel secondary.

He imagined pushing her head further down, forcing her to take him, to understand the full weight of what she'd begged for. He called her names—sweet names, slutty names, loving names, all of them at once—switching from Italian to English. Maybe even tongues unknown to the civilized world.

Chapter 55: Don't Tell Him Anything

His hands gripped her hair, tugging gently at first, then harder as his control wavered. He could feel the pulse of her mouth around him, the warm, wet friction, and it made him see red, made him ache with want for someone else entirely.

He imagined Vee gagging, her throat working around him, her soft hands clutching at his thighs, eyes rolling back, body trembling, desperate and obedient all at once. He imagined whispering to her, commanding her to take more, to love it, to show him she wanted it, making her simultaneously melt and obey, sweet and filthy in every syllable he spat into her ear in his mind.

His hips jerked again, a sudden spike of heat making him see stars, hear the fantasy of her moaning in perfect sync with the woman kneeling before him. Every nerve, every tendon, every pulse in his body burned with the knowledge that nothing and no one could ever make him feel this alive. Vee, Vee, Vee, Vee, Vee, Vee...

He could not escape the truth: he wanted her. All of her. Every inch, every gasp, every twitch of her body. He wanted her mind and her body. He wanted her moans, her shame, her surrender. And he would take it. Every last piece.

He felt the lady pull him out of her mouth and slide down to his balls. His spine shivered, a cascade of pleasure running up his back. Every nerve ending screamed, every muscle coiled and released, and he was drowning in sensation. His mind floated somewhere between delirium and fantasy.

When he couldn't take it anymore—when the need to empty, to release, to feel the blue in his balls lighten, to take a deep gulp of relief—he opened his eyes. The woman before him had that wicked smile that could kill and seduce at the same time, but he barely noticed.

He reached for the bottom drawer, fingers brushing over cold steel and soft leather before he pulled out a condom, holding it out to her. She took it, her nails glinting in the office light, opened the wrap and slid it down his cock.

His hands gripped her hair as he got to his feet, bending her over the desk, her raggy dress slipping just enough to give him access. He moved the string of the underwear aside, and he was in, hard, fast, unforgiving. The movements were precise, brutal in their intensity, and he didn't hold back.

What he needed was quick release, a way to burn off the tension built from the night, from Vee's memory, from the dark, tangled obsession that gnawed at him. He wanted the blue in his balls to lighten, to forget the suffocating weight of last night's restraint, the intensity of Veronica's grip on his mind. Sky blue balls would be a lot better.

Vito was the first to spot Detective Voss as he stepped through the door, the soft jingle of the bell announcing him. Vito's sharp eyes tracked every movement as his daughter leaned over the counter, filling out delivery details.

Voss moved with ease, hands tucked into his jacket pockets, scanning the room.

"That's the detective I was talking to you about. Don't tell him anything," Vito whispered quickly to Veronica. Veronica swallowed hard, forcing herself to nod, trying not to let her panic show. Her father's eyes flicked toward the door again, a silent warning: one wrong word, one slip, and everything could spiral.

Detective Voss arrived at the counter. She could feel the detective's gaze on her. There was no mistaking it—he had instincts honed to a razor's edge.

"I hear Scalese pizza is really good," he said.

Vee looked up from the order pad, blinking as her eyes met his intense stare. Her pulse quickened, a flicker of unease running beneath her calm facade. "You hear correct. What would you like to order?" she asked.

"Surprise me. In the meantime, I have a few questions for you," he said.

"And who are you?" Vee asked.

"I am Detective Andrew Voss," he said. His eyes didn't leave hers, studying, measuring, silently assessing every micro-expression.

Vee's eyebrows arched, the corners of her lips twitching. "Ah, you are the one with the theory that my sister has been kidnapped," she said.

Voss's eyes narrowed slightly, a flicker of acknowledgment crossing his face. "Actually, I am looking into another disappearance, but I'm still waiting for your sister's call," he said.

