

# **Undressed By The Mafia God #Chapter 61: You Make No Sense - Read Undressed By The Mafia God Chapter 61: You Make No Sense**

## **Chapter 61: You Make No Sense**

His hand lifted, holding her waist, fingers flexing. "I want to punish you for making me feel this weak. And I want to protect you from everything that would tear you apart. I want to be the one who hurts you and the one who heals you."

Her breath came shallow now. "That's twisted."

"Yes," he said immediately. "It is."

"I want to be the one who makes you afraid," he continued, eyes dark, unblinking, "and the one who makes you crave it. I want to own your fear and your pleasure because they already own me."

"You make no sense," Vee said, folding her arms over her chest.

"I know. Nothing about me standing here with you makes sense. Nothing about me wanting you makes sense either." His gaze dragged over her, catching on the familiar curve of her hips, the softness of her mouth. "And yet, here I am. Pursuing you like an idiot."

"Flattering," she muttered.

"You're a challenge," he continued, unfazed. "An infuriating, stubborn, mouthy challenge. And a very interesting and hot one."

She snorted. "Whatever. I'm still not going with you."

"I wasn't asking, Bambola," he said calmly. "You're coming with me."

Her chin lifted. "You're saying I don't have a choice."

"In this case," he replied, "you do not."

"I'll scream."

Luca's smile widened. "Even better," he said softly. "Please scream."

She rolled her eyes so hard it was a wonder they didn't get stuck. "You really think you can get away with everything, don't you?"

"Yes," he said without hesitation. Then he gestured toward the car parked at the curb. "Now, your carriage awaits, m'lady."

"Asshole," she muttered, already turning away from him.

She stormed out of the shop, the bell over the door jangling angrily behind her, cursing under her breath in Italian and English, inventing a few new combinations along the way. Luca followed at an unhurried pace, hands in his pockets, watching the way her shoulders were stiff with fury.

He opened the passenger door for her with exaggerated politeness. She hesitated for half a second, then slid inside.

He closed the door, rounded the car, and settled into the driver's seat. The leather sighed beneath him. He glanced at her as he pulled into traffic, the city folding around them.

"I have a surprise waiting for you at home," he said casually.

She shot him a look. "Let me guess. You've got a camera planted in my room for your filthy fantasies."

He laughed. "Tempting. But no."

"Besides," Luca added, "my fantasies are your fantasies too, Bambola. The more you deny it, the more obvious it is." He glanced at her from the corner of his eye, catching the flare of her cheek, the way her jaw tightened.

"You really are arrogant, Luca. Jesus!" She leaned back in her seat, arms folded, kicking at the floor mat with one foot. "You know what? I've had a long day. I would like to enjoy the rest of this ride in peace and quiet. Do you think we can do that?"

"Fine," he said. He leaned back slightly, hands gripping the steering wheel, his focus narrowing to the road ahead.

By the time they arrived at the sprawling mansion, the shadows of the hedges and tall iron gates stretched long in the fading light of street lamps. Vee opened the car door and stepped onto the gravel driveway. Her mind was focused on getting inside and away from him. She went to the apartment behind the mansion.

When she pushed the door open, she thought her eyes were playing tricks on her. Then, impossibly, there was her sister. "Tina?"

Her sister's smile lit up the apartment. "Sis..."

Vee's legs moved. She half-ran, stumbling over the rug in her excitement, and wrapped Tina in a tight, fierce hug, burying her face into the familiar scent of her hair. "Oh my God! You're here? I'm not dreaming. You are here. Wait—what are you doing here?"

Tina pulled back slightly, holding her sister at arm's length just long enough to see her eyes. "Marco says his boss arranged for me to see you. Just for tonight, though."

Vee's gaze swept over Tina. "I can't believe it. I've been waiting... I've been so scared... and now you're here." Her hands gripped Tina's arms.

"Oh, baby." Vee pressed her forehead to Tina's. "I was so worried about you."

"Me too. I mean..." Valentina laughed softly. "I was worried about you, not me."

Vee couldn't help the laugh that tumbled from her throat. It was shaky.

"How have you been?" Vee asked.

"I'm fine, under the circumstances," Tina said, shrugging. "Bored out of my mind. But I've been okay. Marco makes sure I have everything I need. You were right. Marco is a nice man."

"Oh! No! No! Uh... I mixed them up. The Marco I told you about... he's actually the boss. Luca." Her mouth went dry as she watched Tina's expression twist from relief to shock.

"What? The devil?" Tina whispered, a shiver running down her spine.

"Yeah..." Vee sighed, running her hands through her own hair. "Speaking of... I probably should thank him. I'll do that later. But, uh... have you had dinner?"

"Your maid came in. She prepared some food, but I told her not to serve it until you got back. Nice digs you got here." Her gaze wandered around the apartment.

"It's temporary," Vee said, brushing her sister's shoulder lightly. "Come on, I'll have a shower and then we can catch up properly."

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Later, Veronica watched her sister sleep. Tina had curled herself into the bed, sheets drawn up to her chin. Her hair fanned across the pillow. The lines of tension in her face had softened. Vee allowed herself to just look, to memorize. Every small detail that made Tina her sister.

Luca had no idea. He had no idea the magnitude of what he had just given her. The chance to see her sister, to feel her presence again, to breathe in the fact that Tina was safe for at least tonight.

(Editor instructed to get this book to 80 Chapters. working on it. I'll try hard to finish up by tomorrow, in the mean time...Inside The True Heiress will not be available today. I'm so sorry.)

## **Chapter 62: Get On With It**

She knelt by the bed, brushing a hand softly over Tina's hair. Luca might be a devil, a tyrant, a storm of chaos but tonight, he had done something undeniably human, something that left her breathless in its unexpected tenderness.

Vee leaned closer, pressing her forehead to her sister's shoulder, closing her eyes, and just breathed.

Even held captive, Luca had cared for Valentina when he didn't have to. He had fed her sister, housed her, made sure she wasn't hurt.

What if their father had gotten entangled with someone else? Someone colder. Someone without Luca's particular brand of rules, warped as they were. Someone who didn't see people as people at all. What would have become of Valentina then? Of both of them? Vee didn't like the answers her mind supplied.

She shoved them aside, but they clawed back anyway.

Yes, Valentina's fate was still grim. That hadn't changed. But Luca had looked her in the eye and said it. If I could let her go, I would. Which meant he was trying. Or at least struggling with the idea.

Right?

Maybe if she acknowledged this. Maybe if she didn't spit in his face every time he showed the smallest crack in that monstrous armor. Maybe if she was grateful for this one mercy, this stolen night, this gift he hadn't even wrapped in cruelty. Maybe, just maybe, he would try harder. Push further. Bend rules he himself had made.

