My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 141

I didn’t look up from my screen immediately then I slowly raised an eyebrow, my expression flat. “Did he tell you why I threw him there in the first place?”

Adriano stopped tracing the map of Indiana. He leaned back, “What did the idiot do to earn a death sentence in the shipyard?”

I felt my jaw tighten. I reached up and pushed my glasses back, my fingers still tingling with the memory of Gianna’s skin. I clenched my fist under the table, my knuckles turning white.

“He set his sights on Gianna,” I stated, “He brought our stepsister to a sex hunt. If I hadn’t seen her there... if I hadn’t stepped in... things would have gone very differently that night.”

Luca stopped clicking his Glock. Dante’s eyes snapped up from his legal briefs. And Vincenzo’s posture changed completely, his shoulders squaring.

Thinking back to that night made my blood boil. I could still see her standing there in the middle of that filth, that ridiculous pink ribbon tied around her, marking her as prey for animals like me.

She was supposed to be safe. She was supposed to be under the protection of this house, under the shadow of our

name.

Ciro had treated her like a common girl you could buy for an hour. He had tried to put his hands on what belonged to this family.

“A sex hunt?” Vincenzo asked, “He took a girl from this house and took her to the Void to be hunted by the highest bidder?”

“He claimed it was a misunderstanding,” I said, “He told me he only brought her to the party. He’s lucky I didn’t feed his tongue to the water before I sent him to the docks to rot.”

I looked back at my laptop, but the numbers were just a blur. I wasn’t thinking about Ciro anymore. I was thinking about how I had rescued her from one hunt only to start my own.

No one touched the prey I was tracking.

“How did Ciro even get close enough to take her to a party in the first place?” Luca asked, “Why did he think she was his to take?”

“Because she’s been locked in this house with us. Ciro offered her a ‘night out.’ He offered her a bit of freedom, and she was desperate enough to take the bait without looking for the hook.”

“The docks are too kind for a man who forgets who we are,” Vincenzo said, his voice devoid of any warmth. “But let him stay there for a year or two. So, he remembers why the blood in his veins is a privilege I allowed him to \ keep.”

Adriano let out a short laugh that held no humor. He rubbed a hand over his face, shaking his head. “After all I have done for Ciro... fuck. I practically raised that dog.”

“Is that why you left the other night at the Hunt?” Dante asked, his brow furrowing, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

I lifted a shoulder in a slow, bored shrug. I kept my eyes on the screen, “Didn’t think it was important,” I stated.

“Everything that touches this family is important, Raphael,” Vincenzo reminded me, his voice a low warning.

“She’s fine,” I said, my mind flashing to the way she had just looked on my desk, her lip swollen and her eyes

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wide with a mix of panic and need, “Ciro made a mistake, I’ve already corrected. He won’t be a problem again.”

“See that he isn’t,” Vincenzo murmured.

The library doors groaned open. We all turned as our father stepped into the room.

“Still awake, I see,” he said, his eyes scanning the room, “Planning the next move?”

“Dad,” Vincenzo acknowledged. He didn’t stand, but his posture straightened, “We were just finishing the logistics for the state line. The docks are ours by Monday.”

Our father walked toward the center of the room. The firelight caught the gold ring on his hand. He stopped right behind my chair. I could smell the faint scent of his cigar and expensive brandy.

“I wanted to talk to you all,” he added.

“About what?” Dante asked, leaning back and narrowing his eyes. He knew that tone. We all did.

Our father looked at us, a slow, thin smile touching his lips, “Just know that I’m not here to ask for permission. I’m not here for your opinions. I’ve already made the decision. I’m just letting you know so you can fall in line.”

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Vincenzo’s eyebrows furrowed, his jaw setting hard, “Decided what, Dad?”

Our father looked at each of us, one by one, “I’ve decided to officially adopt Gianna and Jules,” he said, “The legal paperwork is already with my lawyer. It’s a full, binding adoption. Since Jules is still a minor, her mother had already signed for her. All I need now is Gianna’s signature on the final decree to make it permanent.

The world stopped.

Inside my chest, something violent and dark slammed against my ribs. My heart didn’t just beat, if thrashed. A cold rage flooded my veins, turning my blood into lead.

Adopt?

The disgust rose up in my throat, hot and bitter. I thought about the office. I thought about the way her skin felt under my hands, the way I had tasted her blood, the way I had pinned her to my desk and made her arch her back for me. I thought about the marks I had left on her throat, marks that were still fresh.

And now my father wanted to give her our last name?

“Official?” Vincenzo asked, “You’re giving them the name?”

“I’m giving them everything,” Salvatore said, his grip tightening on my chair, “Security, inheritance. The protection of the family. It’s done.”

My stomach turned. The idea of her being family officially made my skin crawl with a kind of revulsion I couldn’t name. It wasn’t because I cared about the bloodline. It was because I didn’t want any walls between us. I didn’t want a label that made what I wanted from her a crime against our own house.

I sat there. I sat perfectly still, my face a frozen mask of boredom, while my mind screamed.

She wasn't my sister. She would never be my sister. I had felt her heart racing against my chest. I had seen the look in her eyes when I touched her, it wasn't the look a sister gives a brother.

"She won't sign..." I blurted out as I pushed my glasses up the bridge of my nose.

I forced my breathing to slow down. I couldn't let them see the panic. I couldn't let them see that I was losing my mind at the thought of her being officially "off-limits."

"She's prideful, Dad," I said, "She hates being here. She hates the rules. She thinks she's going to make it on her own. If you hand her those papers, she'll see them as a cage, not a gift. She'll see it as us finally owning her."

"I'll try to convince her," Vincenzo added, "She's a good kid. She has a good head on her shoulders, even if she's stubborn. She doesn't know it yet, but she's going to need all the help she can get after her mother dies. This name is the only thing that will keep the wolves away."

"She'll sign," Dad said, "One way or another, she'll become a Capone. Hazel won't let her pride ruin this for her. The girl has had a hard life. She deserves the peace of a name that protects her even though she is too stupid to realize it."

"A hard life?" I asked, my voice coming out sharper than I intended, "What 'hard life,' Dad?"

Dad looked at me, and for a second, it felt like he was looking right through my skin, seeing every dark, twisted thought I had about his soon-to-be daughter.

"That's a story for another time, Raphael," he said quietly, "I should get back to Hazel, thought I'd see you all

before bed."

He didn't wait for me to respond. He just turned and walked toward the doors, the sound of his footsteps fading into the hallway.

"Why do you care?" Adriano asked, narrowing his eyes.

I lifted a shoulder in a slow, bored shrug, forcing my muscles to stay loose while my insides were screaming. I couldn't let him see the way my skin felt like it was crawling. I couldn't let him see that the word sister was a poison in my mouth.

"I don't," I stated, "It was just a question. I've been stuck in an office with her for weeks, and Vincenzo specifically told me not to run a background check on her or her family. You can't blame me for being curious when I'm working in the dark. You know how I am with data, I don't like gaps in the story."

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The meeting in the library dragged on for another hour until Claire finally called Vincenzo and told him to end it as it was five in the morning.

One by one, my brothers drifted out. I walked through the dark halls of our estate. I climbed the stairs, my mind stuck on the sick irony of the word adoption.

