Valentino Moretti's Guide Italian and Cosa Nostra Terminology

Valentino Moretti's Guide to Italian and Cosa Nostra Terminology, Version 1.0

Traditional Italian

Note from Tino: There are a lot of New York Italians who use broken-up, Americanized phrases in Italian, but this isn't it. This section is traditional Italian. I need to clarify it, because my mother was serious about the way Italian should be spoken. She was old country, so I guess, in a way, me and my brothers are old country too. Not good or bad, just the way it is. (Yeah, let them think that. We all know this makes us sexy as hell. The rest of those guidos are just posers. Old country. The real deal. In my family, if we do something, we own it. Bet you didn't know that, but stick around; you'll find out real fast.)

Apri questa porta del cazzo, Valentino—Open this fucking door, Valentino. (Note, both my brothers have this annoying habit. When they're irritated with me, they switch to Italian and use my full name in the same way my mother used to. It pisses me off. So I do the same thing to them. It particularly irritates Nova, which is reason enough to do it often. Romeo must find it entertaining too, 'cause he does it to Nova all the fucking time, but it's good for him.)

Bambini—Babies, as in more than one. (Not for nothing, but my brother makes the cutest bambini. Sad, him and Jules can't have any more. My nephews could make a million bucks modeling. It's genetic. We don't make ugly babies.)

Bambino – Baby.

Cazzo – Fuck.

Chiudi la tua fottuta bocca, Valentino—Shut your fucking mouth, Valentino. (See what I'm saying? This whole fucking dictionary is just gonna be me and my brothers bitching each other out in Italian.)

Ciao – Hello.

È morto – It's dead.

È la morfina. Lei non ci sta con la testa—It's the morphine. She doesn't have a clear mind. In other words, I was telling Nova that Jules was high as fuck and not to take it personally. Hey, no judgment. I spent a good chunk of my life high, and I don't have two perfect, handsome bambini to show for it. I got nothing but love for Jules. She's my favorite sister-in-law. (And likely the only one I'm gonna get, unless Carina switches teams and starts going for girls. Nova sure as hell isn't getting married.)

Figlio di puttana – Son of a bitch.

I miei bambini – My babies. (Yeah, pretty much. I'd take a thousand bullets for those two.)

Macchiato – Caffé macchiato literally translates into spotted or stained coffee. It's espresso with a spot of milk. The highline coffeehouses in New York will often serve them with designs swirled into the foamed milk. Sounds like a cappuccino, but it's not. Look, I understand it's all very confusing, but think of it like this. Macchiato is a two-layered drink, with just espresso and foamed milk. Cappuccino and lattes are three-layered drinks, with foamed milk, steamed milk, and espresso. Lattes have more steamed milk. Cappuccinos have more foamed milk, so in the caffeine food chain it goes, macchiato, cappuccino, lattes, with progressively more milk and less coffee as we go down. Still don't understand? It's okay. Like most things in my world, it's complex. (Note, it tastes a little different from the café con leches in Miami, but the café con leche was actually really fucking good. I drank them for a full week, and I missed them afterward. So I'm going to have to give them the Tino Moretti seal of approval.)

Merda—Shit. (Note, yes, I know. It sounds a lot like *mierda*, which is *shit* in Spanish. I grew up in East Harlem. Often called Spanish Harlem, though it was Italian Harlem first. There are pockets of Italian holdouts who still live there, but I heard enough Puerto Rican Spanish as a kid to understand most of it. I'm just not gonna speak it, 'cause I have an ethical issue with butchering a language. Like I said before, if you're gonna do something, do it well or don't do it at all.)

Morfina – Morphine.

Nonno—Grandfather. Not to be confused with godfather, unless you're lucky enough to be me. Then they're one and the same.

Sei uno stronzo – You're an asshole.

Tu sei morto per me – You're dead to me.

Vaffanculo—Fuck off. (Usually said while flipping your hand under your chin and then giving them the middle finger. A lot of Italian has accompanying hand gestures. I know people make jokes about Italians talking with their hands, but there is some of it that has actual meaning.)

Un enorme fottuto stronzo – A huge fucking asshole.