She didn't care about her own freedom. She had already made peace with the idea that she might never walk away untouched. But Tina? Tina still had a life. If Valentina could get away, if she could be free, Vee would stay. She would bleed for it. She would kneel for it. She would thank the devil himself if that was the price.

Vee leaned down and pressed a soft kiss into Valentina's hair. Her sister stirred but didn't wake, curling tighter into the sheets. Vee straightened slowly, swallowing the ache in her throat, and slipped out of the apartment.

The main house felt different at night. Bigger.

She found one of the maids just outside the corridor, the woman already dressed down, cardigan pulled close as she prepared to retire for the night.

"Miss Scalese," the maid said gently, surprise flickering across her face. "Can I help you with something?"

"Is Nonnina still awake?" she asked.

"No. She retired early tonight."

She inhaled once, steadying herself. "How about Luca?"

"Up in his bedroom," the maid answered, eyes flicking briefly toward the staircase.

"Okay. Thanks." Vee gave a tight nod and headed upstairs.

She entered quietly.

Luca was sprawled across the bed, shirtless, one arm flung above his head, dark hair mussed. The lights were still on. An empty bottle of wine sat on the nightstand, tipped on its side. He looked asleep, drugged sleep that came from exhaustion rather than peace.

She stood there.

This man terrified her. Controlled her life. Held her sister's fate in his hands. And yet, standing there in his bedroom, she saw loneliness.

She exhaled quietly and stepped closer. Just this. Just a small kindness. She reached for the sheet, lifting it carefully, intending to pull it up over his bare torso.

Click.

"Its me! Its me, Vee!" she blurted, reflex taking over as she dropped the sheet and threw her hands up, heart slamming into her ribs hard enough to bruise. "It's me!"

Luca was upright in an instant, eyes open, focused, lethal. The gun was already trained on her, steady. Even drunk, even half-asleep, he was still Luciano Genovese. Predator before man.

"When are you going to learn not to sneak up on me?" he asked coolly.

Her breath came fast. "How was I supposed to know you sleep with a gun?" she snapped back, more rattled than she wanted to admit.

He didn't lower it yet. His gaze swept over her, assessing, cataloguing. "What were you doing?" Suspicion edged his voice, automatic, ingrained.

"I came in," she said, swallowing, forcing herself to stay still. "I saw you were asleep. I decided to cover you up."

Luca sighed. He flicked the safety on the gun and slid it back under the pillow.

Vee still didn't move. Her back was to him, arms still up, shoulders tight as wire.

"Well?" Luca said behind her. "Get on with it."

"With what?" Vee asked, already irritated down to the bone.

"The sheets."

The words landed flat, like he'd asked her to pass the salt instead of explaining why he'd nearly put a bullet in her chest. She turned slowly, disbelief hardening her spine. "What? This is the second time you've pulled a gun on me and life is just supposed to move on smoothly? Do you have any idea what it feels like to have your life threatened?"

Luca shifted against the pillows, clearly unimpressed, one arm bent behind his head, the other resting near where the gun had disappeared. "Yes," he said lazily. "It's one of the many occupational hazards of my job."

"That's your job," she snapped. "I don't do your job! I sell pizza! Getting a gun pulled on me is frightening. Normal people don't live like this, Luca."

"Stop shouting," he muttered, squinting. "I have a headache."

She scoffed and glanced pointedly at the nightstand. The empty wine bottle lay there. "How much did you have to drink?"

"Not a lot."

Vee made a sound deep in her throat, a mocking hum that translated to liar. "You smell like a vineyard," she said, already turning back toward the bed. She lifted the sheet again, tugging it higher, her movements clipped.

Even dulled by alcohol, even wrapped in that fog where the edges of the world blurred, he felt the graze of her fingers on his bare skin. A whisper of contact. Nothing. Everything. His body reacted, muscles tightening instinctively, awareness snapping sharp. He watched her from beneath heavy lashes, tracking the way she set the sheet around him, tucking it in.

She cared.

And yet, she could not love him.

"You didn't have to do that," he said quietly.

### **Chapter 63: It's Never Enough**

She paused, hands stilling on the sheet. "Yes, I did."

"Why?"

"Because you're drunk. And because if you wake up sick and miserable tomorrow, you'll be even more unbearable than usual."

Luca's hand slipped out from beneath the linen and closed around her fingers.

"Why are you here, Vee?" he asked quietly.

"I came to say thank you for bringing me my sister."

He nodded once and sank deeper into the pillow. The movement felt dismissive, as if her thanks were a formality he didn't need.

Vee hesitated, reading his silence all wrong. They fought too often, screamed too loud, bled each other with words that never quite healed. Maybe he thought she was lying. Maybe he thought she was here out of obligation. So she leaned down, ignoring the warning bells in her head, and pressed a soft kiss to his lips.

Luca opened his mouth to her, his hand sliding into her hair. His lips were warm, tasting faintly of whiskey and smoke, and Vee forgot every reason she had sworn never to cross this line again.

She pulled back.

No fucking way. With a sharp tug, Luca dragged her down, the mattress dipping under their combined weight. Vee yelped as she landed on top of him, palms splayed against his chest, instantly, painfully aware of his hard erection beneath the sheets.

"It's never enough," Luca whispered, his forehead resting against hers, breath uneven now. "With you, it's never enough. I am constantly hard. I am molesting myself every single day, moaning your name like a freaking creep."

"You are a creep," Vee chuckled.

His hand slid from her hair to her jaw, tilting her face so she had no choice but to look at him. His eyes were dark, intense, too sober for a drunk man. "I want all of you."

"You're my obsession," he whispered.

Vee's face remained calm, unreadable. She had always known this about him. She just hadn't heard him say it so plainly, without threat to dress it up.

"Can I touch you?" she asked.

Luca inhaled sharply, his chest rising hard beneath her. His body had already betrayed him, his cock thick and aching beneath the sheets, his pulse loud in his ears. He forced himself to slow down, to think, to regain footing on ground that was slipping fast. "Where?" he asked.

She didn't answer.

Vee's fingers slid under the sheet. Her nails traced his chest, slow enough to drive him insane. Luca sucked in a breath through his teeth, his jaw tightening.

Her fingers brushed his nipples. He cursed under his breath.

She moved lower.

"Are you doing this because I brought your sister?" he asked. He needed to know. He needed to understand the price of this.

Her hand slipped past the waistband of his pyjamas and closed around his hard cock.

Luca groaned, a broken sound dragged from his chest. His hips jerked up instinctively. He was suddenly very aware of how exposed he was, how completely she had him. One hand. That was all it took.

"Do you want the truth or the lie?" she asked calmly.

"The truth," he said. "Always the truth."

"Yes and no," she said.

Her hand moved, stroking him. She watched his face closely as she did it, watched his control fracture piece by piece. His head fell back against the pillow, throat exposed, eyes burning.