I reached my wing of the house but as I rounded the corner to my suite, I stopped dead.

A small, shadowed figure was leaning against the wall right next to my door.

Gianna.

She was wearing a thin, silk tank top that looked like water in the moonlight, her shorts sat low on her hips, the faint rise and fall of her breathing visible if you looked long enough, her light brown hair a messy silk curtain around her face. She looked small but her eyes were wide and burning with a frantic, desperate light.

I didn't move. I didn't breathe. I just stood there in the dark, my hand tightening on the strap of my laptop bag.

"I thought you told me to stay away from you," I said but I stepped forward anyway.

Her back pressed flatter against the wall as I got closer, but her feet stayed planted. Her chin lifted just slightly, like she was forcing herself not to shrink.

"I did," she said, her voice quieter than I'd ever heard it, "And you should.'

I stopped a few feet away, close enough to see the faint mark still blooming along her throat. Close enough to remember exactly how it got there.

"Then why are you here?" I asked.

"I'm not here for you."

My gaze dropped, just for a second, to her mouth. Still slightly swollen then back up, "Doesn't look that way," I murmured.

She pushed off the wall, straightening, forcing space back into her posture even though there wasn't any space between us anymore that mattered.

“I’m here because of Aileen. Please, don’t do anything to her… definitely not what you did to Ciro,” she said, “She didn’t do anything wrong.”

My eyes narrowed involuntarily at her words, “Aileen knew exactly what she was doing.”

Gianna’s jaw tightened, “No,” she said quickly. “She didn’t. She was just” She stopped herself, exhaling sharply. “She was being nice.”

“You came all the way here,” I said quietly, “to protect her?”

“Yes,” she paused and then added softly, “I don’t want her to lose her job because of me.

“You should be more concerned about yourself,” I said.

Her lips, full and pink, parted slightly then pressed together again.

“I am,” she said.

“Then go back to your room,” I told her, “Lock the door like you planned.”

Her throat moved as she swallowed, “I will.”

She didn’t move.

Neither did I.

Seconds passed.

Maybe longer.

The house was silent around us, the kind of silence that made every breath sound louder than it should.

“Go,” I said again.

She looked at me.

And for a second, just one, that frantic edge in her eyes shifted into something else.

Something heavier and darker.

“You stay away from her,” she said instead, ignoring that I told her to leave, “She doesn’t deserve to get dragged into whatever this is.”

Her hand lifted slightly like she was going to point at me but stopped halfway, hung there between us and then dropped again like she didn’t trust herself to get any closer.

“Whatever this is…?” I repeated.

Her lips pressed into a thin line, “You know exactly what I mean.”

I did.

That was the problem.

My gaze dropped again briefly to the space between us… to the inches that shouldn’t feel this loud then back to her eyes,

“You should go,” I said again.

But this time, it sounded less like an order and more like a warning… to both of us.

“If you’re still standing here in the next few seconds…” I paused, letting it settle, letting her feel it instead of explaining it, “…I’m not stopping anything that happens after that.”

Janedoewritings

Author

I know I complain too much… but I’m right at the point where I’m thinking of just quitting. I can’t bear the thought of leaving you in the dark without saying anything. Some days, it just all feels too much.

+15 Banys

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Gianna

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The wall was freezing against my bare back, but my skin was screaming.

“If you’re still standing here in the next few seconds…”

Raphael’s voice wasn’t just a sound. It was a vibration that started in the floor and crawled up my legs, settling right in the pit of my stomach.

“…I’m not stopping anything that happens after that.”

My brain was screaming at my legs to run, to find my room and lock the door until the sun came up but I stayed. My heels were glued to the floor. My breath came out in short little puffs that felt too hot for the cold air.

I could feel the space between us shrinking, the molecules of air vibrating with a pressure I couldn't name. My top felt too tight, the silk dragging against my skin with every shallow breath I took, making my chest ache.

I looked up, and the hallway light caught the edge of his glasses. And through the glass, he was looking at my mouth.

It was so silent that i could hear his watch ticking. I could hear the slow hum of his breathing. Compared to him, I was a mess, shaking, frantic, and burning up.

He leaned in, his face hovering just above mine. I didn't move. One second. Two seconds. Three.

He leaned in, and I didn't pull away, instead, my eyes drifted shut as his warmth finally hit my face, a heat so intense it made my skin feel like it was melting.

I waited for it. I wanted it. My head tilted back, my lips parting just a hair, my chest rising and falling so fast the silk of my slip was rasping against my skin. My fingers dug into the cold stone of the wall.

Every nerve I had was screaming, a throbbing weight settling low in my belly. I was ready to let him take the very air out of my lungs again.

But the kiss never came.

I felt the graze of his breath against my ear instead of my lips, a cold shiver racing down my spine.

"Do not sign the papers, Little Mess."

His voice was a dark, frozen whisper that made my heart stutter and stop.

My eyes snapped open and I blinked, my vision blurry and my head spinning. I was still shaking, but he was already pulling back.

"What?" I breathed, "What papers? What are you talking about?"

He just adjusted his glasses, "Just don't."

He stepped around me without another word. I stayed pinned to the wall, my legs feeling like lead, watching as he walked to his door. He opened it, the golden light from his room spilling out into the dark hall for a split second before he stepped inside.

I stood there for a long time, my back still pressed against the cold stone, listening to the silence he had left

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behind.

What is happening to me? I never do this. I really don't, I haven't liked a man in a long time let alone lust after one. Especially the one I had told to stay away from me. I had warned him in that office, that we were strangers, and yet, the second I saw him, I had stood my ground and waited for his mouth to crush mine.

I won't be the reason my mother's marriage will be ruined. I refuse to be.

I finally forced my legs to move. I walked down the lung, dark hallway toward my own room in Salvatore's wing. Every shadow looked like him. Every shift in the air felt like his hand reaching out to grab me again. By the time reached my door, I was shaking so hard I could barely turn the handle.

I stepped inside, slammed the door shut, and turned the lock.

Oh my god, I wanted him... in a very dark and depraved way.

I didn't turn on the lights. I collapsed onto my bed, my body was still buzzing. I stared up at the ceiling, the moonlight cutting a silver path across the duvet.

P

+15 Banys

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My brain wanted to think about what he said... my thoughts were all like-What papers? What did he mean?-but my body didn't care about the papers.

I closed my eyes, and he was right there, burned into the back of my eyelids. Raphael.

I could see those light brown eyes of his, the kind that looked right through my clothes. I thought about the tattoos hidden under his sleeves. I thought about him in those expensive, sharp suits he wore during the day, looking almost like a... decent man.

But then there was the other one. The version of him that only comes out at night... the one who's colder, darker, hungrier, and far more lethal.

That was the man my skin was still screaming for.

God, he was so tall that he made the hallway feel small. I remembered the way his shirt strained against his shoulders, the sheer width of him blocking out the light.

I thought about the few times I'd seen him without the layers of expensive clothing... the way his stomach was a flat, corded map of muscle, and the dark tattoos that crawled up his arms, neck, and honestly, goddamn it, everywhere else. He was covered in secrets I wanted to trace with my tongue.

A soft moan escaped my throat as I reached up, my fingers trembling as they brushed over the silk of my shirt.