"Whose disappearance?" Vee asked, curiosity and unease battling for dominance in her chest. Her hand curled around the edge of the counter, nails pressing into the smooth wood.

"Cassidy Grant," he replied.

Cassidy. She had seen him just yesterday—alive, furious. "What are you talking about? Cassidy is fine. I saw him just yesterday," she blurted.

"And he has not been seen since yesterday. He didn't show up to work this morning. You were the last person to see Mr. Grant, Miss Scalese," he said, his eyes locking onto hers, squeezing for truth.

Vee's pulse hammered, her throat tightening as her mind spun. How could she explain the chaos, the madness of the past day, without revealing too much, without drawing attention to Luca, without putting her sister or herself in danger? Her hands flexed over the counter.

"Do you know who took him?" Voss asked.

Vee swallowed, her mind racing as she tried to calculate how much she could say, how much could stay hidden. Her eyes flicked to her father, and then back to the detective.

"Do you know what has happened to him, Miss Scalese?" Voss asked again.

"How can you be sure he was taken?" she asked, trying to keep control over the tremor that threatened to betray her.

"Because witnesses saw him being shoved into a car around noon yesterday," Voss said. Her stomach lurched, and she pressed her palms against the counter, trying to stop herself from visibly shaking.

"Oh my God!" she gasped, her breath catching in her throat. Her mind raced.

"Cassidy told me you love him. He was sure about it. Even when I told him every woman in Luca's orbit becomes—" His words faltered for a split second, but he finished them with blunt precision. "...horny sluts."

Chapter 56: They Can't Help It

Vee's eyes flew to his instantly, her cheeks burning. She pressed her lips together. The man knew exactly what he was doing—probing, testing, pressing buttons she wasn't ready to acknowledge.

"They can't help it. Cassidy said not you," Voss continued, his gaze narrowing slightly, studying her reactions. "He trusts you. He adores you. If you know something that can help me find him, now is the time to tell me."

Vee's tongue felt heavy in her mouth. Her heart pounded so loud she was certain he could hear it. She wanted to speak, to scream, to do anything that might help—but then her mind flashed to Valentina. She felt torn apart.

The choice loomed in front of her: tell the truth and risk her sister—or protect her sister and betray Cassidy. Her throat tightened, and she swallowed hard. "I... I... don't know," she stammered, trying to protect herself with the lie, trying to buy time to breathe, to think, to reconcile the impossible.

Voss leaned closer, his dark eyes burning into hers. "You do," he said quietly. "Miss Scalese... I don't ask lightly. Lives are on the line. Yours. His. Others. If you know something, even a small detail, it can save him. Don't waste time."

Vee's chest heaved. She could feel her pulse in her throat, in her ears. Heat rose to her face, her hands shaking, her heart split into shards of guilt, fear, and the anger she

could barely keep from herself. "Detective Voss... I... I do not have any idea whatsoever what happened to Cassidy. And really... shouldn't you be out there looking for him?"

"I am out there, Miss Scalese," he said. "But every lead counts. Every moment wasted is another risk for him. Right now, I need you."

Her eyes darted toward her father, and she realized the gravity of her own silence. In protecting one, she was endangering another.

"Miss Scalese? I can help you," Voss said again. "Please, let me help you. I can save you and your sister, but I need one person... just one person to come forward. I can turn his life inside out, find Cassidy before it's too late."

"Myself and my sister are fine, Detective Voss. Please... leave and find Cassidy. Because if he is in trouble, then you put him in it!" Every muscle in her body screamed in fear for him.

"No, I didn't," Voss said. "Your family did. Your father did. Your father dragged an innocent man, whose only crime was to love you, into this. The moment you got entangled with Luciano Genovese, Cassidy was as good as dead."

"Cassidy isn't going to die. Please... leave! Now! Detective," she snapped, pointing toward the exit.

Voss tilted his head slightly. "Still don't have my pizza," he said lightly.