"Yes," she continued, "because I am grateful. You didn't have to bring her here. You didn't have to protect her. You didn't have to show mercy. But you did."

Her fingers tightened slightly, and Luca gasped, a helpless sound. His hands clenched into the sheets.

"And no," she said, leaning closer, her mouth near his ear now, breath warm against his skin, "because I want this. I want you like this. I want to see what happens when Luciano Genovese stops pretending he's untouchable."

He turned his head, eyes blazing. "You want to break me."

"I want you finished," she corrected coolly. "By me."

With one hand, Luca pulled her close, trapping her body against his. Their lips collided, tongues clashing in a heated war for dominance, each tasting the other. His other hand gripped hers with unyielding intent, guiding her, teaching her without words how to drive him to the edge, how to pull every raw, dark pleasure from him.

He pressed her hand tighter against his cock, adjusting her fingers, quickening her pace, his moans deep and ragged in her mouth as their kiss became both battle and surrender.

Vee learned quickly. She matched him, moved with the rhythm he demanded, sensing every subtle shift in his body, every groan, every tightening of muscles. The strength in his chest flexed under her palms as he ground against her hand, and she reveled in the raw power beneath her fingers. Luca's breathing grew ragged, his neck strained, every muscle taut with the intensity of his need.

The sheets twisted and bunched beneath them. When he broke the kiss, it was against his will, lips trembling, tongue still glistening with her taste, his body rigid and coiled, his abs flexed under the strain, every vein standing out in stark relief.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" he groaned, his head falling back into the pillow, eyes closed tight as his release finally claimed him. His hips jerked, slamming against her hand as shudders racked through him, his cum spilling over her fingers, sliding onto the sheets. "Fuck!!!" he screamed again, ragged, animalistic.

Vee's eyes remained locked on him, watching every muscle tighten, every gasp, every expression of raw, unguarded pleasure, and for the first time in a long time, she felt an unshakable sense of power. She whispered, "This...this is the Luca I like,"

Luca didn't let her have a moment to savor it. In one swift, fluid movement, he flipped them over, his body pressing down on hers, taking dominance again as naturally as breathing. "I told you, it's never enough," he growled, lips trailing down her throat, teasing, kissing, nipping at her skin in a way that made her shiver.

He left marks along her collarbone and down to her chest, lips finally closing over her nightdress-covered nipple, sucking, biting, groaning with the intensity of his need. His

fingers slipped lower, finding her slick, warm and ready for him, and he groaned—a deep, guttural sound of craving—when he felt how wet she was, how desperate her body had become for his touch. "Jesus..." he muttered, every word dripping with hunger, possessiveness, and unrestrained need.

## **Chapter 64: Don't Say No**

He had her laid bare, the heat of his cock pressing against her slick folds, the promise of domination and pleasure electrifying the space between them. His hands gripped her hips, steady, demanding, ready to claim what he wanted. "Luca?" Vee's pulse raced in her throat, her heart thudding painfully as reality collided with desire.

Something inside her screamed that this had gone too far, that the line had been crossed, her body didn't respond with obedience but with resistance.

"Don't say no, Vee! Fuck! Don't say no," he growled, eyes burning with frustration, pupils dilated. Every inch of him screamed for release, for conquest, for the intimate proof that she was his in every possible way. But desire twisted into anger, impatience, and the raw, animalistic hunger that had been caged for too long.

"No!" she spat.

"Fuck!" he bellowed, releasing her with a violent shove that sent the sheets flying. He scrambled off the bed, legs unsteady, drunk on the lingering wine and his own pent-up need. Hands trembling, he grabbed the empty bottle beside him, shaking with frustration, and flung it against the wall.

The shards fell like scattered stars across the floor, glittering but dangerous, much like their own twisted connection.

"Luca!" Vee shouted, heart hammering, eyes wide at the violence of his anger and disappointment. She had never seen him unravel like this. It was terrifying and magnetic all at once.

"Go to your apartment, Vee, before I do something I will hate myself for," he growled.

Vee didn't need a second warning. She scrambled from the bed, tangled sheets falling around her legs, and fled, muttering curses under her breath. Her hair was disheveled, eyes wild.

"Fuck!" Luca roared again, picking up the glass from the side table and hurling it at the mirror. The reflective surface shattered, fracturing his own image into jagged, dangerous pieces. He collapsed back onto the bed, chest heaving, mind spinning. How long would he wait for her to be ready?

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The next morning, Veronica opened the door as Marco arrived to pick up Valentina.

"Miss Scalese. Good morning," Marco said

"Ah...the original Marco." Vee's lips curved into a smile. Marco was a man who could be terrifying in his intensity without ever raising his voice, that was why she had assumed he was the devil and not Luca.

"Yes, I am," Marco replied, Veronica could sense the tension in his stance. He was always that taut, immovable force.

"Tina tells me you have been good to her. Thank you."

"Just doing my job." Marco said.

"Thanks anyway. Come in," Veronica invited him. She wanted to extend normal courtesies. But Marco didn't move. His rigid posture at the door, his careful stance, immediately made her uneasy.

"I'll just wait out here," he said. He didn't want to be in the same confined space as Luca's woman, and Veronica couldn't blame him. Marco's refusal to enter the apartment fully, his self-imposed distance, was a shield both for him and for her.

"Valentina is just getting ready. Are you going to wait out here the whole time?" Veronica pressed.

"Yes." Veronica's lips parted, about to argue, when the bedroom door swung open and Valentina emerged, cheeks flushed with excitement, hair slightly tousled from her hurried preparations. Her eyes lit up as she spotted Marco, and without hesitation, she ran forward, throwing herself into his arms. "Marco!" she exclaimed as she hugged him with a fervor that spoke of trust, relief, and the unfiltered happiness of a child reunited with someone she saw as a protector.

Veronica's eyes narrowed. What the hell was happening here? She had expected propriety, distance, and professionalism, yet here was her sister wrapping herself around Marco like a lifeline.

"Marco, please excuse us for a minute," Vee said as she gently but decisively closed the door in his face. She turned to Valentina, hands on her sister's shoulders. "What are you doing? Is he being inappropriate with you?"

"What? No!" Valentina protested. "Marco is just like some terrifying teddy bear. He is harmless." Veronica felt a flicker of relief.

"He kills people for a living, Tina!"

Valentina shrugged. "He is still harmless," she said. "Besides, you are worried about him when I will be sold to modern-day slavery on Friday? I'd rather be with Marco." Her mind raced, trying to reconcile her sister's calm acceptance with the horrifying reality that had been dangling over them for weeks.

"Friday? What? Friday? You didn't say anything!"

Valentina tiptoed closer, leaning in so her lips brushed Veronica's ear. "He is going to help me escape. You can't tell Luca. He'll kill him." Vee's heart skipped a beat, a tangle of awe, relief, and terror twisting in her chest.

