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*Who knew karma had such a perfect aim? It never misses, always plays the game. With a wink and a smirk, it serves up the pain, Like a cosmic joke, with nothing left to explain. Guess we should thank it for keeping things so plain! For the Queen's crown had tumbled.*

"f\*\*k!" Carla muttered, furiously biting her fingers. She thought she had lost them, but those pathetic idiots still found her regardless. Now she had to stress her already exhausted brain to figure out how to lose them again. But that was exactly the problem

— she was trapped in this expensive hotel, and those bastards — Hunter's men — had already surrounded the building. She peeked out from behind the curtains. There they were—about a dozen men in black suits and dark sunglasses, stationed across the street.

She had specifically chosen a room with a view across the street, just in case something like this happened, but she never thought it would actually come to pass. With a frustrated groan, she stepped away from the window. What the hell did

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Hunter want from her? Couldn't he just leave her alone? After all, he could now go back to his precious Estelle while she moved on with the little money she managed to withdraw from his account. She would have taken more if the stingy-ass fool hadn't frozen it almost immediately. Now, her dreams of the luxurious life she envisioned were crumbling before her eyes.

She hissed in annoyance, pacing back and forth, her mind going back to the moment when she was nearly choked to death. What if she had arranged for Estelle's k\*\*\*\*\*g? He would have done worse if it suited his agenda, and it wasn't like she had ruined his big plan. Yet, he almost killed her, then threatened her, ruining her plan over something so minor.

She hissed again, tugging her hair as she paced the room, her anger and frustration growing.

On the other side of the room, Mara rose from the bed, her small footsteps soft on the carpet as she shyly approached her pacing mother, fingers in her mouth.

"Mama?" She tugged on Carla's clothes.

Carla snapped out of her daze, turning sharply toward Mara with a harsh look. The little girl



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shrank back, her eyes dropping to her feet, her small voice trembling. "I'm hungry..."

Carla stared at her for a moment, different emotions clouding her mind. Thinking about it now, how was she going to deal with this sensitive, sickly child when they barely had enough money to survive? Mara got ill every time they moved, which happened frequently and with the amount she got from Hunter, she was sure it would all end up in hospital bills. Her teeth clenched with anger and irritation, but the sight of the trembling child softened her slightly.

Despite her cold-hearted ways, Carla never intended for her daughter to fear her. But Mara would understand everything someday—why Carla acted the way she did. She would understand she needs to act like her if she wants to survive when she realizes the world isn't fair to people like them. With a sigh, she waved her hand dismissively, "Go get the banana on the table."

Mara nodded, retreating quickly, but Carla added sharply, "And don't make a mess of it,"

She couldn't be bothered with cleaning up childish messes right now. She needed to focus on how to escape from the hawk eyes of those tails Hunter had sent after her.

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Suddenly, a knock on the door startled her. "About damn time," Carla muttered under her breath. She had been waiting for room service to bring up her food for hours and was ready to give them a piece of her mind. With an angry huff, she yanked the door open, ready to lash out at whoever was unfortunate to bring up her food so late.

However\_\_\_\_\_

Her world froze.

Standing before her was the last person she ever expected, nor wanted to see.

Vittorio f\*\*\*\*\*g Carbone. Fondling called, 'Dark Carbone.'

The man she had been running from. The man she feared more than anyone. He stood there with his wide grin, flanked by his loyal goons.

"Don't you look pretty with that pale face, bambina?" Carbone's voice dripped with sarcasm. His wide and unsettling grin never reached his cold, dark eyes, as usual.

Carla's heart leapt into her throat. She snapped out of her shock and tried to slam the door, but Carbone's boot caught it just before it shut. "I thought you'd do that," he chuckled darkly, pushing the door open with ease.



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Carla stumbled backwards, her breath quickening as Carbone sauntered in, his grin never faltering. "What... are you doing here? What do you want?" she stammered, her voice and body visibly trembling. However, her fear only made his grin wider.

"What do I want?" he echoed, his hands spreading wide as if he was surprised by the whole situation. "Why else would I be here, be?"

Carla cringed at the pet name, one he used frequently when they were together. It was either that or 'bambina.' She had hated them then, but had to pretend she liked them.

Carbone closed the gap between them in a heartbeat. Carla's spine went rigid, her breath hitching as his calloused hand trailed up her arm.

"Why else would I be here, dolcezza," he murmured, his hand gently circling the base of her neck. "If not for you."

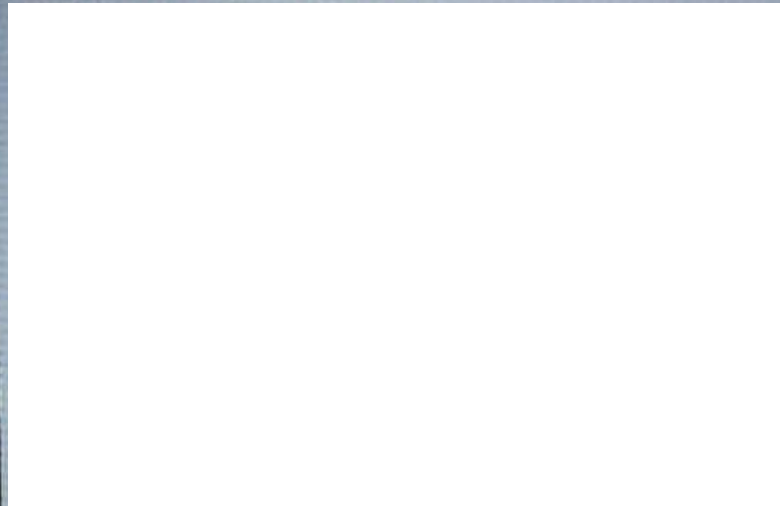
Before she could respond his grip tightened around her throat, cutting off her air. Carla choked, her hands flying to his wrist as she struggled to pry him off.