She grabbed one of the delivery orders, her hands trembling. She shoved it at him. "On the house. Now get out."

Voss didn't rush. He lingered. His eyes flicked to hers, holding a quiet patience. Then, finally, he turned and walked toward the door, the bell jingling behind him, leaving Vee trembling in his absence.

She exhaled slowly, and turned to her father. His eyes were downcast, his hands stuffed into his pockets. She shook her head. "Why didn't you tell me he was asking for Valentina to call him? I could have arranged it, taken the heat off while I find a way to get her back!"

"I do not want to get on Luca's toes," Vito said quietly.

Vee's eyes bulged in disbelief. "You are not alright, dad. Not one bit!"

Without waiting for a reply, she swung her bag over her shoulder and bolted from the pizza shop. The sun hit her face as she stepped onto the sidewalk, but she barely noticed the warmth, her mind consumed with a thousand racing thoughts—Cassidy, Valentina, Luca, and the choices she had no control over.

The city around her blurred: the honking cars, the pedestrians weaving between each other.

As she stepped on to the side walk, the car Luca had provided pulled smoothly to the curb. The driver opened the door, and she slid inside, informing him of her destination.

Luca was still buried deep inside Dante's girl when the office door burst open, slamming against the wall. The sudden intrusion yanked him out of the haze of pleasure and heat, his cock pulsing violently in protest as his rhythm stuttered.

At first, he caught the flash of surprise in Veronica's eyes, her dark orbs wide. Then it shifted instantly—like a switch flipped—to anger, pure, unfiltered, blazing fury. She stalked further into the office, her eyes locked on Dante's girl bent over his desk.

"You! Get out, now!" Veronica thundered.

Dante's girl looked up. "Who the fuck are you?" she spat, venom dripping from her tone.

"You do not want to know," Veronica said, stepping closer, her presence filling the office, radiating raw authority. "Get the fuck out or I'm going to fuck you up!" She flexed her fists, every inch of her vibrating with controlled wrath.

Luca groaned audibly, rolling his eyes at the chaos. He peeled himself off Dante's girl, who now looked like a startled deer caught in headlights. "You heard her," he said lazily. "Get out. I'll forward your payment to Dante."

The girl's eyes flicked to him, before she adjusted her dress and backed toward the door. Luca's hand lingered near his cock, sliding the condom off with a swift flick and tossing it into the bin. He muttered under his breath, "Fucking hell..."—his voice rough and edged with frustration—realizing he hadn't even gotten the release he craved.

As soon as the door clicked shut, Vee turned on him like a coiled spring, her eyes ablaze, hands balled into fists. "Where the fuck is Cassidy?" she thundered.

"Great! You cock block me for him! Fucking epic move." Luca spat.

"I know you have him, Luca. What have you done to him?" Her hair fell in her face as she stepped closer, hands clenching and unclenching at her sides.

Chapter 57: In Your Wildest Dreams

"Nothing short of what he deserves." Luca answered, bored. He sank deeper into the chair, crossing one leg over the other, his fingers drumming idly against the armrest.

Veronica's chest rose and fell rapidly, her nails digging into her palms. "What exactly does he deserve? What has he done? He is fighting for a woman he loves. And you? What are you doing? Fucking some slut!"

"Are you jealous?"

"In your wildest dreams, Luca. Where the fuck is he?" She leaned forward, almost lunging at him, the intensity in her gaze like fire.

"Do you actually think the louder your voice is, the faster you will get an answer?"

"Have you killed him?"

"He chose death." Luca replied calmly.

Veronica gasped, her hands flying to her mouth. Her eyes glistened, the fire turned to panic. "What have you done?"

"I told you there would be consequences for your actions."

"The cops are asking me questions, Luca! They think I have something to do with his disappearance."

"Tell me honestly. Are you really worried about him or yourself?" Luca's piercing eyes bore into hers, searching, weighing, testing.

"Do you even know how to be a human being? Of course, I am worried about him!" Vee snapped.