Veronica's eyes widened, comprehension dawning and fear turning into a brittle kind of hope. She nodded slowly, swallowing hard. "How do I reach you?" She needed to know she could be there.

"I will. Once I am safe," Valentina replied, a small, confident smile tugging at the corners of her lips. Her fingers brushed Veronica's briefly, a touch that conveyed both reassurance and bravery.

Vee pulled her sister into a tight embrace, holding her. "I love you very much, baby,"

"I love you too," Valentina whispered back.

"And no touchy-feely with the big bad bear," Veronica added with a teasing edge.

"It's nothing, Vee. Trust me," Valentina assured her, her eyes steady, her posture calm and self-possessed despite the storm they were all navigating. Her confidence was a balm.

Vee nodded, taking a deep breath, letting some of the tension ebb. Hope flickered brightly, a fragile, precious flame. Her sister would be okay—she had Marco. The burden of fear, of helplessness, was lightened, even if just slightly.

Veronica led Valentina out to where Marco waited, car idling silently. She waved goodbye, holding her breath as Valentina climbed in. Her sister's eyes met hers one last time, the silent promise of safety shared across the space between them.

As she turned to retreat back to her apartment, she saw Luca emerging from the main house. The muscles in her neck tensed, her pulse spiked. He watched her, the blue of his eyes like frozen fire, a predator in the calm morning, and the air seemed to thrum with the intensity of the storm that was Luciano Genovese.

(16 Chapters to go. Oy vey!)

**Chapter 65: You Look Like Shit**

Their eyes met across the driveway, Luca barely acknowledged her. He walked past, opened the driver's door of his car, slid in, started the engine, and pulled out without looking back.

Vee stared after him, then rolled her eyes. Such a big baby. Honestly. The great Luciano Genovese, ruler of men and breaker of spines, sulking because he didn't get what he wanted. She huffed and turned on her heel, stalking back toward her apartment. Did he really think it was going to happen?

That she would just melt, crawl into his bed, and let him fuck her because he snapped his fingers? Absolutely not. He had said it himself. It was her choice. And her choice was no. Plain. Simple. Non-negotiable.

If he wanted to brood and stomp around like a toddler denied candy, that was his problem. She had bigger things to think about. Luca could glare holes through walls for all she cared. She wasn't responsible for managing his ego or his expectations. Let him sulk.

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"You look like shit," Detective Voss said flatly as he pushed open the door to Cassidy's apartment without waiting for an invitation.

Cassidy was slumped on the couch, one arm braced awkwardly at his side, a fading bruise blooming along his jaw. He looked up slowly, eyes bloodshot, mouth dry. "Gee...thanks," he said. "I was in an accident." The lie slid out smoothly. "What's your excuse?"

Voss shut the door behind him and took a look at himself. His tie was loosened, shirt wrinkled, eyes shadowed. "What's wrong with me?" he asked dryly.

"You look like shit," Cassidy shot back. "So. What are you doing here?"

Voss's eyes flicked to the overturned chair, the broken lamp. "I know you weren't in an accident," he said. "Your neighbors called 911. Said you were taken. Was it Luca?"

Cassidy's jaw tightened. A muscle jumped in his cheek. "No," he said quickly. "Just a prank by my friends."

"He got to you, didn't he?" Voss pressed. "Did he threaten you?"

"He didn't have to do anything," Cassidy said. He leaned back against the arm of the couch. "You were right. Luca always gets away with everything." He had believed, once, that monsters only survived because good men stayed silent. Turns out monsters survived because they were smarter, richer, and far more powerful.

"Not with your help," Voss said immediately, stepping closer, urgency tightening his shoulders. His coat still smelled faintly of old coffee, the uniform of a man who hadn't gone home in days. "I need you, Cassidy."

"Why?" He spread his hands, palms up, showing the tremor he hadn't managed to control since the night before. "I have no reason to want him gone anymore." That wasn't entirely true.

"How about Veronica?"

Cassidy's jaw tightened. "Let's just say," he replied quietly, "she crossed to the dark side."

Voss went very still. "Wow," he said softly. "I'm... I'm really sorry, Cas. Truly." For a moment, the cop mask slipped, and what showed underneath was a tired man watching another one come undone.

"It is what it is," Cassidy shrugged, the motion stiff with pain. He pressed his fingers into his thigh.

"I can still get him," Voss said. "Assault. Kidnapping. If you'll file a report."

"He didn't assault me," Cassidy shot back. "Neither did he kidnap me. I'm not making a report."

"Cas—"

"No!" Cassidy snapped, louder now, turning, eyes bright. "It's over. It's a lost cause bringing Luca down. I cannot help you anymore." He pushed himself up, his limp pronounced. He crossed the room slowly and dropped into the chair by the window.

"Fine. If you change your mind, you know where to find me." Voss turned and left.

Cassidy stared at the paper in his hand. A resignation letter. Typed neatly. Signed shakily. If he wanted to take Luciano Genovese down, his job was a liability. You couldn't fight a king with chalk dust on your hands.

Luca's voice echoed in his head, calm, mocking. Get some power. At the time, Cassidy had thought it was just another insult. Now he understood it for what it was. Advice.

His reflection in the window looked older. Harder. Something inside him had calcified. He folded the letter carefully, and placed it back on the desk.

Luca would die.

And Vee would pay for breaking his heart.

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Marco stared at Bastardi's text for a long moment. Meet at the drop point for the delivery. 11pm.

He slipped the phone into his pocket and walked into the living room.

Valentina was perched on the edge of the couch, fingers clasped tightly between her thighs. She'd changed clothes twice already. Practical now. Dark jeans. Sneakers. Hair pulled back. Brave face firmly in place, but Marco had spent his life reading people. Fear hummed off her in waves. She was still.

"You okay?" Marco asked.

"Yes," she said immediately.

"Liar."

Her mouth twitched, and then she smiled. "I am trying to be brave."

Marco nodded once. Respect. He dropped into the armchair across from her, spreading his legs, forearms resting on his thighs. Big man. Built like he'd been carved out of concrete. To most people, he was terrifying. To her, right now, he was the solid thing in a world that kept tilting. "You'll be fine," he said. Matter-of-fact. "You remember the plan, right?"

Valentina nodded, but her fingers tightened.

"Walk me through it," Marco said.

She took a breath. "Get in the car. Put on my seat belt. Wait for the crash. Grab the keys in the glove box. Don't do anything else. Don't hitch a ride. Find my way to the station. Locker number two-two-one. Get the phone and call the last dialed number. Follow the instructions."

Marco watched her closely as she spoke. No skipping steps. Good. "Good girl," he said, a faint smirk tugging at his mouth. "See? Easy peasy."