Vai a morire ammazzato—Go and die murdered. I guess, technically, it translates to go and die killed. Essentially, it means don't just go and die. Go and die violently, at the hands of another, shamed and suffering before death. What can I say? All the great artists were Italian because we're creative people...in all things. (Note, I don't even remember saying this to Nova, and he was probably really pissed off about it. This is not a nice insult. Especially in our family, when dying murdered is a very real possibility. I should probably apologize to him for this one.)

Vai via, stronzo—Go away, asshole. (Note, in case you haven't noticed, stronzo means asshole, and I use it frequently when talking to my brothers. Don't feel too bad about it. They've said it to me a few times too.)

Zio—Uncle. (Zu can also be used, but zu is sometimes used with respect toward senior members of a mafia organization. No, we're not gonna let our nephews call us Zu.)

Cosa Nostra Terminology

Note from Tino: The information contained in this guide was obtained through academic research and does not, in any way, indicate any sort of personally obtained knowledge of the internal workings of Cosa Nostra, criminal activity, drug use, etc... (In other words, I'm not a narc, and I'm not a wiseguy. So the Borgata and the Feds can just back the fuck up. It's a fucking story. That's it. Made-up. I'll swear on a thousand stacks of Bibles that none of the shit in these books is true anyway.)

.38—A gun. On the small side. A good revolver if you're into revolvers. It's not the most powerful gun. It's not the fastest (I prefer semiautomatics), but if you're running strapped and you want someone to know you'll put a hole in them if they fuck with you, a .38 will do the job. It'll kill someone easily enough if your aim is decent. (Note, it'll do the job faster than a fucking shotgun, that's for sure!)

Administration—The upper-level management of a crime family. Usually consisting of the don (boss), capo bastone (underboss), and the consigliere (advisor). It's all about the bottom line with them, and shit always rolls downhill from the administration. Also, many of the rules in Cosa Nostra revolve around protecting the administration, but despite that, historically there are a lot of bosses who have gone down. Feds will give just about anyone a free pass to grab someone from the administration of a crime family, and it works more often than it should. The old man has done over ten years in federal, and that's light for a don. It's a fucking miracle Nova hasn't gone down as capo bastone, but no one's sold him out. (Note, selling out Nova would be very bad for your health. Don't

think I can't find you. There are a lot of dead motherfuckers who made that mistake.)

Associate – An associate is someone who works with an organization but is not an actual member of the mob. The power and influence of an associate are vast. For example, if you're just the drug dealer up the street, paying out a cut to the capo in charge of the area, you have no power, but if you're someone like Chuito, who is now a known confidant to the capo bastone of the Moretti crime family, that's a different set of issues. There have been associates who've gained great power in an organization, even if they weren't Italian. Think Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel. They were both Jewish but gathered huge amounts of power and authority with the Italian mafia. It's all about playing your cards right and allying yourself with the right powers that be, 'cause shit can change very quickly in the Cosa Nostra. (Note, not playing your cards right is a good way to end up dead. There aren't too many Meyer Lanskys in history. Most associates are expendable should a mafia war break out. They aren't protected like a made man is.)

Blow—Cocaine. (The rich man's drug. In case you didn't know, a cocaine habit is expensive as hell. Upside is coke will make you very productive. It'll also wreck your life if you hold on to the habit for any extended period of time. I don't recommend blow. Drink coffee instead.)

Borgata—The family. Used in mafia circles to refer specifically to a crime family—one with an established upper-level administration, soldiers, associates, etc. There are different Borgatas. Some are small; others, like the Moretti crime family, are very large, with capos, soldiers, and associates in most major cities.

Boss—This word has a million different meanings, but at the end of the day a real boss is probably someone you should respect. In the Cosa Nostra, *boss* is another term for the godfather (can also be referred to as don, father, or uncle in Italian).