Luca watched her, dark eyes steady, assessing. "He isn't dead," he said calmly. "But he will be soon. He just has to make the right choice."

Her shoulders sagged in relief. "And what choice would that be?" she asked, quieter now, warier.

"Stay away from you and stay alive. He is currently making the wrong choice. That's not on me."

Vee dragged a hand down her face, exhaling shakily. "I can make him make the right choice."

Luca stopped. Turned. One brow lifted. "Can you? Let me guess. You want to talk to him again."

"No." She squared her shoulders, lifting her chin. "Put him in that viewing room you put me in the last time I was here."

"You want him to watch me fuck you?" Luca asked bluntly.

"No. No! Not all the way," she said quickly, heat flooding her cheeks. "Just enough to make him believe he has lost me."

"You would trick a man you claim to love this way?"

"If it will keep him safe, yes," Vee answered without hesitation. "I can live with him hating me. I can live with him thinking I chose you. I can't live with him dead."

"That's bullshit," Luca snapped. "I think you want him to leave you alone so you won't feel guilty when you do beg me to fuck you, Bambola."

She dragged a hand through her hair, pacing once before turning on him with flashing eyes. "Get your head out of your ass for a second, you bumbling buffoon. I'm beginning to feel like I'm damned if I do, damned if I don't." She spread her arms, taking in the room, the entire absurd world that kept chewing her up and spitting her back at his feet. "Besides, I don't see you coming up with any brilliant ideas except to kill him." She tilted her head. "It's a good idea."

"So why don't I like it?" he asked.

"Because you're an idiot," she shot back, reflexive. "That's why."

Luca straightened, the strategist in him snapping into place. "Let me lay out your stupid plan for you," he said, pointing a finger at her chest. "You want me to pretend to fuck you so your boyfriend can watch. The whole show is for him. It wouldn't even be real." His jaw tightened. "It wouldn't be you. Not the you I saw last night."

She looked away, shoulders stiffening. "Last night was different," Vee said. "Under normal circumstances, it wouldn't have happened."

She told herself that was true. She told herself fear had pushed her into his arms. She did not tell herself how right it had felt.

Luca closed the distance between them. "Different?" he murmured. "You were basically weeping in my arms, Bambola. Begging me for more. Moaning my name." His eyes searched her face. "Your cum was everywhere. On my dresser. My fingers."

"Luca..." Vee started.

"You're telling me it means nothing?" he demanded. "Did you even remember who the fuck Cassidy is when you were chasing release?"

"That's unfair," Vee said, immediately, instinctively. Her spine straightened even as her heart stumbled.

His hands rose to her neck. His fingers curled slightly. "Would you stop me now?" he asked quietly, his breath warm against her cheek.

"Yes." She meant it. She needed him to believe she meant it.

"What if," he said slowly, "I promise to let Cassidy go and you give in to me right now?"

"That defeats the point of letting Cassidy believe what we want him to believe," she said.

Luca scoffed. "I don't give a fuck what he believes." His hand slid from her throat to her shoulder. "What matters is what I believe." His gaze dropped to her mouth, then lifted again.

"This is not what this should be about," Vee said. "You're turning everything into a test."

"Like I said," Luca replied, "I don't care. Cassidy's fate ends here. What happens next depends on what you do."

He leaned down and pressed a kiss to her neck, a claim rather than a caress. Vee's breath hitched despite herself, her head tipping back as her body betrayed the logic screaming in her mind.

And while she was lost in that moment, in the heat and confusion of it, Luca reached behind her without breaking contact. His fingers found the switch hidden beneath the table, a small, unassuming thing built into the underside of polished wood. With a quiet click, the sound setting on the camera in his office came alive.

The game, it seemed, had moved into its next act.

Then his hands went to her sides as he covered her lips with his, not asking, not easing in, just taking. The kiss landed hard and unapologetic, all tongue and intent. Vee felt it immediately, that familiar vertigo, the sense that the floor had tilted under her feet and the only thing keeping her upright was him.