I let my hands slide down, my palms grazing over the curve of my breasts. The silk was thin, and the friction made my breath hitch in the quiet room. I closed my eyes tighter, imagining it wasn't my own hands. I imagined it was his large, rough palms.

I touched myself through the fabric, my thumbs circling the nipples until they were hard peaks that ached for a touch that wasn't mine. I could almost feel his breath on my ear again, that low, dark whisper that made my stomach flip. The weight in my hips was getting heavier, a deep, pulsing throb that I couldn't ignore.

I shouldn't want him. He was off limits. He was a part of my new family. His father was married to my mother. It was embarrassing. But as I lay there in the dark, pulling at my own skin and wishing it was him, I knew I was already lost.

I arched my back, my fingers digging into my skin as I gasped into the empty room.

I didn't even turn on the lamp. I sat up, my hands were shaking as I grabbed the hem of my silk top. I yanked it over my head, flinging it somewhere into the dark, before sliding my shorts down. They brushed over my thighs and knees until I kicked them off my feet, tossing them into the shadows to join the rest of my clothes.

I was completely naked. The moonlight spilled across the bed, hitting my skin and making me look pale and ghostly, but I didn't care, at least the dim light hid the bruises marking my body.

I looked down at my breasts. My nipples were dark and standing up so hard they actually ached. I reached up and squeezed them again, rolling the tips between my fingers and pulling on them until a sharp jolt of heat shot straight to my crotch. I closed my eyes and pictured Raphael's teeth. I wanted him to bite me right there.

A soft, pathetic moan broke out of me as my hand slid down my stomach. I buried my fingers between my legs and gasped. I was a mess. I was soaking wet, my release slick and hot, coating my fingers the second I touched my folds. The throb between my thighs was so heavy it felt like a second heartbeat.

I reached into my nightstand and gripped the dildo vibrator thingie Tasha had given me to “relieve some stress.” At the time, I thought I’d never be desperate enough to use it, but here I was.

+15 Banys

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I stared at it in the moonlight, it was big, shaped like a man, and the weight of it in my hand made my stomach flip. Before this house, I had only ever been with my fiancé, my first love and no one else. After him, I had spent five years burying my head in books, just trying to survive and making sure my mom stayed happy. Sex had been the very last thing on my list of priorities. I honestly thought I had turned that part of me off for good

But Raphael had turned it back on with a single look. And suddenly I was starving for sex. I wanted his tall, muscled body crushing mine. I wanted those big, tattooed arms pinned over my head.

I flicked the toy on. The deep, low hum filled the room. I didn’t go slow. I pushed the head of it hard against my clit and let out a choked sob.

“Fuck,” I whispered, my head hitting the mattress.

I started working it fast, grinding my hips against it. Every vibration felt like a shock to my system. I closed my eyes and pictured him. I pictured him stripping off that expensive suit to show the hard, corded muscles of his stomach and the dark ink on his chest. I imagined him watching me do this. I imagined his big hand wrapping around my neck again, forcing me to look at him while I played with myself.

I took the head of it and pushed it inside my hole. I was so wet it slid in. I gasped, my eyes rolling back. I felt so full, so stretched. I started pumping it in and out, the vibration rattling my bones. I wanted him to be the one filling me. I wanted his actual body crushing the air out of my lungs just like he did on the desk.

But then, a cold splash of reality hit me. He was my stepbrother.

If I let this happen, if I gave in to this hunger, I could ruin everything. My mom finally had a life. She had a husband who protected her, a house that wasn’t falling apart, and a future. If I was caught with Raphael, if I became the reason Salvatore threw us out, I would never forgive myself. I would be the one to destroy my mother’s only chance at happiness.

The guilt made me squeeze my eyes shut, but the hunger was stronger. I worked myself harder, my hand moving in a blur, my body arching off the bed. I was rubbing myself raw,

my skin sensitive and screaming for the finish. I wanted to scream his name, to tell him how much I hated him for being the one man I couldn't have.

"God, please," I whimpered, my voice breaking in the dark. "Please... just once. Then I'll never do it again... I promise."

The pressure started to build, a white-hot coil tightening in my gut. I shoved the dildo in deep, feeling it hit the back of me, while the vibration buzzed against my clit until my breath turned into messy, loud gasps.

Then it hit.

A violent, toe-curling climax shattered through me. My back bowed into a bridge, my head snapping back as my insides clamped down hard on the toy. I shook uncontrollably, wave after wave of heat washing over me until my legs went numb and my brain went blank.

I slumped back onto the pillows, gasping for air, the vibrator still humming inside me. I felt wrecked. My body was still tingling, but my heart felt like lead.

The sun was too bright. It poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the breakfast room, glinting off the polished silver and white china like tiny knives. I kept my head down, my hair acting as a curtain to hide my face and the way my hands were trembling as I gripped my coffee cup.

+15 Bgnys

I couldn't look at him. Every time I even caught a glimpse of Raphael's blurred shape in my peripheral vision, sitting directly across from me, as always, my skin felt like it was vibrating.

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My body remembered everything: the hallway, the heat of his breath, and the way I had screamed his name into my pillow just a few hours ago.

I took a slow sip of coffee, the bitter liquid burning my throat. I focused on the sound of Salvatore's newspaper rustling.

"You're quiet this morning, Gianna," Salvatore said.

I didn't look up, "Just tired. I stayed up late... studying."

“Hard work is a trait of this family,” he said, and I felt a chill race down my spine. He set the paper down, “Which brings me to what I wanted to discuss. I’ve spoken with my lawyers. The paperwork is ready, and the name change is a simple filing away.”

I turned my head slowly and looked at him, “What?”

He leaned forward, “I want you to be a Capone, Gianna. Officially. I want you and Jules to have the protection, the inheritance, and the respect that comes with being my daughters.”

My heart stopped. Then it started again, racing with a suffocating panic.

Capone.

“Do not sign the papers, Little mess.”

The papers...

He knew.

The Capone name felt like a collar being snapped around my neck. All I could think about was the way Salvatore controlled my mother. The way he controlled the city. The way Raphael had pinned me to that desk. If I took that name, I wasn’t just a guest anymore, I was property. I would be under their thumb, under their laws, for the rest of my life. The fear of being owned flared up in my chest like a wildfire.

“No,” I blurted out.

The clinking of silverware stopped. Dante paused with his fork halfway to his mouth. Raphael didn’t move, but I could feel his gaze burning a hole through the top of my head.

“No?” Salvatore repeated, his voice dropping an octave.

“I... I can’t,” I said, finally looking up, “I appreciate everything you’ve done for my mother and for us. Truly. But I’m not a Capone. I want to make my own way. I don’t want to be... tied down like that.”

I could see the anger flickering in Salvatore’s eyes, the insult of a girl saying no to the most powerful man in the

state.

“This is a gift, Gianna,” Mum said, “I think you need a father who can actually protect you.”

“I don’t need a new father, Mom,” I snapped, “I already have a father. His name was on my birth certificate, and it’s the only one I’m keeping.”

“Give her time,” Vincenzo interrupted, “Let her think. It’s a big decision. Pushing her will only make her run, and we don’t want her running, do we?”

He shifted his gaze to me. He was giving me an out. I felt a wave of genuine relief wash over me. I looked at

+15 Bany

Vincenzo and gave him a small, trembling smile of gratitude.