Burner phone—I'm a big fan of the burner phone. It's essentially a prepaid phone that you keep for a few days or weeks and then toss for the next burner phone. In doing this, it makes you very hard to track. Cosa Nostra believes, with good reason, keeping a cell phone in your pocket is like carrying the government around with you. But we're also in the modern fucking age, and cell phones are required. Even still, you don't see me spending hours on my phone like Jules and Romeo are apt to do. The reason people call me hyper is because I'm not spacedout on my phone 24-7. I'll text. I'll call, but I don't put my life on my phone. Nova's on his more than I am, but it's never for business. He uses burner phones for that. We'll have one phone that's ours all the time, and we use it for things like Jules texting me to pick up milk for the twins on the way home. According to Romeo and Jules, this is the only phone I have, but I have others hidden for emergencies. Rarely smartphones, though the one I kept in the GL was a smartphone in case I needed it for maps or something. But real burners are usually just used for talking. Cheap, disposable, and untraceable.

Capo bastone—Underboss. Just like it sounds, the capo bastone is the vice president of the mafia, but in this scenario, the vice president isn't just sitting around waiting for the old man to kick off. He handles all the shit, big and small, that goes into running a crime family. For big families like the Morettis, more steps need to be taken to protect the don, which means the underboss is the one who takes more risks, makes more decisions, and essentially puts himself out there as a moving target to distract the Feds and other enemies from the don. That's why Nova's on the commission. It's the reason he's the one who handles the capos. The don is supposed to be invisible, protected at all costs. The underboss, in contrast, is almost like a decoy who got stuck doing all the work. Underboss is a shit fucking job. Bet you didn't know that's what Nova was dealing with all this time, but he owns it...like a boss.

Capo dei capi—Boss of all bosses. Literally translates in Italian to head of all heads. This is a very old-school term, one given to the few godfathers who gained

so much power they held supreme authority over the entire Italian mafia organization in America, which essentially means they controlled most of the underworld. This is a lot of power for one individual, and it can create a lot of tension, as crime families only like to recognize their own administration as their ruling party. I think another capo dei capi rising to power is a dead ideal, as in, not really possible anymore no matter how much it's romanticized. Nova likes to say anything is possible, but let's get real. A play like that would have to be epic, and even if they did succeed, holding it down would take a powerhouse administration.

Caporegime – Almost always shortened to *capo*. Can also be called a skipper, or lieutenant. A capo is the leader of a crew in the mafia. Crews often run independently, doing their own thing, making money, but on regular intervals they will have to give a taste (a cut) to the administration. A capo will usually have an area they work for the Borgata, or in other instances a specialty within the Borgata. Gambling, theft, guns, drugs, unions, etc. There are also capos who run legitimate businesses. Particularly in our family, over the past many years, shock of shocks, a lot of our money is made legitimately. Of course, the accountants will often use the capos who are running legit crews to funnel dirty money, so don't get the wrong idea. The Moretti family isn't going straight by creating all these legit crews. They're hiding the money from the Feds, but that's complicated. It has Nova's name written all over it and makes me faze the fuck out when he talks about it. Anyway, capos who make more money have more power and respect. Some suck; others rock it out like a motherfucker. A good underboss (Nova) will often try to help them be as efficient and profitable as possible. Nova does all right with this. I haven't met a capo yet who didn't love him. Considering they're all rich and their money is pretty and clean and legit looking to the government. Nova is what we like to call an overachiever when it comes to mafia work. He protects his capos.

Candy—Code word for drugs, particularly cocaine. Like real candy, the rule of thumb is never to take candy from strangers. You never know what they cut it with to save their bottom line. Trust me on this, dealers will cut cocaine (and other drugs) with some very nasty shit to save their bottom line. You'd be lucky to get baking soda. Very lucky. (Note, it's extremely rare to get pure cocaine, unless you're the grandson of a don. Then it's a perk of the job.)

Commission—A while back, long before I was even a sexy thought, the crime families instituted a commission to make the decisions that might have once been reserved for a capo dei capi (see above), because the battle for that title left a lot of dead wiseguys in its wake. The commission has members from all the powerful families who help make the decisions that affect the organization as a whole. Which seems odd, but think of it like this. The NFL is an organization that has rules and a commissioner to make sure they're followed, but the NFL also has all these different teams who do their own thing and have their own bosses. These teams really don't like each other. Some of them even hate each other, but they all follow the rules laid down by their organization. That sort of describes how the mafia works, if you forget for a moment that one commission member might be inclined to ice another for fucking with their agenda. If something major goes down, the commission can punish individual members as well as entire Borgatas. (Note, yes, in case you're wondering, as of right now, Nova is on the commission for the Moretti family.)