Chapter 58: Tell Me What You Love

Somewhere in the back of his mind, irritation flared at the layers between them. Too many clothes. That stupid Scalese pizza T-shirt. Jeans. Insulting, really. He could make it work.

"I need you to talk to me, Vee," Luca whispered into her ear. "Tell me what you love. I like dirty."

Heat was blooming under her ribs. This was the trap. She knew it. And still, her body leaned in. "I like how you kiss my neck," she said.

"Hmmm... more...." His fingers slid beneath her shirt, skin to skin now, tracing slow lines along her waist, learning her again.

"I like to feel you get hard against my thigh," she continued. "Makes me feel powerful."

Luca answered without words. He pushed himself further into her thigh, exactly as she'd described, letting her feel the evidence of how badly she had him. "You are powerful," he murmured.

"You know what I would really like to do right now?" he asked.

"What?"

"I want to slide these jeans down, get on my knees, throw your legs around my neck and bury my face deep inside your pussy and lick all of your juices." He did not rush the sentence. He wanted every word to land. To stay.

His fingers brushed her nipples gently through the thin barrier of fabric. Her body reacted instantly, a sharp inhale, a betrayed shudder, heat flaring where she did not want it to.

Vee moaned. Her hands came up to his shirt, fingers curling into the fabric, fisting it.

Then Luca reached over behind her once more and switched off the sound button.

"Now smile for the camera, love," Luca said lightly, the cruelty in his tone dressed up as charm, "'cause your boyfriend is going to watch this in a bit. Original, isn't it?"

The room seemed to tilt. Vee's eyes widened, shock slicing through the haze. Her hands fell from his shirt.

"You tricked me?" she asked, disbelief cracking through the words.

Luca shrugged, unapologetic, his expression infuriatingly calm. "It's what you wanted, isn't it?"

The answer never came. Instead, her arm swung back on instinct. The slap landed hard. His head snapped to the side.

"You son of a bitch!" she screamed, already moving, shoving past him, maneuvering her way away.

Luca turned slowly, tongue pressing briefly to the inside of his cheek. "What's got your panties in a bunch?" he asked mildly. "You said you wanted him to watch you."

He had a point. The logic twisted inside her. If it were fake, if it were controlled, if it were just another performance, then maybe she could live with it. Maybe she wouldn't feel like she was tearing Cassidy's heart out with her bare hands.

"What are you trying to do to me, Luca?" she demanded. "Break me? I'm already broken." Her chest heaved. "You have taken everything away from me. My sister. My life. My choice."

"No," Luca snapped. "Your choice has always been yours. You make the fucking choices. Do you want to know what it means to have your choice taken from you?" His eyes burned into hers. "It means I won't give a fuck if you say no, Vee. It means I'll do whatever I want, fuck you whenever I want. You want this!" he roared. "You want me!"

And that was the cruelest part. It was the way her body betrayed her even as her heart shattered, the way desire and hatred coiled together until she couldn't tell where one ended and the other began.

She stood there shaking, broken and furious and wanting, and Luca watched her.

"Then take that too from me!" Vee shot back. "Leave me with nothing! You play all these games, Luca. You play with my body." She pressed a hand flat against her chest. "I'm human. You forget that part too easily. You're throwing feelings at me I never asked for, never had to deal with. What the hell do I do with them except give in to them?"

He watched her, dark eyes narrowed. "What are you really afraid of, Veronica?" he asked. "Are you afraid you'll fall in love with me? That you'll fall in love with the monster you despise so much?"

He took a step closer, lowering his voice, forcing her to hear every word. "Or are you already there?"

"I told you," she said, and this time her voice was deadly calm. "I can never love you." She met his gaze head-on. "You are evil. You ruin people's lives without blinking. You destroy families, futures, and then you go to sleep like nothing happened. No one can love you, Luca. You can buy the whole world. You can own this entire city, brick by brick, soul by soul. And still, no one will truly love you." She paused. "Neither can I."