*What is it with men strangling her?*

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Suddenly, a soft cry broke the tension. Carbone's grip loosened, his attention snapping toward the sound. His eyes landed on Mara, who stood frozen in the corner, her tear-filled eyes wide with fear as



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they locked on him.

Something in him clenched painfully as recognition flooded his mind. He let Carla go and took tentative steps towards the trembling little girl.

"Mi amor," Carbone said softly, his voice suddenly tender. He crouched to Mara's level, his eyes scanning her tiny figure.

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"Get away from my child!" Carla shrieked, lunging forward. But before she could reach Mara, two of Carbone's men grabbed her, pulling her back.

Mara seeing the whole thing unfold, let out a frightened whimper, shrinking away as Carbone reached toward her. However, seeing the fear in her eyes seemed to irritate him. He clenched his hand which was hovering in mid-air before he stood up. His expression darkened, as he turned back at Carla. His gaze was hard and cold, making Carla swallow forcefully.

"Take the girl," he ordered one of his men.

"No!" Carla screamed as Mara was lifted off the floor, crying out for her mother. "Let her go! Let my child go!"

She thrashed in the grip of Carbone's men, but they held her firmly in place. As Mara's screams faded into the hallway, Carla felt a new kind of fear gripping her. This was different from the fear she had felt whenever Mara fell ill. This was the fear of losing Mara for real this time, especially to someone like Carbone who she could never trust Mara with. "What do you want to do with my...."

A sharp slap snapped her head to the side, the sting radiating across her cheek. Carla's face



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burned, but still, she gasped out, "Please, give me back my child."

Carbone chuckled darkly, the sound cold and dangerous. "Your child? He sneered, stepping closer. "No, no, mia cara." He leaned in close, his breath hot against her skin. "She's mine. My child! My blood!" He roared.

Carla's eyes widened in horror, dread crawling down her spine. How? She never told him. How did he find out?

"No," she shook her head, tears streaming down her face as she locked gaze with Carbone. "Mara isn't yours," she shouted.

"Oh really?" Carbone's c\*\*\*\*d his head, his grin wider than before. "Just like Annie isn't your real name, Carla," he sneered.

Carla's blood ran cold. How does he know that? It was the name she used when she first met him. The name was created to conceal her true identity, as she scammed him before realizing who he really was.

"Did you really think I wouldn't find out?"

"I'll give you credit, though," Carbone swirled around and sat in a chair facing Carla, who was



still trapped in his men's grip. "I never thought a lying fraud like you would keep something so innocent after all. I didn't expect you to keep the child," his voice dripped with mocking sympathy.

And then his grin returned. "But that doesn't change what's going to happen to you now, because I have a beautiful and perfect punishment for you, bambina."

Carla's breath hitched, and her heart thudded in her chest. She knew what Carbone meant by 'punishment'. It was never death. It was worse than death. But the so-called punishment had a way of making people wish for death.

"I did nothing wrong," Carla choked out, tears streaming down her face. "You never loved me. You never wanted a child."

She never loved him either. To her, he was nothing more than a walking bank account. She had pretended to love him, but it was all a lie. Until she discovered the truth—he wasn't just some rich fool. He was a powerful Italian drug lord. Not someone she thought he was.

The realization had terrified her but it was too late to run. How was she supposed to escape from someone so powerful, so dangerous? She had

thought it would be simple: milk him for all he was worth and then disappear, just like she had done before. But Carbone had different plans. He didn't just want her on his arm; he wanted to own her, control her like some pet, his possession. And she didn't want that.

Yes, he showered her with money, with power, but deep down, she knew it was only a matter of time before he uncovered the truth behind her lies.

However, when she found out she was carrying Mara, that was when the fear truly took hold. She couldn't risk staying any longer, couldn't risk living such a risky life playing a mafia mistress. So she ran—fled from the life she'd built with him.

Carbone's eyes darkened. "It doesn't matter what I wanted. You took what was mine and ran, and now, you'll pay."

"No, Carbone, please," Carla begged, her voice breaking as tears streamed down her face in waves. "Don't do this, please. Mara needs me."

"Not anymore," Carbone replied coldly. "She only needs me now,"

Carla shook her head, dread curling in her stomach.

"And as for you, bambina..." He trailed off, a



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wicked grin spreading across his face as he leaned back in the chair. "You'll be nothing but a slave. A puttana for everyone to use."

Carla's blood ran cold. She knew what a 'puttana is'. She had seen it before, women broken beyond recognition. "No, no, please..." she sobbed, shaking her head desperately.

"Oh yes, mi amor," Carbone stood up and walked slowly toward her. His eyes shone with a twisted sense of satisfaction as he leaned towards her tear-streaked and reddened face. "You'll wish you were dead before I'm done with you."



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