Consigliere—This is sort of a cool job in the administration. I think Nova enjoyed this job when he had it. The power play for the consigliere should ideally be removed because he's an advisor—someone expected to see all sides fairly. Nova should've never had this job for bloodlines alone, but there was an opening and I guess that was enough for the old man. In other families, the consiglieres sometimes aren't even made men, and they are often completely removed from criminal activity. They've come into the positions as trusted associates of the don, who are fair-minded enough to give him honest advice

that'll serve the whole, but the job is more than that. If the don is the mind of the Borgata, and the underboss is the face of the Borgata, the consigliere is the voice of the Borgata. And he's the voice not just of the don, but of all the members of the Borgata. The consigliere is our go-between, someone we can talk to and bring our issues to in hopes of being heard by the don. (And yes, Nova was a great consigliere. We all hate that he's now the moving target instead.)

Cosa Nostra—Italian for our thing. Okay, again with the complicated. I'm throwing out the word mafia left and right in this dictionary to help you understand, but wiseguys, we don't call ourselves the mafia. We don't name ourselves. The media did that shit ages ago when the Italian crime families started organizing in America. They just stole the word from the Sicilian mafia in Italy (who also, incidentally, do not name themselves). It's a secret fucking organization. We don't blab that we're in the mafia. We don't even really use Cosa Nostra anymore, 'cause fucking stool pigeons writing books and singing to the Feds jacked that up too, but alone, when we're among those we trust and we have to talk business, we discuss "our thing." That's it. (Note, media sometimes calls it La Cosa Nostra, which translates to the our thing and sounds stupid as fuck to anyone who speaks Italian.)

Don—The godfather. The head of a Borgata. The boss. Don was originally a title in Italy that was reserved for royalty, esteemed nobles, higher-ups in the church, etc. It's a title of respect. It should be said with respect, and the position should be respected. He is the king of our family. We treat him as such, but it's also a good idea for the don to remember he needs to be worthy of respect, because Cosa Nostra has a massive case of ADHD when it comes to those in power. We can move on to the next don pretty fucking fast.

Enforcer—Mafia justice, all wrapped up in one sexy package. Enforcers in a Borgata are often free agents who operate outside the chain of command and answer directly to the administration. They're rentable to any capo who needs them, or to put it not so nicely, a whore with a gun. There aren't many of us,

because if we're good at it, the borgata doesn't need more than one or two enforcers. A capo can usually utilize his own muscle to get a job done, but if he's got a difficult situation, if it's something he can't handle on his own and he has to come, hat in hand, to the administration, they'll send an enforcer to handle the problem. Now if the problem is the capo who can't handle his shit on his own, well, that's up to the administration. Enforcers generally only socialize with other enforcers or potential enforcers. We don't make too many friends in the ranks, more to protect ourselves than anything. An enforcer doesn't argue the hit handed down from the administration. He does it, regardless of his personal feelings. Not sure how much mob history you know, but most mob hits are on wiseguys who fucked up. You'll see mention of rules time and again throughout this dictionary. The punishment for breaking these rules is almost always death. Unfortunately, this means that the administration has to off wiseguys who used to be their friends, are oftentimes their blood, and it's very upsetting to them. So it's not too much of a hardship on their delicate sensibilities, they have enforcers to take care of it for them. Other wiseguys do not like enforcers. They're nice as fuck to us, but they don't like us. We are the grim reapers of the Borgata, and no one is safe from us. If the enforcer is really, really good, he answers to and works for the commission, rentable from the Borgata, but separate from it as well. This makes the enforcer even less likable, as he could one day get handed a hit to take out a don or an underboss as easily as some capo who fucked up. When I left, Tony took over my job working for the commission. (Note, yeah, I'll let you sit and think about all that for a while, because Tony has a lot of reasons to be loyal to Nova. He's been his self-appointed bodyguard ever since Nova nearly went down for killing our father. Nova also serves the commission, so this works for everyone, except maybe the old man.)

Family—Good or bad, it's the one you're stuck with. Needless to say, in mafia circles, this term means more than just blood ties. Though for some of us, it's one and the same.