She turned away from him then, walking toward the door. At the threshold, she stopped, glancing back over her shoulder.

"Oh," she said lightly. "The police want Tina to call them or they'll declare her missing." Her eyes flicked over him. "Whatever you want to do with that information is up to you."

She glanced back at him.

Then she was gone.

Cassidy watched the entire scene unfold in silence, his wrists bound behind him, shoulders hunched forward. One of Luca's men held the tablet inches from his face, close enough that he could see every detail. Luca sat casually on the desk across the room, one foot hooked around the leg, posture loose and unbothered.

From the very first moan that slipped from Vee's lips, Cassidy felt something inside him fracture. Not crack. Shatter. His chest tightened violently, breath catching. His vision blurred, the image smearing as tears burned hot and humiliating behind his eyes.

"Enough!" he choked out. "Enough!"

Luca didn't even look at him right away. He simply nodded once, a small, almost bored gesture. The man holding the tablet switched it off instantly, the screen going black. The silence that followed was deafening.

Luca slid off the desk and rose to his full height. He walked toward Cassidy with unhurried confidence.

Chapter 59: You Got The Girl

"Are you sure you can still win this battle, Cassidy?" Luca asked mildly, tilting his head.

Cassidy swallowed hard. His throat burned. His pride lay in ruins at his feet, trampled beyond recognition. "You win," he said hoarsely. "You win. You got the girl." His shoulders sagged, exhaustion flooding in now that resistance was pointless. "Now let me go."

Luca smiled. "Not yet," he said.

He circled Cassidy once. "Ground rules," Luca continued. "You will be watched twenty-four seven. Every call. Every step. Every breath." He stopped in front of him again. "If you even breathe ten centimetres around the police, you're a dead man."

"Vee does not love you," Luca went on, each word precise, designed to land where it hurt most. "Not when she has me. Someone who can actually protect her. I have more power in my little finger than you could ever rack up in your entire skeletal system."

"You were never a contender," Luca finished. "You were just something she outgrew."

Cassidy closed his eyes, the last of his resistance collapsing inward.

Luca turned away without another glance, the dismissal absolute. He lifted two fingers in a small, economical gesture, and his man moved instantly. A hood was yanked down

over Cassidy's head, the fabric rough and smelling faintly of sweat. Cassidy sucked in a sharp breath, disoriented, panic flaring too late to matter.

The ropes binding his wrists were cut next. Freedom delivered.

"Strip him and dump him on the streets," Luca ordered flatly, already walking away.

Cassidy was no longer a person in Luca's mind. He was debris. Luca exited the cell through the false wall, the mechanism sliding closed behind him.

He hadn't taken three steps into the corridor when one of the men approached. "Julian is waiting in your office."

"Shit," Luca muttered.

He rolled his shoulders once, irritation settling in his spine. He was not in the mood for Julian. He already knew how this would go. Julian would be smug, righteous, rehearsed. Julian would talk about optics and tradition and consequences while coveting everything Luca touched.

And worse, Julian would have reported last night's events to their father.

That part surprised Luca more than he cared to admit. The senior Genovese hadn't called yet.

You do not hurt family.

That was the Genovese mantra. It wasn't written anywhere. It didn't need to be. It was carved into bone. You hurt family, you die. Luca had lived his entire life inside that rule.

He strolled back to his office.

Julian was already seated when Luca entered, legs crossed comfortably in Luca's chair. Julian had always had a talent for occupying space that wasn't his. He was built leaner than Luca, sharper features, carefully cultivated charm.

"What's the problem, Julian?" Luca asked, not bothering with a greeting, not slowing his stride as he moved to the desk.

"Father sent me," Julian drawled, settling deeper into the chair. "You could have saved me the trip if you'd agreed to talk to me last night. But instead, you tried to stab me with a knife."