Valentina snorted despite herself. "Easy peasy," she repeated, rolling her eyes. Then the smile faded. "Won't you get hurt?"

Marco shrugged. A massive shoulder lift. "It's not my first crash."

(15 more to go.)

**Chapter 66: We Don't Quit The Familia**

"Why do you do this?" she asked quietly. "Why do you do this job?"

"Some paths in our lives are chosen for us," Marco said.

"You can choose your own path, Marco." She stood in front of him. Her eyes were too big for her face tonight, glossy with fear.

"We don't quit the familia, Miss Scalese. Don't worry about me. Come on. Get something to eat. It's going to be a long night. Go."

She nodded and turned toward the kitchen, her steps light but stiff.

She had barely crossed the threshold when the sound reached him. Engines. Multiple. Marco's body reacted. His spine straightened. His hand flexed. His eyes snapped to the camera screen mounted on the left wall.

The courtyard bloomed on the monitor. Black SUVs rolled in. Doors opened. Men stepped out.

Julian.

What the fuck were they doing there?

Julian adjusted his coat as he walked. His men fanned out.

Marco was on his feet and moving. He crossed the living room and stepped outside.

They stopped inches apart.

"This is a safe house," Marco said. "I have no prior notification you will be here."

Julian smiled, eyes glittering with amusement. "That's odd," he replied lightly. "Since your boss usually tells you everything."

"You cannot go in."

Marco could feel the eyes of Julian's men on him.

"I cannot? Do you forget you work for the familia? I am the familia," Julian said. He stood perfectly relaxed, hands loose at his sides.

"I work for Luciano Genovese," Marco shot back without hesitation. His stance was solid, feet planted. His shoulders were squared, jaw tight, eyes flat and unblinking. "He is the familia."

The insult landed exactly where Marco intended. Julian's lips curved slowly, wickedly. He would never get tired of that particular cut. Blood might be thicker than water, but respect was rarer than gold. His younger brother had it. He did not.

Julian reached into his coat and pulled out his phone. He dialed without looking. As soon as Luca picked up, "Call your bulldog off," he snarled into the phone. He ended the call just as abruptly, slipping the phone back into his pocket.

They stood toe to toe in the courtyard, the night holding its breath around them. The men behind Julian remained still, disciplined, eyes darting between Marco's hands and the doors to the house.

Marco's phone buzzed.

He didn't break eye contact as he pulled it out. One glance was enough. Luca had authorized it. Authorized Julian to oversee the exchange procedure.

Permission to stand down.

Permission to let the wolf inside.

Marco stepped aside.

Julian passed him with a satisfied smirk, his men following. Marco remained where he was for a beat, jaw grinding as his mind raced.

This would put a wrench in his plan.

A serious wrench.

Julian and his men meant variables Marco had not calculated for. Eyes where there should be none. Ears where silence was required.

Fuck.

He turned and followed them in.

Marco scanned automatically, noting positions, exits, shadows. Julian's men spread out, one near the stairs, two by the living room, another lingering too close to the hallway that led to the bedrooms.

Marco moved toward the kitchen.

He found Valentina tucked into the corner beside the counter, arms wrapped tightly around herself. Her face had gone pale, eyes wide and dark, fear finally slipping past the cracks in her bravery.

"What's going on?" she whispered as she quickly got to her feet.

Marco stopped in front of her. His hand came up, resting lightly on her arm.

"Nothing. Stick to the plan," Marco said.

"Marco?"

"Stay calm," he said. "I promise, you will be fine. Trust me."

He pressed a key into her palm. Her fingers curled around it.

"Just make sure you have your seat belt on," he added.

Valentina nodded.

Calm, she was not.

Her heart was a trapped animal, slamming against her ribs, each beat too loud, too fast. The house felt wrong now. Not unsafe exactly. Worse. Occupied.

Even with the house crowded with men, it was eerily quiet. Julian stood near the center of the living room, phone in hand, tapping away. His posture was relaxed, arrogant.

His men took up strategic positions around the house, blocking exits, leaning against walls, hands never far from their weapons. They didn't speak. They were statues with pulse rates.

Luca's men, by contrast, lounged. They knew whose house this was. They knew whose word mattered.

Valentina's eyes kept finding Marco.

Every muscle in his body was wound tight, eyes tracking everything, everyone. Even when he told her to stay calm, his body betrayed him. He was anticipating impact. Waiting for something to go wrong. Planning for it.

She swallowed hard.

She didn't know what was going to happen tonight. She didn't know if the plan would work. She didn't know if she would live through it.

But she needed him to know.

She needed Marco to know that even if the plan failed, even if the night swallowed them whole, what he had done for her mattered. That she saw it. That she was grateful.

The problem was there was no way to get him alone.

Every time she shifted toward him, someone moved. A man stepped closer. A presence filled the space. Eyes watched. Julian's gaze flicked toward her once.

Time dragged.

The clock on the wall ticked loudly. 10:12. 10:18. 10:24.

At 10:30 pm, everything shifted.

One of Julian's men approached her, he gestured toward the door. "Time."

Valentina's stomach dropped.

She glanced at Marco. He met her eyes immediately. It terrified her and steadied her at the same time.

She rose on unsteady legs and followed the man outside.

This was it.

Stick to the plan, she reminded herself.

Even as fear crawled up her spine, even as her heart tried to outrun her body, one thought burned brighter than the rest.

She trusted Marco.

And that trust might kill them both.

Marco hung back. Valentina's eyes widened as she stared at him, confusion crashing into fear. He wasn't where he was supposed to be. He wasn't sliding into the driver's seat. He was still standing there.

No.

(14 to go)

## **Chapter 67: I'll Be Right Behind You**

He was supposed to be the one driving.

Marco turned calmly to Julian. "I'll be right behind you."

Julian barely spared him a glance. "Suit yourself."

Marco moved toward his own car. He slid into the driver's seat.

The engine hummed to life.

He waited until the car Valentina was in rolled forward. Then he pulled out, falling in behind them, maintaining a measured distance.

Inside the back seat, Valentina's hands shook as she reached for the seat belt. Her heart was hammering violently. She pressed her back into the seat, forcing herself to breathe through her nose.

Wait for the crash.

The words looped in her head.

Wait for the crash. Wait for the crash. Wait for the crash.

The road stretched ahead, narrow and poorly lit, swallowed by trees on both sides. The woods closed in.

Marco watched the surroundings carefully. This was the stretch he'd memorized. His foot eased off the accelerator, letting the distance between his car and Valentina's widen just enough.

This was the point of no return.

He accelerated.

The engine roared, tearing through the silence. He gripped the steering wheel hard, eyes fixed on the car ahead. One second. Two.

He slammed into the back of the car.

