

Bonus Chapter II

The villa was quiet, except for the soft clinking of china in the kitchen and the muffled chatter of maids going about their tasks. Sunlight spilled through the grand windows, illuminating the marble floors of the living room where Mara sat on a plush carpet made from fur, scribbling something in her notebook. Her caregiver, whom Mara loved calling 'Nana,' sat beside her, legs tucked beneath her as she watched the little girl draw what looked like a man in a suit with an exaggeratedly large head. What in the world was that supposed to be? A frog in a suit?

"Mara, dear! Will you tell me what you're trying to draw?"

Mara giggled, not looking away or stopping whatever it was she was drawing as she replied, "Guess."

"Hmm!" the caregiver muttered, one finger pressed to her chin. Her head tilted as she feigned being lost in thought.

"A bear?" she joked, careful not to hurt the little girl's feelings, even though she knew Mara, even as a child, rarely got hurt emotionally. Mara was a

happy child, but the caregiver feared the little girl wasn't actually what she seemed. She worried that Mara had learned to keep a smile on her face and act happy despite everything. It was both sad and scary, and that was the reason she tried to fill the emptiness in Mara's life. Though she feared it was impossible, she tried to make sure Mara didn't feel it, not even for a second, because her smile was one of the best things in the world.

The sound of a car screeching made the caregiver's smile falter. She sat up straighter, instinctively smoothing down her dress. Mara didn't notice the change in her caregiver's demeanor; she was too engrossed in her drawing. But the caregiver knew who had just arrived - there was only one person it could be.

The door to the living room opened, and there he was.

The mafia boss, Mara's father, known as Carbone, strode in with the confidence of a man who owned not just the villa but the world. His dark, dangerous eyes swept the room, landing briefly on the caregiver, who immediately stood, her head bowed and hands folded in front of her. His gaze softened as it settled on Mara. His tailored suit was immaculate, his hair neatly combed back, but

there was tension in his posture, an unspoken weight he carried.

"Daddy!" Mara's face lit up as she scrambled to her feet and ran to him. Carbone crouched just in time to catch her, lifting her effortlessly into his arms.

"Little one," he said, his voice low but warm. He kissed the top of her head, his fingers brushing through her curls. "Have you been good?"

Mara nodded enthusiastically. "Yes! Nana and I played games, and I drew pictures. Do you want to see?"

"Of course," he said, his lips twitching into a rare smile. "I always want to see what my little artist has made."

The caregiver watched the interaction silently beneath her lashes. It was moments like these that made the mafia don seem odd. He could be tender, almost gentle, with Mara, a side of him no one else ever saw or benefitted from because that same tenderness never extended to anyone. Not even her, Mara's mother.

Mara wriggled out of his arms and ran to grab her notebook, while the caregiver carefully and professionally looked away. The room was

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charged with a heavy silence, and for a second, she feared he had noticed her watching. Not that he would punish her, but the man exuded a palpable aura of fear that made anyone near him tremble for even the slightest reason. The caregiver avoided his gaze, focusing instead on the pattern of the rug beneath her feet.

"How is Carla?" His voice cut through the quiet like a knife.

The caregiver glanced up, meeting his dark eyes briefly before looking away. "She's fine, sir," she replied, her tone professional.

Carbone arched a brow, stepping further into the room. "Fine? That's all you have to say?"

The caregiver glanced up at him again, trying to mask her confusion and irritation. He'd asked how she was. If he wanted more details, he could have asked where his mistress was or called her directly instead of trying to intimidate her. "She's upstairs in her room. She hasn't stepped out today."

His expression darkened, but before he could respond, Mara bounded back into the room, her notebook clutched in her hands. She held it out to him, her eyes shining with excitement.

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+5 Points

"Look, Daddy! This is you!" she exclaimed, pointing to the drawing of the suited man with the oversized head.

He took the notebook from her, studying the drawing with exaggerated seriousness. "Hmm. I

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think you've captured my likeness perfectly," he said, his tone lighter now. "But don't you think my head is a little too big?"

Mara giggled. "That's what makes it funny!"

He laughed softly, ruffling her hair. "You've got talent, little one. Keep it up."

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Mara giggled, bouncing on her toes in excitement, and the caregiver could only watch the exchange between father and daughter with delight. If only he could be around her more often and not just for these once-in-a-blue-moon visits.

He chuckled and tapped her nose while handing the notebook back to her. "I need to talk to your mom for a little while, little one. Stay here with your caregiver, and if you're good, maybe we'll grab some ice cream afterward."

The smile on Mara's face widened, and she gave a cute nod before bouncing back to her caregiver, who was still standing rigid as a tree. Ice cream-making and eating were some of his favorite moments with his daughter. Even though he rarely had time to visit, he made sure every minute with her counted. But with Carla... he sighed as he climbed the stairs. It was different.