He didn’t smile back. He just gave a single, almost invisible nod of his head, his expression remaining flat. He went back to his espresso, the conversation effectively ended by his word.

I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding. I felt a tiny bit of space open up in my lungs, but then I felt it, a dark weight from across the table.

I finally risked a look at Raphael.

He was staring at me from across the table, the morning light glinting off the edge of his black-rimmed glasses. My heart gave a frantic, heavy thud against my ribs as I realized he hadn’t looked away once.

A slow, almost non-existent smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. I had listened to him. I had done exactly what he told me to do in the darkness of that hallway. I felt a sick, dizzying rush of heat crawl up my neck. I was supposed to be free of the Capone name, but the way he was looking at me told a different story.

I hadn’t saved myself. I had just picked a different master.

+15 8gnus

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After the last lecture ended, I felt my phone buzz in my pocket. I pulled it out to see a text from Raphael. It was short and blunt, ordering me to get to the office immediately.

I stared at his name on the screen for a second, my heart doing that annoying little skip. I didn’t reply. I didn’t even lock my phone. I just shoved it back into my bag and turned my

back on the campus. I ignored the order and headed straight for the only place that actually felt like home.

As I walked toward the bus stop, my head was a mess. My mind kept spinning in circles. We still needed so much money, and the clock was ticking. Waitressing tonight was better than nothing, but the tips were never enough to make a real dent in what we owed.

Tasha and I had been trying to land a stripping gig again at one of the fancy clubs downtown for a week now. I didn't care about the clothes or the stage. I just knew it paid three times as much as carrying heavy trays all night Right now, I was thirsty for that kind of cash. The sooner this debt is over, the sooner things can finally go back to normal. I just wanted to breathe again.

I turned the corner into the alleyway where the Rose Garden's entrance was hidden. I was already reaching into my bag for my keys when I stopped.

The heavy steel door was hanging off its hinges.

The metal was twisted, the frame splintered like something huge had just smashed right through it. My stomach dropped into my shoes.

"Tasha?" I called out, my voice coming out as a thin whisper, "Bri?"

I ran inside. I burst into the main room and froze. The beautiful bar I spent every night polishing was cracked in half. Glass was everywhere, thousands of tiny, sparkling shards of liquor bottles littering the floor like ice. The tables were flipped over, their legs snapped off, and the red velvet curtains had been ripped from the walls.

"Mama?" I screamed, my voice cracking.

I scrambled over a broken chair, my breath coming in terrified gasps. I found her behind the wreckage of the booth.

Mama D was curled on the floor, her dress torn at the shoulder. My heart stopped when I saw the dark, wet crimson staining her white hair. A thick trail of blood was leaking from a cut on her forehead, dripping down her

cheek and onto the floor.

"Mama D! Oh god, stay still," I sobbed, dropping to my knees. I didn't care about the glass cutting into my shins. I grabbed a discarded napkin and pressed it against her head, my hands shaking so hard I could barely hold it there.

She groaned, her eyes fluttering open. They were unfocused and glassy. She reached out, her fingers clutching my forearm with a strength that scared me. Her skin was cold.

“Gianna…” she wheezed, a red bubble of spit forming on her lip.

“I’m here. I’m calling an ambulance,” I fumbled for my phone, but she gripped me tighter, pulling me down until my ear was inches from her mouth.

“He took her,” she coughed, the sound wet and horrible, “He took Morgan.”

My blood turned to ice.

“What?” I whispered, though deep down, I already knew.

“Cole,” she choked out, a tear carving a clean path through the blood on her face. “Cole took Morgan. He ruined everything… he just grabbed her and dragged her out. He said the debt had to be paid.”

Janedoewritings

Author

Guys, the problem isn’t the comments. I’ve had my share of mean, hateful comments, and this is nothing new to me. What I’m going through now is something deeper. I’m dealing with a rough phase in my life, and it has affected my mental health so badly that I can barely function, let alone write. My doctor has advised me to keep pushing through this, even when it feels in

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Just a quick note: Gianna is meant to be an unreliable narrator due to her mental health, so her narration may seem all over the place at times. That’s intentional and part of her character.

Gianna

The air outside Cole Mercer’s pub smelled like wet trash and exhaust, but inside, it was worse. It smelled like stale cigarettes and men who hadn’t showered in days.

I led the way, my shoulders pulled back and my jaw locked so tight it ached. Brianna, Emma, and Jasmine were right behind me. I could hear their fast, shallow breathing. They were terrified, and honestly, so was I, but I couldn’t show it.

Two massive men in greasy leather jackets stood by the door. Their knuckles were scarred, and their eyes were flat and cold as they looked us up and down. One of them reached out, his hand grazing my hip as I passed, and I swiped his arm away with a snarl.

“Don’t touch me,” I hissed.

He just laughed, a low, wet sound, and kicked the inner door open.

The pub was lit by the yellow light from the overhead lamps barely cutting through the thick haze of smoke. It was loud, shouting, glass clinking, and a heavy bass beat that made the floorboards shake.

Then I saw her.

Morgan was standing near a long, scarred wooden table in the center of the room. She was wearing a tiny, glittery dress that barely covered her hips, and her legs were shaking. Her black hair was a mess, and her eyes were so swollen and red from crying that she could barely keep them open. She was holding a tray of drinks, her fingers trembling so hard the glasses were rattling.

“Morgan!” Brianna whispered, her voice breaking.

Morgan’s head snapped up. When she saw us, a fresh sob escaped her throat, and a glass slid off her tray, shattering on the floor.

“Clean it up, girl!” a voice boomed, “We have guests!”

I looked toward the head of the table. Cole Mercer sat there like a king on a throne made of garbage. He looked at Morgan with a filthy, hungry grin that made my skin crawl.

I stepped forward, “Let her go, Cole.”

Cole leaned back, taking a long drag from a cigarette. He blew the smoke directly into my direction.

“Gianna,” he drawled, “I heard you were coming. You brought the whole set, huh? A regular bouquet of flowers.”

“We’re here to negotiate,” I said, my voice steady. “Mama D is hurt. You ruined the Rose Garden. You’ve done enough damage. Take the equipment from the bar. Take the liquor. Take every single thing we own, but give us Morgan.”

Cole laughed, and the men around the table joined in. It was a chorus of barks and sneers.

“You think some broken chairs and a few bottles of cheap whiskey pay off Denise’s debt?” He spat on the floor. ” That woman owes me more than that shitty Rose Garden is worth. I’m a businessman, Gianna. I need a return on

my investment.”

“We’ll get the money,” I promised, my hands curling into fists. “We already gave you thirty thousand dollars last week. Give us a few more weeks. We’ll work double shifts, we’ll do anything. Just let her come home with us.”

Cole stood up slowly. He walked around the table. He stopped in front of Morgan and ran a thick, dirty finger down her arm. She flinched, her whole body jerking away, and he just grinned wider.

“She’s a pretty little thing,” Cole whispered, loud enough for the whole room to hear. “I did some checking. She’s untouched. You know what that’s worth on the street? I could sell her tonight to the highest bidder and make back half the debt in an hour.”

“You bastard,” Emma choked out behind me.