Luca scoffed, a short, ugly sound. "Awww... poor baby." He tilted his head, mock sympathy dripping from every syllable. "Did you run to Father already?"

"In time, Luca. In time." He rose slowly from the chair. "Father will eventually see that you have no idea what you're doing with the Genovese legacy."

Luca straightened. "What did Father ask you to tell me, Julian?"

Julian exhaled. "He wants me to oversee the Bastardi exchange." He paused deliberately. "The Bastiones are making filthy moves in Italy. Father wants them cut down." His eyes flicked up. "So he needs those schematics. And he doesn't want anything to go wrong."

"What could possibly go wrong?" Luca said.

"Judging from the last exchange, Father doesn't want to take any chances."

"Fine," Luca said finally. "The exchange is happening Friday. Marco will text you the details of the meet."

"No can do."

Luca's eyes darkened. "Excuse me?"

"I have to be with the package before it leaves the safe house," Julian asserted. "Father's orders."

"Fine," Luca snapped, the last shred of patience burning out of him. "Do whatever you want. If that is all, get the fuck out of my office."

Julian paused at the doorway, one hand resting casually on the frame. He turned just enough for his smile to be visible. "Enjoy the view from the top, Luciano," he said smoothly. "You will fall soon."

"You are so damned lucky," Luca said, "that you have the rules of the familia to hide behind. So damned lucky."

Julian chuckled. "And you," he replied calmly, "are lucky to be the golden son."

They never pretended otherwise. The disdain between them had never been subtle, never dressed up as rivalry or misunderstood brotherly tension. It was open, corrosive, mutual. Luca disliked Julian because Julian had never liked him. That truth sat heavy and unresolved.

They shared the same father, but that was where the similarities ended. Different mothers. Different origins. Different expectations. Julian was the first son, born in Italy, raised steeped in tradition. Luca came later, American-born, his mother a citizen, his accent unmarked, his instincts shaped by New York concrete and ambition.

That single fact had tipped the scales in Luca's favor long before either of them understood what it meant. The New York familia needed an American face. An American passport. Someone who could move through banks and boardrooms without leaving a trail of suspicion. Luca had privilege Julian never would.

And Julian had never forgiven him for it.

"Goodbye, Julian," Luca said coldly. "I really don't have time for chitchat."

Golden son. The phrase echoed bitterly as Julian left.

He had paid for that title in blood. In sleepless nights. In choices that hollowed him out piece by piece. Julian saw the crown, not the weight of it. Saw the power, not the constant threat.

Julian's involvement in Valentina's exchange complicated things in ways Luca didn't bother pretending to underestimate. He watched too closely, reported too faithfully.

The original plan had been simple.

Chapter 60: You Sent For Me

Winn Kane would attend the auction. Kane owed Luca a debt that could never be repaid properly.

Kane would bid on Valentina. Win her. On paper, it would look like another ugly transaction in a world that fed on them. Off paper, Luca would extract her quietly, move her out of the system, put her somewhere safe and forgettable. New name. New city. New life.

But Bastardi changed the process. No auction. No public bidding. And now Julian was overseeing the entire process.

Luca had run out of options.

Now all he could do was make sure Veronica had closure.

If he couldn't save Valentina, he could at least give her sister the chance to say goodbye. To see her. To touch her.

There was nothing more he could do.

And that, made his hands curl into fists.

Detective Voss knocked once on the door marked CAPTAIN, squared his shoulders, and stepped inside.

"Captain, you sent for me," Voss said evenly.

Captain Harrington sat behind his desk, broad-shouldered and graying. He finally lifted his eyes.

"What's this nonsense I hear about you harassing Luciano Genovese and his associates?"

"I haven't spoken to him."

Harrington's mouth tightened. "You dispatched officers to his house. I'm told you visited Scalese pizza parlour asking questions about him."

"Again," Voss said tightly, palms braced against the edge of the captain's desk, "officers were dispatched to his house because a report was made about a disturbance on the premises. We were informed Miss Scalese was being held against her will." He spoke carefully, the way a man did when every word might be used to hang him later.