The impact was brutal. Metal screamed against metal. The car ahead lurched violently, tires shrieking. Valentina was thrown forward, the seat belt biting into her chest as the vehicle spun, skidding wildly across the road before slamming into a tree with a sickening crack.

Her breath was knocked from her lungs.

For a heartbeat, everything went silent.

Then chaos erupted.

Cars screeched to a halt, doors flying open. Men poured out onto the road, shouting, swearing, guns drawn in frantic unison.

"What the fuck is he doing?" Julian shouted.

His face was twisted with rage, handsome features pulled tight, eyes burning as he scanned the scene. Suspicion flared instantly.

Valentina's vision blurred, as pain pulsed behind her eyes. Her chest burned where the seat belt had caught her, her ears rang, and the smell of smoke made her stomach churn. But fear cut through everything. If she hesitated now, she would never get another chance.

The men around her were distracted, shouting, drawing guns, fanning out. No one was looking directly at her anymore.

She moved.

Her fingers fumbled once at the seat belt. She shoved the door open, boots hitting the dirt hard, nearly stumbling as she broke into a run. The woods loomed ahead, freedom. Thorns ripped at her skin, branches slapped her face as she sprinted, lungs screaming, heart pounding.

Julian saw her first.

"There!" he barked, arm snapping out, finger pointing. "Get her!"

His men reacted instantly, guns raised as they tore after Valentina. Shouts echoed through the trees, footsteps pounding behind her. Panic clawed at her throat, but she ran harder.

Behind her, Marco never took his eyes off her retreating figure.

Then rough hands yanked him backward.

He barely had time to brace before he was dragged from the vehicle and thrown to the ground. Gravel bit into his cheek, pain exploding across his ribs as boots pressed into his back. A knee slammed between his shoulders, pinning him down. His gun was kicked away, skidding across the road, useless.

"Well, well, well..." Julian crouched beside him, fingers gripping Marco's jaw and forcing his head up. "...what do we have here?"

Marco met his gaze without flinching, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, eyes cold and unrepentant.

"A traitor," Julian snarled, spitting the word. "You disappoint me, Marco. Truly."

\*\*\*\*\*

Luca sat at his desk in Commissioned, staring hard at his phone.

His fingers were steeped under his chin, jaw tight, blue eyes dark.

He was waiting.

For a text. A call. Anything.

The phone lay face-up on the desk, silent, mocking him. He hadn't moved in over an hour.

The door opened and Veronica walked in.

Luca had successfully kept his distance from her since the last time he almost crossed a line—since the night restraint had been a thin, fraying thread. It was safer this way. For both of them. Or so he told himself.

"What are you doing here, Vee?" he asked.

"I thought to check in on you," she said.

It was only half the truth. Veronica stepped further into the room. What she was really there for was Valentina. Luca didn't bring work home. That made his office the only place to corner him and get information first hand.

"Why?" he asked.

"I haven't seen you in days."

She watched his face as she said it.

"You do not come to my place of business without being invited," he said.

"You're mad at me," Vee said.

"Should I not be?" he replied.

His blue eyes held hers.

"You gave me a choice," she said, "and now you're pressuring me to make the choice you want."

"I'm not pressuring you," Luca said. "I'm just tired of the back and forth."

"That's it?" Vee asked. "Is that all you want me for? Sex? If I have sex with you, would it get me out of your system? Will your grip on me loosen?"

Luca had no answer. His jaw locked.

Vee dropped into the chair opposite his desk.

"I'm busy. You have to go, now," Luca said.

"You don't look busy," Vee shot back, eyes sweeping over the desk.

"Vee!"

"Talk to me, Luca! Don't shut me out," she snapped.

"You're giving me whiplash," he muttered, running a hand through his dark hair. "Do you want me in or out? Because you keep pulling me back in just to set me on fire."

Before she could answer, his phone buzzed. Luca snatched it up, thumb moving. Vee saw the shift immediately. His shoulders stiffened. His breathing changed. Whatever was on that screen had just redrawn the map.

It was a message from a friend of a friend.

Something is wrong. They're late.

—Reese.

"Fuck," Luca swore under his breath. He was already dialing Marco's number.

"Is everything alright?" Vee asked.

He didn't answer. Dialed again. Straight to voicemail. His mouth flattened into a line.

(I think my brain is fried. Lol. I'm going to catch a few hours sleep. Its 3am here)

## **Chapter 68: Your Bulldog Strayed**

Then a video came through.

Julian.

The text read:

**Your bulldog strayed. About to be neutered.**

Luca opened the video.

Marco and Valentina were on their knees, wrists zip-tied, faces bloodied. Valentina's dark hair was tangled, her eyes blazing even as fear flickered beneath. Marco was bruised, split lip swollen, but still managed to lift his chin. Julian stood behind them, elegant as a devil, gun resting casually against Marco's head.

Luca inhaled slowly. His eyes narrowed, all warmth draining out. This was the Luca his enemies feared.

He dialed Julian's number.

His brother picked up on the first ring.

"Marco is my lieutenant. My second in command." He stood tall in the center of the office. "If he strayed, it is my duty to punish him. Not yours." His lip curled. "You hurt one hair on his head, Julian, and I will damn every single one of Genovese rules. I will unmake everything Father pretends is sacred." He paused, letting the threat breathe. "I will make your death so painful your mother will cry from her grave. Carry on with the exchange. Father needs those schematics. And bring Marco to me."

He ended the call without waiting for a response.

Vee was frozen where she sat, skin drained of color, lips parted. He crossed over to her until he was looming over her, hands braced on either side of the chair.

"Did you know?" he asked quietly.

"Know what?" Vee whispered.

"Did you know Marco was planning to help your sister escape?" His eyes burned, a molten blue edged with betrayal.

Vee swallowed and nodded, just barely.

"That's why you came here," Luca said, straightening slowly. "You didn't come to check on me. You didn't come because you missed me." He shook his head once. "You came for information."

"What was I supposed to do?" she shot back. "Sit pretty and do nothing? She's my sister, Luca. I needed to know she is okay."

He picked up his phone, and without a word, pressed play.

Vee gasped.

Her hand flew to her mouth. A broken sound escaped her. "No... no, no, no."

"Please, Luca. You cannot hurt Marco. You cannot. Please. He was only trying to help her. He didn't betray you. He did it because he has a heart."

"Marco knows the risk of straying," he said evenly. "He accepted it. He chose it." His eyes flicked toward the phone still glowing on the desk, Julian's face frozen mid-frame.

"At least," Vee shot back, tears blazing now, "he is a better man than you!"

"I never called myself a good man!" Luca thundered. "If you're looking for good, you came to the wrong devil."

"Luca," she cried, breaking fully now, her pride shattering at his feet, "don't give my sister to Bastardi. Please. Don't do this." Her knees trembled as she dropped to the floor. "Surely there must be a way out. There's always a way out. Find one."