Cole ignored her. He leaned in close to Morgan, sniffing her hair, “Or maybe,” he said, his voice dropping to a disgusting murmur, “maybe I’ll just keep her for myself for a few nights. Break her in. Let her pay off the debt with her body.”

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“Don’t you touch her!” I stepped in front of him, “Name your price, Cole. A real price.”

Cole turned his eyes on me. They were dark, greedy, and full of a sick kind of power. He looked at me, then at Brianna, Emma, and Jasmine.

“You want her back? Fine,” he said, his voice turning cold. “But Denise doesn’t have the cash. So I’m taking payment in other ways. Y’all come up with thirty million by the end of this year. And if the money isn’t in my hand by then, I’m not just keeping the kid. I’m coming for all of you.”

He stepped closer, his sour breath hitting my face.

“I don’t care about your last name, Gianna. If you wanted to involve the Capones in our mess, you would have already. But you didn’t. You’re hiding this from them, aren’t you?” He leaned in, “Because then your mother will know that you whore yourself to men for measly hundreds of dollars. The Capones would throw you out themselves.”

My heart hammered against my ribs, but I kept my face still.

“So, here is what I am going to do. I’m going to drag you and your little friends to my pubs. I’ll put you on the stages and whore you out until every cent is paid back with interest. You’ll be working for me, Gianna. Every night. Every hour. By the time I’m done with you, you won’t even remember your own names.”

He grabbed my chin, his fingers digging into my skin. I wanted to spit in his eye, but I saw the men around the room moving closer, their hands on their belts.

“Now get out,” Cole sneered, shoving my face away. “Leave the girl. She stays here to remind you what happens when you don’t pay your bills.”

“No!” Morgan wailed, reaching out for me.

One of the men grabbed her by the waist and hauled her back. I tried to move toward her, but a heavy hand slammed into my chest, pushing me back violently.

“You have till Friday, Gianna!” Cole shouted over the noise. “I want the first hundred thousand by Friday, or I start with the little one.”

I looked at Morgan, at her broken, terrified face, and for a second, I saw my little sister, Jules, in her place. Then I looked at Cole’s filthy, mocking grin.

My chest ached from where his man had slammed into me, but the pain was nothing compared to the sound of that door locking.

“If I get you a hundred thousand dollars by Friday,” I called out, “you’ll let her come back with us?”

I noticed Cole’s eyes lit up with twisted excitement. He let out a slow, raspy whistle. He knew Mama D was broke, and he knew a waitress and a college student couldn’t pull that kind of cash out of thin air in forty-eight hours. He looked at me like I was a joke he hadn’t finished telling yet..

“A hundred thousand in cold, hard cash,” Cole said, his voice dripping with a sick kind of amusement, “By Friday night at midnight. You bring me that, and I’ll let the little bird fly right back to your nest. You have my word as a businessman.”

“Your word is dirt, Cole,” I snapped, stepping closer even as Jasmine tried to pull me back by my sleeve.

“It’s the only word you’ve got, Gianna,” he countered, his eyes crinkling. “Tick-tock. Every hour you waste out

here is an hour Morgan spends in there with my boys. And they aren’t exactly known for their manners.”

And then the next moment, his men grabbed us by the arms and dragged us toward the exit. They threw us out onto the hard, cold street like trash. As the door slammed shut, the sound of Morgan’s crying was the last thing, I heard, ringing in my ears like a death bell.

an

The calm, robotic voice of the text-to-speech filled my ear, “Message from Professor Adler.”

I was alone in the bathroom at Rose Garden and I felt the floor tilt beneath my bare feet.

Professor Adler:

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Chapter 15)

+15 Banes

Ms. Toricelli, I need to speak with you urgently regarding your Orion Vector internship. HR has reported that you have not shown up for your scheduled hours this week. This is concerning. Please respond immediately.

I swallowed, the back of my throat feeling like it was coated in sand. I opened the full thread. There was another message underneath it, a wall of text that looked like a swarm of angry hornets. My brain couldn’t catch the letters; they vibrated and flipped, mocking me. I hit the play button, desperate for the voice to make sense of the

mess.

Professor Adler:

As you know, this internship is not optional. It is tied to your final semester credit hours. You are required to complete a minimum of 240 verified internship hours to graduate.

The robotic voice droned on, indifferent to the way my heart was trying to kick its way out of my ribs.

“Additionally, your disability support scholarship requires proof of continued placement and attendance. If Orion Vector reports non-compliance or termination, it could affect both your credit completion and scholarship status.”

Scholarship.

Without that money, I wasn’t just losing credits. I was losing the half-tuition coverage my disability status provided, the only reason I wasn’t drowning in a debt of my own.

“If there is a personal or professional conflict, you must report it through proper channels immediately. Failure to complete internship hours may delay your graduation or require semester repetition.”

Semester repetition. Starting over. Being the “slow girl” for another year.

Professor Adler:

Please respond within the hour. If I do not hear from you, I will be forced to contact Orion Vector HR directly for clarification.

This was it. My future. My career. All those nights staying up until 3:00 AM debugging broken models that refused to train. The hours spent staring at lines of Python until the characters blurred into a gray soup. The late nights running TensorFlow scripts while my earpiece whispered variable errors into my ear because my brain kept flipping characters when I read too fast.

All of it, the sweat, the tears, the way I had clawed my way through a world that wasn’t built for a brain like mine. All of it was on the line because I’d quit like a coward after kissing my boss. After kissing my stepbrother.

I let out a shaky, jagged breath. What was I supposed to say? “Sorry, Professor, I blew my career because I let the CEO pin me to his desk and eat my face.”

I scrolled down to see another text.

Orion Vector HR Portal

Subject: Internship Attendance Alert

Dear Gianna Toricelli, Our records indicate absence... Continued absence without notice may result in internship termination and academic reporting...

I stood alone in bathroom, listening to those emails over and over until the robotic voice sounded like a judge

C

sentencing me to death.

I was done. I was a defect.

I felt like nothing. I was supposed to save my family. I studied until my eyes bled so Mom and Jules would be safe. But Salvatore took that away. He used his blood money to buy them, making my years of hard work look like a joke. He made me useless.

Now, Morgan was gone too. I wasn't smart enough. I wasn't fast enough. I was a failure as a student, a sister, and a friend.

I wasn't enough for the degree. I wasn't enough to protect anyone. I was just a mess. I was a mistake in the story that everyone was tired of trying to fix.

I pulled up a new message and sent a voice note to my mother, "I'm staying with a friend for the week. Don't look for me. I'm fine."

I hit send, and then I looked at the phone. It was a tracker. I didn't think. I dropped the phone into the toilet and flushed. I watched it swirl away, taking my career, my scholarship, and my identity with it.

I turned and slammed the metal bolt of the door into place.

Now, it was just me and the water. And I deserved every bit of what was coming next.

Janedoewritings Author

Swipe up for the next update

P

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Chapter 152

Gianna

I turned and slammed the metal bolt of the door into place.

Now,

it was just me and the water. And I deserved every bit of what was coming next.

I needed to drown out the noise. The sound of Morgan's sobbing, the memory of Cole's smile, and the strange feelings I felt for my stepbrother. It was all too much.

I grabbed a clean towel from the cabinet. I turned the cold water on. It didn't just flow, it roared, splashing against the porcelain sink and spraying my shirt.