The captain lifted his eyes slowly. "And was she?"

Voss hesitated just long enough to be honest. "It didn't look like it."

That answer tasted bitter. He had wanted it to be different. Had wanted bruises, tears, something undeniable. Instead, he'd seen a woman too composed.

"So," the captain continued, folding his hands together, "why were you snooping around the pizza parlour?"

Voss exhaled sharply. "Because the younger Scalese daughter is still missing."

The captain leaned back in his chair, leather creaking. "Did the Scalese family report her missing?"

"No, sir."

That earned a long, weary sigh. The captain rubbed his temples. "Detective, I know you hold a grudge—"

"A grudge?" Voss exploded. He straightened, eyes blazing. "A grudge? Captain, the man killed my father!"

"There is no evidence to support that accusation," the captain said quietly, firmly.

"Witnesses saw his men," Voss shot back. "They saw them drag my father out of our house."

"And have you found these men? Can you link them directly to Genovese?"

"How can I do that when I'm not allowed to investigate?" He spread his hands in a bitter gesture. "Every time I get close, I'm shut down. Files disappear. Witnesses recant. Patrol gets pulled."

The captain stood then, his height suddenly imposing. "The powers that be have asked that you stop your investigation into Luca Genovese," he said. "Or they will have your badge."

Voss stared at him, chest heaving, disbelief and fury crashing together. "So let me get this straight," he said. "A decorated officer's father is murdered by a mafia lord, and I'm the villain?" He laughed again, almost hysterical. "Make it make sense."

"Because you are not thinking straight," the captain said. "Your anger is guiding you instead of your head. I told you to take a couple of days off. To breathe. To mourn. Get your head straight." His eyes hardened. "Do not let Luca be the final nail in your coffin. Is that understood?"

Voss swallowed. His jaw flexed, muscles jumping beneath stubble he hadn't bothered shaving in days. He stood there, spine rigid, hands clenched into fists at his sides.

"Yes, sir," he said at last.

The captain nodded once.

Voss walked out.

The hallway lights hummed overhead, too bright, too clean for a place that buried truth for a living. Of course. Of course. The fucking slippery snake. Luca Genovese. Nothing could stick to him.

Fuck the powers that be.

They could threaten his badge, his career, his life. He didn't care. He had already buried the man who taught him how to ride a bike, how to throw a punch, how to stand his ground. Luca didn't get to walk away clean. Not from this. Not ever.

He would make sure Luca went down for killing his father. Law or no law. Badge or no badge.

Luca arrived at the Scalese pizza parlour exactly when he knew Veronica would be closing.

The bell over the door chimed softly as he stepped inside, the scent of yeast, oil, and baked dough wrapping around him.

Veronica was already slipping her arm through the strap of her bag. She looked tired. When she saw him, surprise flashed across her face, before hardening into anger.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I'm taking you home myself," Luca said calmly.

Her eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Nothing," he replied.

She scoffed. "I don't want to go with you."

"Don't fight me, Veronica, please." He stood there, hands shoved into his coat pockets.

Vee stared at him. "This isn't a fight, Luca," she said. "This is a beat down. And you are the one winning."

"I like to win."

"Even when I am no match."

Luca stepped closer. He didn't touch her.

"Vee," he said, lower now, her name dragging out of him. "Why do you think I'm here? Why do you think I keep coming back, fighting with you, dragging you into my world?"

She swallowed. Her eyes flicked to his mouth and back up again, annoyed at herself. "I don't know. You're a psycho?"

A corner of his mouth twitched. "That's not incorrect. I rule men with fear," he said plainly. "I rule women with passion. You piss me off when you fight me. When you look at me like I'm just another man you can say no to." His eyes burned. "And yet, its what keeps me coming back to you."

"I can't get you out of my head," Luca went on, jaw tight. "Because I'm not winning. I'm losing, Bambola. Every day. I want you all to myself."