Flip—To turn your back on the Omertá oath and betray the Borgata to the government. Also known as being a rat, a snitch, a stool pigeon, and a good way to earn a visit from an enforcer.

Friend of mine—An introduction of someone outside the mafia to other mafia members, but by using this term, the member introducing them is putting their reputation on the line by vouching for them. It's a big deal to get that level of approval. Wiseguys aren't known for tossing around their loyalty lightly, and let me tell you why. If the person you're betting on fucks up. If they go to the Feds. If they're idiots and lose the Borgata money or harm the organization in any way, guess who's getting called up for it. Made men have quite a bit of protection, but if you vouch for a dumbass and they hurt the organization, you can end up in a watery grave real fucking fast. (Note, I honestly don't remember introducing Chu to Nova with this. It's another one of those things lost in the crash, but Nova assures me I did. A part of me must have known Chu was worth the gamble.)

Friend of ours—Made men use this as code to recognize each other. An example, if Nova and I walk into a restaurant, and Nova runs into a made man he knows, perhaps from another family, he'll introduce him to me as a friend of ours. The organization is very secretive. There are a lot of rules in place to protect its members, and they're important. I believe in them as much as in any other made man does. This is a very strict rule. As in, you'll be dead in a fucking heartbeat if you introduce someone as a friend of ours and they aren't actually made. I cannot emphasize enough how unbreakable this rule is.

Glock—One of the most popular gun brands in law enforcement. Also extremely popular with criminals. Why? It doesn't have a typical safety. You can fire quickly and efficiently in an emergency situation. Of course, gangsters like to conceal this weapon in their jeans, and without a safety, well, for obvious reasons, I'm not recommending that. I like Glocks (no, the Boricua is wrong, we

don't all exclusively pack Berettas; some of us are into whatever will get the job done), but I don't stick them in my jeans. The Glocks I reserve for a holster.

Goodfellas — Another term for made men. (Note, made men are protected in the underworld. Even if they deserve to get whacked, killing or even punching one of them is bad for your health unless the punishment was approved by the administration.)

Hit – A contract killing.

Ice—Kill. (Also street slang for crystal meth. A drug that makes cocaine look like baby aspirin. Meth wrecks you. Quickly. Anyone with a shred of vanity wouldn't touch ice. You don't see too many wiseguys on meth. Cocaine we'll snort like a motherfucker. But ice, not so much. We don't even deal it, to be honest. We have limits. Ice is one of those limits.)

Made — Being formally inducted into the mafia through a ceremony. You're told the history. (Why do you think this dictionary is so fucking long? We have a thing about our history.) You're told the rules. (Which takes a while, as you can see.) You're told what happens if you break the rules. (Death, in varying horrific ways depending on the infraction.) Then you're a man of honor, a wiseguy, a goodfella, more often than not like your father before you, and one day, if our lady is kind, you'll have a bunch of mafiosi sons to share the tradition with. (Note, or if you're my father, you have one daughter, a pissed-off wife who won't fuck you, and a couple of bastard sons who are good enough for no other reason than one is pretty smart and the other makes a fantastic motivational tool.)

Madonn'—Short for *Madonna*, or *Madonna mia*. The blessed mother. It expresses surprise in a slightly blasphemous way, something similar to *holy shit*. (Note, like others in this section, while technically Italian, it's become New York slang enough that I moved it down.)

Make your bones—In order to become a made man, you have to make your bones. What is it, you ask? You have to carry out a contract killing. This cannot

be a personal vendetta. It can't be the asshole who screwed over your friend. This has to be done exclusively for the organization. Meaning you have to kill, in cold blood, someone you don't know who had the misfortune of making enough bad life choices that the mafia put out a hit on them. I mean, don't get me wrong; whoever you have to kill to make your bones was probably gonna die anyway, but if the Borgata has someone up for being made, they take the job away from the enforcer and give it to the potential inductee. For a lot of made men, this is a grim part of being made. Not all mafia are killers, but this is insurance for the organization, and it's currently an unbendable rule. It used to be, back in the day (like the early '80s), you could become a made man without it. If you were a big earner like Nova, that'd be enough, but after the Donnie Brasco trials, it became an absolute must. Why? 'Cause undercover FBI agents aren't going to go contract kill someone to get into our organization. They just aren't. So, yeah, after it's done, made men love to announce when they did it. "Yo, Tony, shut the fuck up. I made my bones back when Reagan was president." Honestly, I usually want to punch motherfuckers when they do that shit. I never had to make my bones. I was contract killing for the mafia long before I got made. Lucky me.