I didn't use the sink. I went to the tub and lowered myself in it, my back against the freezing porcelain. I folded the towel over my face, covering my eyes, my nose, and my mouth. The world went black.

I grabbed the detachable showerhead and turned it to the highest pressure.

I didn’t hesitate for another second, I aimed the spray directly over my nose and mouth.

The water hit the fabric, and for a split second, it was just cold. Then, the towel saturated. It became a heavy, sodden weight that suctioned against my skin. I tried to take a breath, but I didn’t get air. I got a lungful of freezing, choking water.

My body went into a violent panic like it always did.

I bucked off the floor, my heels slamming into the porcelain. My lungs burned like they were filled with acid. I was drowning on dry land. I could feel the water forcing its way into my sinuses, a stinging pain that felt like needles being driven into my brain. I tried to scream, but the sound was swallowed by the wet fabric and the roar of the

water.

I can’t breathe. I’m dying. I’m actually dying.

This is what it feels like to break.

I deserve this.

Because I’m not strong enough.

I forced myself to keep the showerhead there. I gripped it so hard my knuckles popped. I wanted to feel the terror. I wanted to be pushed so far into the dark that the rest of the world disappeared. My vision started to turn into a swarm of black bees.

Finally, my hand went limp. The showerhead clattered into the tub, and I ripped the heavy, dripping fabric from my face.

I collapsed forward, retching and coughing up clear fluid onto my knees. I sucked in air, my chest heaved, my skin turning a ghostly, mottled blue in the shivering cold.

The panic was still there, as I stood back up with trembling legs, gripped the sink to keep myself up and then I looked at my reflection in the mirror.

Snap out of it.

I raised my hand and slapped myself. Hard.

Steptor 12

+15 Batues

My head snapped to the side, and the sting on my cheek was a sharp, grounding heat.

“Get it together,” I hissed, then I raised my hand and slapped the other cheek.

I did it again and again until my face was burning and my ears were ringing. I needed the pain to pull me back. I needed to be awake.

I needed my daddy.

He always said I was soft. He said the reason I couldn’t see the words right was because I was lazy, because I wasn’t disciplined enough. He’d know exactly how to fix this. He’d know how to make me stay under the water until I learned to be still.

When my breath finally slowed, I slumped back against the wall. My hands were still shaking, but the violence had done its job. The world was quiet now. I could focus on things clearly. I reached up and began to stroke my own hair, my fingers light and trembling, imitating the way he used to touch my head after a long night of lessons.

“Shhh,” I whispered, “It’s okay, Gianna. You’re okay.”

I rocked myself back and forth on the wet floor, cradling my own body. I closed my eyes and summoned his voice from the dark corners of my memory, from the years before Mom stole me away from him and let me get soft.

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 153

+15 Bgnus

I would have been perfect until my Mom tried to tell me that there was nothing wrong with me, that I was “normal ” and “perfect just the way I am...”

“You could be so much more,” I murmured to myself, smoothing the wet strands of hair away from my forehead. I could almost feel his heavy hand on my shoulder, “But you could be so much better. You’re just not trying hard enough. Just a little further, Gianna. Just a little more pressure.”

I kissed my own shoulder, the skin cold and damp, exactly where he used to grip me to keep me from turning away from the page.

“Dry your eyes,” I told myself, “Don’t be a disappointment. “Daddy loves you. And Daddy doesn’t like a mess.

My beautiful little mess-A deep voice choked in the back of my mind but I snapped out of it.

I stood up, and wiped the water and the spit from my chin, staring at the red handprints on my cheeks in the mirror. The marks were symmetrical. Perfect. He would have liked that.

“Your mother is probably losing her mind, Gianna. It’s not fair to her. Just go home!” Mama D snapped.

I didn’t even look at her. The letters on the back of a nearby beer crate were vibrating, sliding over one another like insects, and I had to focus on making them sit still. I furrowed my eyebrows, forcing the world into a straight line. “No. I’m going. Bri, where did you say this place was?”

Brianna shrugged, her face pale as she yanked up the lace of her bodysuit. “I don’t know. These people are lowkey as hell about their business. They don’t give an address. They just send their own blacked-out cars with drivers.”

“How much?” I asked. I stared into the small compact mirror, shoving a bright blue contact lens onto my eye. It stung, a sharp, cold prick that felt better than the numbness.

“They said they’d take every girl we have,” Brianna whispered, her hands shaking. “They told us to name a price. Whatever we want. But... there’s a catch. There’s extra money if we agree to do more than just the stage work. You

know. Acts.”

“What kind of acts?”

Jasmine stepped into my space, her shadow towering over me, “The kind that aren’t any of your business, G. Emma and I are handling the handsy ones. You aren’t getting fucked for a paycheck, Gianna. Period.”

My head snapped toward her, my neck popping with the sudden movement. “Neither should you! Why are you acting like your skin is worth less than mine?”

“Gianna, what is actually wrong with you right now?” Emma cut in, looking at me like I was a car crash she couldn’t look away from. “We’re all losing it over Morgan, but we aren’t letting you throw yourself away for this. Tasha, Jas, Bri, me... we’ve done the extra credit for clients before. We know how to turn our brains off. But you and Morgan? That was the one rule. It stays that way.”

I felt a hysterical laugh bubbling up in my chest. I looked down at my hands, at the faint red marks I left there hours ago, and felt a wave of pure, unfiltered self-loathing.

My body wasn’t a temple, it was a piece of meat that had been failing me for twenty years.

“I could do it,” I said, “If the bag is big enough, why not? It’s not like I’ve had any action in years anyway. Trust me, I’m starving for it. My body is just... It doesn’t even feel like it’s mine most of the time.”

+15 Banys

I wondered what Daddy would think of me now. Would he be proud of how much pain I could take without crying? Would he finally say I was a fast learner?

He isn’t here, Gianna.

My mother had ripped me away from him, dragging me into this “normal” life that felt like a slow death. And he let her. He let her take his “Baby Gia” and he never came looking. He abandoned his masterpiece because it was too hard to fix.

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My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 154

“I’m getting in that car,” I whispered, pulling the silver wig over my hair, the synthetic strands feeling like silk. I looked in the mirror and didn’t recognize the girl with the blue eye and silver hair, “And I don’t care what part of me they want to buy, I’m bringing Morgan home in the next twenty four hours.”

The roar of the engines outside was low. I heard the tires crunching over the broken glass and gravel.

“They’re here,” Brianna whispered.

I looked at the silver wig in the mirror one last time. My blue eye stared back, cold and fake. I felt like a doll, something made of plastic and paint instead of skin and bone. I followed the girls toward the back door of the Rose Garden.

As I stepped onto the pavement, the night air hit me. It was freezing, but I didn’t shiver. I just stopped. My feet felt like they were sinking into the concrete, turning into lead. I went completely still.

The cars were long, black, and shiny. There were three of them, their engines idling with a deep vibration that shook my teeth. The windows were so dark I couldn’t see if there were people inside or just shadows.

“Gianna? Move,” Jasmine nudged me.

I blinked. For a second, the streetlights above us started to swirl. The yellow glow stretched out like long fingers, trying to grab me.

I climbed into the backseat of the middle car. Brianna and Emma slid in next to me, their legs brushing against mine. As soon as the door slammed shut, the world went silent.