Initially, when he'd found out Carla had birthed his child and lied to him, he'd been furious. He'd vowed to make her pay. That had been his motive when he sought her and his daughter out. But meeting Mara had changed everything. She'd been terrified of him, and that had hurt. His own child didn't recognize him. What broke him further was that she'd cried all day for a man who wasn't her

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father. That pain had been unbearable, and although he wanted to make Carla pay, he couldn't. He couldn't bear his own blood being in pain, a little child at that. So, he'd forgiven Carla and moved them to one of his anonymous penthouses, far from his dangerous, wild world, to a more secluded and safe area.

However, Carla seemed to prefer the hard way, because the damn woman refused to change for their child's sake.

Carbone came to a halt before a door.

But he was trying - for Mara's sake - not to throw her out.

Without knocking, he pushed the door open and was greeted by darkness. He wasn't surprised. His eyes adjusted quickly, and he made his way to the switch. With a flick, light flooded the room, followed by a muffled groan.

"I'm beginning to regret my decision," Carbone growled, his posture rigid with anger. But the woman lying in bed didn't stir, though he knew she'd heard him. His anger multiplied, and he took a deep breath to control it before marching toward the bed. In one swift motion, he snatched the bed sheet away from Carla's body. She groaned,

twisting before sitting up in anger, her bloodshot eyes meeting his flaring ones.

"What the hell do you want?" she snapped, her voice hoarse.

Carbone inhaled deeply, exhaling to steady his anger, something he found himself doing every time he was in her presence. But the stench of alcohol in the room almost made him gag. She'd been drinking. Again.

"The hell I want is for you to get up and act responsible for once. I didn't bring you here so you could drink your life away and neglect my child."

Carla's jaw tightened, her eyes burning with hatred. She knew better than to provoke him, but the words spilled out before she could stop them. "Oh, come on, Carbone. No one asked you to bring me here, nor does it look like Mara needs me. She has the people you planted around her. So why can't you leave me the f**k alone?"

She screamed the last sentence, her hair flying into her face, making her look rugged and pathetic at the same time.

The room fell into silence, the two glaring at each other. Truthfully, Carla had been really scared when Carbone came and made that silly promise

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of making her his people's s*x doll. It was something he could do, and that had terrified her. But miraculously, he had changed his plan, and she was more than grateful for his unexpected kindness. However, when she thought he was going to set her free, he caged her up in this shithole he called a mansion.

This wasn't what she envisioned for her life. She understood she had made a lot of terrible mistakes, but what else was to be expected from a child brought up in a ghetto? She had fought her way to the stage she was at today by being cunning and resourceful, but that was how she survived. So how dare they all try to make her look like the villain when all she did was survive? f**k them all, and f**k Carbone.

f**k him for making her want to be a better mother when he wasn't one himself. f**k the ache between her thighs just by looking at him. f**k everything. All she wanted was to leave, leave him, leave here, and leave everything in her past.

Carbone watched emotions swirl across her face. He saw the moment her eyes glistened with unshed tears, and his anger softened. Maybe he was being harsh, but who could blame him? The woman needed to be responsible for her daughter.

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"Look, everything I did was for your protection. For both you and Mara."

Carla met his gaze, her eyes brimming with tears. "You think this is protection? Trapping us in this house, cutting us off from the world? You might as well have buried me alive."

He flinched at her words, a rare c***k in his stoic facade. "I'm trying," he said quietly, the word feeling foreign to him. "You know what my world is like, Carla. You know how dangerous it is. I'm trying to do right by you. By Mara."

Carla laughed bitterly, shaking her head. "Right? You kidnapped us, threatened to ruin me, and now you're playing the hero? Forgive me if I'm not convinced."

He didn't respond immediately, his jaw tightening as his anger surged again. "f**k your confusion, Carla. I don't care about that," he said finally. "All this..." he gestured at the space between him and the bed Carla was sprawled on "...all this I'm doing is for Mara's sake. She's innocent in all of this, and she deserves a chance at a better life. And so do you."

"Then let us the f**k go," Carla screamed, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Then let us go," she

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said softly this time.

Carbone worked his jaw, his heart clenching with both anger and something he didn't want to acknowledge.

"The door is open for you, Carla," he said softly, his

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hard gaze slipping from hers as he turned to leave the room. "But not with my child," he added lastly, shutting the door behind him.

He did like her - that was the truth. There was still an unfinished attraction between them, and for her sake, he hoped she would change for the better so

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they could build something meaningful together. But if she didn't, he would have no other choice but to remove her from Mara's life. Not like the little girl would feel it anyway.



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