"Go home," he said simply.

"No!" Vee shouted, fury and terror tangling together. She moved fast, arms wrapping around his legs, face pressed against his thigh. "I'm not leaving." Her grip tightened. "Please, Luca. Please... please... for the love of God!"

"Enough!" he roared. "I already have it handled! Let's just hope Marco's little stunt doesn't put a wrench in my plans."

Vee collapsed where she knelt, strength finally abandoning her. Her body folded sideways, shoulders shaking, sobs tearing out of her.

"You always want something from me," Luca said. He turned away from her. "Always beg me for something." He reached the bar, poured whiskey into two glasses with a steady hand that betrayed nothing. "Don't kill Cassidy. Save my sister. Don't hurt Marco." He scoffed softly. "And still, I am the monster."

He stared into the liquid, reflection fractured, distorted.

He dropped both glasses onto the desk with a sharp crack of crystal against wood. Then he was on her, hauling her up by the arms. "Stop it," he ordered.

Her body shuddered, breath hitching, tears streaking down her face as she struggled to rein herself in. Luca's eyes bored into hers.

"It's time you learned loyalty," he continued, jaw tight, thumb digging into her arm just enough to hurt. "You do not keep anything from me. Ever. Do you hear me? It doesn't matter what it is. A plan. A secret. A doubt. You do not keep it from me."

Vee nodded quickly, hair falling into her face, eyes glassy and red. Her throat worked, but no sound came.

"I need to hear you say it," he commanded, leaning closer. "Say it."

"I'll not keep anything from you," she whispered.

"I'll do anything for you," he said. "Don't you see that yet? Don't you know that yet? I bend rules for you I would break men for."

Her fingers clenched in his shirt. "You'll keep her safe?" she asked, barely breathing.

"Trust me," he replied, and in his world, that was a blood oath.

She broke then, wrapping her arms around him, pressing her face into his chest. "I'm sorry," she sobbed. "I'm so sorry I give you a hard time. I'm sorry."

He didn't tell her to stop this time. He held her, one arm wrapped firmly around her back, the other steadying her head against him. He let her cry into his shirt. Human tissue, he thought grimly.

When her sobs dulled into shaky breaths, he gently eased her back, fingers brushing her cheek. He picked up one of the glasses and pressed it into her hand. "Drink. It will keep you calm."

She took a cautious sip. "Can I stay until you get word?" she asked quietly, eyes searching his face again.

"Yes," he said after a beat. "But then you go home and wait to be punished." His gaze sharpened slightly. "You and Marco both."

His phone buzzed once more. Luca glanced at the screen and his jaw tightened.

**'Exchange made.' Julian.**

Luca didn't reply. Instead, he immediately typed out a single word to Reese.

**'Now.'**

"What's going on?" Vee asked, watching his face.

## **Chapter 69: Your Sister Is With Bastardi**

"Your sister is with Bastardi," he said bluntly, lifting his glass and swallowing the rest of the whiskey in one go. The alcohol burned a clean, familiar line down his throat.

Vee went still. "What next?" she asked.

"Patience, bambola. Patience." He set the empty glass down. "You are in the mafia now. You need to learn patience, or your blood pressure will be through the roof before you're thirty."

Vee forced herself to sit back, to breathe, to unclench her fists. If Luca said he had it handled, she should believe him. He was capable. More than capable. The legendary devil.

So why wasn't she relaxed?

She stood abruptly and crossed to the bar. She grabbed the bottle straight from its place of honor and carried it back.

"Careful, bambola. It's strong," Luca said mildly, watching her with narrowed eyes. There was a note of warning there, buried under the affection.

"Strong is good," she replied, pouring herself a generous glass. She downed it.

Luca leaned forward slightly. "Vee—"

She was already pouring another. "I can't do this," she snapped. "I can't stay calm." She lifted the glass and drank again, not even wincing this time. The burn was gone, replaced by a dull warmth.

Luca snatched the bottle from her hand. "That's enough." He set the bottle out of her reach, eyes scanning her face, noting the flush in her cheeks, the glassiness creeping in.

His phone buzzed again.

He looked at it for only a second.

Extracted.

That was all Reese sent. Luca's shoulders loosened a fraction, tension bleeding out of him.

"Your sister is safe," he said aloud. "It will take a bit for me to get her resituated, but she is currently in safe hands."

Her breath left her in a long, trembling exhale, and she folded forward until her forehead rested against the desk. Relief crashed through her so violently it left her hollowed out, shaky, almost weak with it.

"And Marco?" she asked.

"Marco will be punished by the laws of the familia."

Her fingers curled against the desk. "Is there...."

"Don't." He cut her off sharply. "Like I said, he knew the risks. Just like I know the risks of saving your sister. We make our choices and accept the consequences."

She lifted her head slowly, eyes red-rimmed, searching his face. "You had your own plan mapped out," she said quietly. "You were always going to save her."

His mouth tightened. "She is your sister. You love her. I couldn't hurt you like that. Now tell me," he said. "What's with Marco and your sister?"

Vee stiffened instantly, her eyes flying up to meet his. "What's with them?"

"I don't get it," Luca continued. "Marco isn't reckless. And he certainly isn't suicidal. He knew saving her was a suicide mission, and he did it anyway." His eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"They are quite close," Vee said slowly. She sat sideways in the chair, one knee tucked up. "I noticed it when she visited." She frowned, thinking. "But Tina says it's nothing." She glanced at Luca. "You think it's something?"

He shrugged. "I guess I'll find out in time."

"I hear a bit of hypocrisy in there, Luca."

"I'm not a hypocrite," he replied immediately, offended in principle.

She tilted her head, eyes glittering. "So you can have me as an obsession," she said lightly, "but he cannot have her as an obsession?"

Luca rose from his chair and closed the distance between them. He caught her by the wrists and pulled her up to her feet. She swayed slightly, unsteady, and he compensated instinctively, one arm wrapping around her waist to keep her upright. His face was close now, stubble shadowing his jaw, dark eyes burning.

"I don't care about them," he said quietly. "Not really." His hand tightened at her waist. "I care about you."

Her laughter faded.

"You have a problem?" he continued. "I have a problem. That's how this works." His thumb brushed absently over her hip, a small, unconscious touch that spoke volumes. "I want to make life easy for you."

She blinked at him, heart thudding.

"I want your only task every day to be fighting me," he went on, mouth curving slightly, dark humor threading through his intensity. "Arguing with me. Challenging me. Making me lose my temper in very specific ways." His gaze dropped briefly to her lips, then lifted again. "While mine is to solve all of your problems by whatever means necessary."

Her breath hitched. "Are you being sweet," she asked, laughing again, breathless now, "or am I just too drunk?"