The windows were totally blacked out. I pressed my face against the glass, trying to see the street, the trees, anything. But there was nothing. It was just a void. We were moving, I could feel the pull of the car, but I had no idea where we were going.

I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. It let the thoughts back in. I thought about Professor Adler's voice, that robotic sound telling me I was failing.

240 hours. Scholarship revoked. Semester repetition.

I could see the letters of the email again, but they weren't on a screen anymore. They were burned into the back of my eyelids. They were moving, jumping, laughing at me.

I had thrown it all away. Five years of staying up until the sun came up, fighting my own brain just to read a single page. I did all that work just to quit because of a man.

Because of Raphael.

My skin burned when I thought of him. I could still feel the way his fingers felt on my neck. I had ruined my career because I wanted my stepbrother to break me.

This is it. The car hit a bump, and my head jolted. This is my life now.

I looked at Brianna, Jasmine, Tasha and Emma in the dim light of the car. They were beautiful, but they were tired. Their eyes were hollow. I realized I was one of them now. I wasn't a student anymore. I wasn't a girl with a future. I was just a girl in a silver wig, sitting in a black car, waiting for a stranger to tell me what to do with my body.

I would spend the rest of my life like this. Moving from one dark club to the next. Smelling like cheap perfume and expensive smoke. I would never have an office. I would never have a degree. I would just have the stage and

+15 Banys

the noise and the hands that didn't love me.

1 felt a hysterical giggle tickle my throat. It was funny, really. Daddy would be so proud. He always said I wouldn't make it. He always said I was too slow to be anything real.

"Where do you think we're going?" Brianna asked, her voice small.

“Does it matter?” I whispered.

I stared at the back of the driver’s head. He didn’t move. He didn’t look back. I reached down and touched the hem of my tiny skirt. The fabric felt cheap. I imagined the black cars driving forever, deeper and deeper into the dark, until the Rose Garden and the university and my mother all disappeared.

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 155

The car began to slow down. We were stopping. My heart gave one loud, heavy thud. I reached up and adjusted my wig, making sure every strand was perfect.

The door opened, and the cold air rushed in, smelling of pine trees. I stepped out of the car and looked up.

We weren’t at a club. We were at a gate. A big, iron gate that looked like it belonged to a palace.

Wait...

I know this place.

I’ve been here before.

A cold, sick feeling washed over me, worse than the water in the tub. I looked at the front door. The heavy wood was the same. The lion-head knockers were the same.

I wasn’t at a random party. I wasn’t at some secret club downtown.

I was at the property that belonged to the Capones.

“Gianna? You okay?” Tasha asked, her voice sounding far away, like she was underwater.

I looked down at my tiny, glittery outfit and my silver hair and then back towards the mansion in the woods.

The front door opened. A man in a suit stood there, “This way.”

I reached into my small bag and pulled out the mask. It was a delicate thing made of hard, black lace and silk, designed to cover everything from my forehead to my cheekbones. It fit tight against my skin, hiding my identity but leaving my mouth, my chin, and my fake blue eyes exposed. I tied the silk ribbons behind my head, the silver hair of my wig falling over my shoulders.

The massive front doors opened, and a man stepped out into the night air.

He was tall and lean, and he was adjusting his cufflinks. My breath hitched.

Silvio.

My stepbrother. The one who usually looked at me with a bored sort of kindness at the breakfast table. I went completely still, my fingers curling into my palms. I waited for the shout. I waited for him to point his finger and tell everyone that the daughter of the house was standing on the porch in a tiny skirt and a silver wig.

Silvio stopped. His gaze drifted over the line of girls, moving past Brianna and Emma without a second thought. Then, his eyes landed on me.

We made eye contact. My heart stopped. I stared at him, my lips parted, waiting for the sky to fall. I could see the reflection of the porch lights in his dark eyes.

He looked at my blue eyes. He looked at my mouth. He looked at the way I was shaking. Then, he let out a short, tired sigh. He didn't even blink.

"You've got beautiful eyes," he said, his voice flat and dismissive. He didn't even look twice. He just stepped past us, heading toward a silver car parked in the shadows.

I stood there, the cold wind whipping the silver hair into my face.

He didn't know.

+15 Banys

He had looked right into my eyes, the eyes that sat across from him every morning, and he saw a stranger. He saw a girl for rent.

If Silvio didn't recognize me, no one would.

"Move it," the guard ordered, nudging my shoulder.

I started walking again. My heels clicked on the marble floor as we entered the foyer. I followed the girls down the long hallway toward the sound of music and low, male voices.

We reached a set of double doors. They were huge and black, with gold handles.

"The entertainment is here," the guard announced.

I stepped into the room, my blue eye scanning the crowd. I was looking for him. I was looking for the man with the black-rimmed glasses.

I wanted to see if he would know.

I wanted to see if the predator could recognize his prey when she was wearing a different skin.

Janedoewritings

Author

I hope you all are enjoying these updates

I really do love all of you and this little space we've created together. It honestly feels like such a beautiful connection that I get to share with you all. The love I feel when reading your

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 156

Raphael

38-

The woods smelled like pine needles and damp earth. It was the smell that usually made men feel alive, but I felt nothing.

I never felt much of anything lately.

There was no excitement left. There was nothing new to buy and no one left to fight. I had everything I wanted, so I wanted nothing at all.

There was no thrill in the hunt anymore. There was nothing left for me to chase, except for one thing. One girl. She was the only thing that wouldn't let me catch her.

She was a mess, and for some reason, she was the only thing that made me feel like the blood in my veins wasn't made of ice.

I leaned against a thick oak tree and took a slow pull from my beer. The glass was cold against my palm. A few feet away, a twig snapped. I didn't even turn my head. I just listened to the sound of panicked breathing coming from behind a wall of bushes.

All around me in the dark, I could hear the sounds of the Hunt. The distant crack of a rifle. The high-pitched laugh of Julian as he chased someone through the creek. The wet thud of a blade hitting something soft. My friends, the men who owned the banks, the men who bought the politicians were having the time of their lives. They were red- faced and sweating, screaming like kids on a playground.

I took another sip of my beer. I was bored.

“I can hear your heart, you know,” I said flatly, “It’s beating so fast. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. It sounds like a drum. Do you think that’s going to help you?”

The heavy breathing in the bushes stopped.

I pushed off the tree and let the heavy machete in my right hand drag along the ground. The metal blade scraped against rocks and roots, making a slow, screeching sound.

I knew what that sound did to a man’s brain. It was like a countdown.

I walked toward the bushes. I didn’t run. Why would I run? The man hiding there was a piece of trash. We had pulled him out of a dark basement in the city where he kept things that didn’t belong to him. He was a monster

who hurt children.

In my world, monsters got hunted by bigger monsters.

“Come out, little rat,” I called out. I tipped my beer bottle toward the moon. “The woods are big, but you’re small. You’re so very small.”

A man scrambled out from the leaves, his face covered in dirt and tears. He was shaking so hard he could barely stand. He looked at the machete, then at the beer in my hand, then at my face. He saw that I wasn’t even angry. That was the part that made him scream.

“Please!” he blubbered, falling to his knees. “I have money! I can pay you!”