Mattresses—Going to the mattresses. Hitting the mattresses. It means preparing for mafia war. It is still a literal term too. When a war goes down, mattresses are involved. Soldiers sleeping on them, stuck in safe houses as they wait for orders. The administration and their families are also taken to safe houses, cooped up together, sleeping on the floor, and forsaking any other internal bullshit that is going on in order to protect what matters.

Muscle—Underworld thugs. (Note, yes, I am considered muscle to the Borgata. I like to think I'm top-shelf muscle, but really, muscle is muscle. Do you really care if it's top-shelf muscle kicking your face in?)

Omertá — Omertá is more than a code of silence. It's an attitude. It revolves around strict noncooperation with law enforcement and protecting the secrecy of the organization. Once you take the Omertá oath, you turn your back on the idea

of any help outside the organization. Whatever problem you have has to be handled inside Cosa Nostra. You're a citizen of Cosa Nostra and answer only to their laws. Forever. Endgame. (Do I believe in the oath? I fucking took it. Of course I believe in it. I don't love the establishment, but fuck the government. Motherfuckers hound my brother every step he takes. I'd rot in federal forever before I'd flip on the Borgata.)

On the pad—An officer of the law enforcement who is being paid to ignore certain criminal activity. I joked that Wyatt is on the pad, which, of course, he'd debate, but come on, Wyatt's on the pad. Nova invests all his wife's money. Wyatt is, without question, on the pad like a motherfucker. He ignores a fuckload of criminal activity. Either that or he goes to the Romeo Wellings's School of Denial. (For the record, I don't think Wyatt's in denial. I think he knows we had that motherfucker Vaughn Davis offed, and I think he knows a lot more than that. Why he chooses to ignore it, I'm not sure, but I'm not complaining.)

Oobatz—Crazy. (Note, this is another one of those Italian words that was latched on to by New York Italians. I mean, can't really give anyone shit about it. I use it as much as the next wiseguy.)

Rolling—Rolling is the term used for the high off ecstasy, also known as Molly. Which, in case you didn't know, is absolutely Nova's drug of choice. Molly was his girlfriend for a while, and I'm pretty sure he has days where he still misses her.

Smack—Heroin. (Never used it. There are levels of drug use, and heroin, in my opinion, is extreme. It wrecks you like meth. A horrible, nasty drug, and my people don't sell it because of that.)

Soldiers—Entry-level position for made men in the mafia. Also known as button men, because if a capo presses a button, they better jump to do what he says.

Straight — A term used for a gangster who decides to step away from crime and be law-abiding. This rarely works out. I went straight for three fucking years, but it just never lasts, for any of us.

War – A mafia war. Never a good thing, but inevitable.

WASP princess — This is sort of a snarky term. WASP stands for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. A WASP princess is one of those preppy, polished girls from high school you kinda wanted to fuck, even knowing they'd ignore you the next day rather than be seen in public with you. WASP princesses eventually grow up to drive BMWs and decorate their four-bedroom houses in the suburbs. Then they'll have more little WASP princesses that they take to dance classes and groom to be the next generation of wine-drinking, pumpkin-candle-buying queens of suburbia. (Note, there's not a fucking thing in the world wrong with that. You have to remember something. I'm not the only one from East Harlem. Nova lets his ghetto show sometimes. Not forgetting things means there's always a part of him that's the angry teenager from East Harlem who was forced to live in the suburbs when his brother went to prison. Nova will, on instinct, pick fights with a WASP. Male or female. Ask Jules about it sometime if you don't believe me. He'll come around, but his knee-jerk reaction is to lash out first.)

Whack—To kill. (Note, we have a lot of words for this. The ones in this dictionary don't even scratch the surface.)

Wiseguys – Another term for a made man. If you're made, you're a wiseguy.