He snorted softly. "Both," he admitted. "Which is why you should go home and sleep it off."

She leaned into him, forehead brushing his chest, the steady beat of his heart oddly comforting.

"I'll wake you up when I get back," Luca added.

"Promise?" she murmured, her head tipped back.

Luca snorted, a real laugh breaking free. "Someone is excited to be punished." His hand steadied her, palm firm at her lower back.

"Can I tell you a secret?" she asked, lips dangerously close to his collarbone.

"Please," he drawled, amusement curling through his tone. "Regale me."

She leaned in, breath warm against his neck, whispering. "I like it when you punish me."

Luca laughed again, shaking his head. "I know, Bambola." His thumb brushed her chin, lifting it just enough to look at her unfocused eyes. "Oh, you're going to hate yourself when this clears from your system."

She giggled. "I know, right. I'd never truly admit that in my right mind." She wrinkled her nose. "Damn, that drink is strong."

"I warned ya," he said smugly.

She sobered slightly then, the haze parting just enough for the real fear to peek through again. "You'll take good care of my sis?" she asked, searching his face.

"I promise," he replied.

Her lips curved, alcohol-fueled bravery blooming. "Then you can fuck me."

Luca lifted her chin fully, forcing her to meet his eyes. Her lashes were heavy. "Hey," he said quietly, intensity cutting through the humor. "Listen to me before you pass out. I didn't save her to fuck you, you crazy woman. What kind of vibes are you getting from me exactly?"

## **Chapter 70: Little Luca Wants To Play**

She frowned thoughtfully, swaying closer, breasts pressing against his chest. "You have sex with women you pay, Luca," she said bluntly, logic slurred but sincere. "What kind of vibes do you think I would get?"

"Ouch." He winced theatrically. "God, I wish you weren't high while we were having this conversation." He sighed, then added dryly, "And you weren't pressed so hard against me. It's distracting."

She laughed again, delighted, resting her forehead against his shoulder.

"Awww... little Luca wants to play," Vee drawled. Her smile was all trouble, lips curved like she knew exactly where to press and couldn't resist doing it anyway.

"Little?" Luca scoffed, arching a brow, mock offense flickering across his face. "You wound me."

She squinted up at him, clearly considering this with drunken seriousness. "Sorry," she murmured, reaching up to pat his chest as if consoling him. "It's not little. It's big." Her mouth twitched. "You think it'll fit."

Honestly, Luca was enjoying himself far too much. The tension of the night had cracked just enough to let this absurd, dangerous levity slip through, and he loved how good it felt. But reality was already clawing its way back in. Julian and Marco would arrive soon.

"Trust me," he said dryly, adjusting his grip on her before she could sway again. "It'll fit." He shook his head, a ghost of a smile still lingering. "But I've gotta make sure you get home, Bambola. I've got work in a bit."

She pouted, but didn't argue when he bent and lifted her bridal style. Her arms slid around his neck automatically, fingers tangling in the collar of his jacket. The corridor outside his office was quiet, guarded by men who looked anywhere but at her bare legs hooked around his arm. Everyone pretended not to notice. Everyone knew better.

Her assigned driver was already waiting with two other men near the reception area. He straightened the second he saw them, moving fast. He opened the door before Luca even reached the car.

Luca lowered her carefully into the seat, adjusting her dress so it didn't bunch, brushing a strand of hair back from her flushed face.

He turned to the driver, his expression flattening instantly. "If she loses one hair," he said calmly, "you're dead."

"Yes, Luca," the driver replied, already sliding behind the wheel.

Luca stepped back and watched the car pull away, taillights disappearing into the night. He stood there, hands in his pockets, jaw tight, waiting until it was fully out of sight. Only then did he turn, the last of that warmth draining out of him.

The sound of another engine cut through the garage.

Julian's car rolled in, timing impeccable.

The happiness and levity Luca had allowed himself evaporated instantly. His shoulders squared. His face hardened. The man who laughed with a drunk woman vanished, replaced by the one who ruled by consequence. As Julian stepped out of the car, Luca welcomed the darkness back.

Playtime was over.

Marco stepped out of the car. His wrists were bound in front of him. Blood had dried along his knuckles, his shirt torn at the shoulder, but he walked upright anyway, chin lifted, spine straight.

Luca raised two fingers subtly and his men moved at once. They took Marco from Julian's custody. Marco's gaze flicked to Luca for half a second in acknowledgment, acceptance.

"Interesting turn of events," Julian said, amusement dripping from every syllable as he stepped closer. "Your most loyal dog turns for a pussy."

Luca fixed his attention on Julian, eyes cold. "Get your ass on a plane to Vienna and deliver the schematics."

Julian tilted his head, watching Marco being led in. "What will you do with him?"

"None of your business, Julian. Your mission is complete. Get lost. Send my regards to Father."

Julian smirked, eyes flicking back to Luca's face, searching for cracks. "Do I send your regards to your wife too?"

"I will ask you again, Julian," he said quietly. "Do you want to fuck my wife? Because I don't see why you keep bringing her up."

Julian's smile widened. He lived for this. "Just being a good brother," he said lightly. "Because if you don't fuck her, Luca, someone else will." He shrugged. "Leaving her in Vienna for a year? It doesn't look good."

"Keep your advice to yourself," Luca snapped, restraint thinning. "And maybe get Father to arrange a wife for you if you're so clogged up and desperate for a pussy to fuck."

Julian lifted his hands. "Vienna it is." He turned away, chuckling.

Luca headed back inside but his mind lagged behind his body. The triangle that had become his life was terrifying. Bianca. His wife in name only.

How would Veronica feel about him being married? Would she despise him for it? Would she hate him? Would she run? Or would she understand, really understand, that some vows were cages?

He didn't have answers. Only consequences waiting to be handed out.

Luca moved through the false wall. Marco was tied to a chair in the center of the cell, wrists bound, shoulders slumped just enough to betray exhaustion. His eyes lifted immediately when Luca entered.

Luca glanced at the two men stationed inside. "Untie him and leave us."

One of them moved fast, cutting the restraints. Neither man spoke. Neither lingered.

Silence stretched.

"What am I to do with you, Marco?" Luca asked at last. He stood a few feet away, hands clasped behind his back. "What?" His eyes burned now. "You have been with me since the beginning, and you pull bullshit like this."

Marco swallowed, rolling his shoulders as circulation returned to his wrists. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I couldn't do it."

Luca stopped directly in front of him. "Were you fucking her?"

Marco's head snapped up, eyes wide with horror. "God, no. No. I swear, no!" He shook his head hard. "It's not like that."

"Then what is it?" Luca demanded, patience thinning. "Because from where I'm standing, you threw your life away for something."

Marco dragged a hand down his face. "She is... she's a child," he said. "A good child. And we don't do this, Luca. We don't."