I laughed. It was a short, dry sound. “You have nothing I could ever want... except for your life, maybe.”

He tried to turn but his legs had been injured, he fell to the ground hard. And still he tried to crawl away. He was slow. I stepped forward and brought my boot down on the small of his back, pinning him to the dirt. He grunted, his face smashing into the mud.

I finished my beer and tossed the empty bottle into the dark. It shattered against a rock.

“You like to hurt things that can’t fight back, don’t you?” I asked. I flipped the machete in my hand, feeling the balance of the weight, “You like them little and weak. Now it’s your turn to be the little one. Now you’re the one who can’t move.”

I didn’t feel a rush of blood. I didn’t feel a thrill. I just felt a job that needed to be done. I raised the machete high. The moonlight caught the edge of the blade, making it glow like a silver tooth.

He started to wail, a long, thin sound that cut through the night.

“Shhh,” I whispered, mocking the way a mother might talk to a child.

I swung the blade.

The sound was wet. There was a sudden spray of warmth against my hand. I stood back up and wiped the blade on a clump of moss. The man on the ground stopped making noise. The woods went back to being quiet, save for the distant shouts of my friends further down the hill.

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My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 157

I reached into my pocket and pulled out a clean white cloth, wiping a spot of red off my watch face. It was an expensive watch. It told me exactly how much time I was wasting out here.

“Raphael!” Julian shouted from the trees, his face lit up with a sick, bright joy. “Did you get him? Was it good?”

I looked at the body at my feet. It was just a pile of meat and rags now. It meant nothing.

“It was fine,” I said, my voice flat, “What’s your count?”

“Ten, so far!” he yelled back.

I turned my head just as a shadow burst out from behind a thick pine. This one wasn’t a sniveling coward. He was big, a disgraced soldier we’d pulled from a cage. He had a piece of a broken beer bottle in his hand, and his eyes weren’t wet with tears. They were bright with hate.

“There you are,” I murmured, a tiny spark of heat finally touching my chest.

He lunged. The broken glass sliced through the air, aimed right for my throat. I moved my head an inch to the left, feeling the sharp edge whistle past my ear.

I didn’t reach for my gun. I didn’t even lift the machete yet. I wanted to see if he could do it again.

He swung a heavy fist, catching me square in the jaw. My head snapped back, and the taste of copper filled my mouth. I stumbled back two steps, my boots sliding in the slick mud.

“That’s better,” I said, spitting a glob of blood onto the leaves. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand and felt a slow, dark grin pull at my lips.

I wasn’t bored anymore, now I was mildly amused.

The man let out a roar and charged again, trying to tackle me to the ground. He was strong. I dropped low, letting his weight carry him over my shoulder. As he moved past, I drove my elbow into the back of his neck.

The sound of his breath leaving his lungs was a sharp huff. He hit the dirt hard, but he didn’t stay down. He rolled, kicking out and catching my shin.

The pain was a beautiful bite.

I flipped the machete in my hand so the flat side of the blade was facing out. I didn’t want to end this too fast.

He scrambled up, holding the glass shard like a dagger. He was panting, his chest heaving under a torn shirt. ” Come on then, you rich prick!” he spat, “Kill me or let me go!”

“I don’t think I’ll do either yet,” I said.

I stepped into his space, he slashed at me again, but I was faster. I grabbed his wrist, the bone feeling weak in my grip. I squeezed until I heard the faint pop of his joint. The glass fell from his hand, tinkling against a rock.

Before he could pull away, I slammed the heavy handle of the machete into his forehead.

The sound was like a hammer hitting a melon. He crumpled to his knees, blood starting to leak from a gash above his eye. He looked up at me, his vision blurring, but he still tried to swing a weak punch at my stomach.

I caught his fist in my palm. I looked down at him, watching the light in his eyes start to flicker and fade.

“You almost had it,” I whispered, “You almost made me feel something.”

+15 Bahus

I let go of his hand and stepped back. He slumped forward, his face in the dirt, gasping for air.

I raised the machete and swung the blade down. It was a single, clean arc of silver. The metal bit through bone and skin, and then his head was gone, rolling away into the dark weeds.

I didn’t move for a moment. I just watched it stop near a tree root. I felt a small, strange spark of playfulness, the kind of feeling a cat gets with a mouse.

I walked over and nudged the head with the toe of my tactical boot. It was heavy, but it moved easily over the slick

mud.

I started to hum a soft tune. It was an old song my mother used to sing, something sweet and simple that didn’ belong in these woods.

I kicked the head forward. It tumbled through the dirt, leaving a dark trail behind it. I followed it, light on my feet, and trapped it under my boot like a soccer player. I tapped it from my left foot to my right, keeping the rhythm of my humming.

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Left. Right. Left.

I kicked the head one last time, sending it flying into the thick bushes. I watched it disappear into the shadows.

“Goal,” I whispered to the trees.

The woods turned eerily quiet as I walked back towards the mansion. The screaming had stopped, and the only sound was the heavy breathing of men who had just finished a workout.

Julian and the others stepped into the moonlight, their faces flushed and their expensive hunting/gear covered in mud. Julian looked at his watch and groaned, a long, annoyed sound.

“Two hours?” Julian spat, kicking a pile of leaves. “Is that it? We went through one hundred and fifty of those rats in two goddamn hours, Raphael.”

“We’re getting too fast,” Marcus added, leaning on his rifle. His eyes searching the dark trees for something else to kill, “One hundred and fifty is a joke. It’s like shooting fish in a bucket. Next time, I want at least three hundred I didn’t even break a sweat.”

I let out a short, dry laugh. I threw the bloody cloth onto the ground and reached for a fresh beer one of the servants held out, “Three hundred? You’ll be out here all night, Marcus. You don’t have the lungs for it.”

“Try me,” he grinned, his teeth white in the dark. “I’ve got the money to burn, and I’m tired of the hunt ending before midnight.”

“Fine,” I said. I tilted my head back to finish the drink. “Three hundred next time. I’ll make sure they are the fast kind. I’ll pick the ones who know how to run,” I looked at the dark trees around us, “But it will take time. It takes months to find that much trash. You have to look in the deepest, filthiest holes of the earth to find three hundred people that the world won’t miss.”

A soldier nodded at me, and waited for me to finish my drink before I walked over to him, raining an eyebrow.

“Boss,” he said, “We finished the pickup from the club you mentioned hours ago. The Rose Garden.”

I felt a small spark in my chest. A different kind of hunger, “Did you get them? All of them?”

“Yes, sir,” the soldier replied, “We picked up the whole set. Every girl that works for them. They sent one more girl than they mentioned in their files. A gift perhaps.”

I nodded and walked toward the back of the mansion. The house looked like a mountain of glass and stone, glowing with a deep, red light from the inside.

The music hit me before I even reached the doors. I pushed open the heavy glass doors and stepped into the heat.

The party was in full swing.

In the center of the room, three men we had pulled from a maximum-security cell were crawling on the marble floor. They were wearing dog collars, racing each other toward a bowl of raw steak. People were betting thousands of dollars on which mutt would eat the fastest.

“Ten grand on the one with the scars!” Julian yelled following into the mansion right behind me.

Near the stairs, a glass tank was filled with ice water and hundreds of stinging jellyfish. Two criminals were inside, their skin turning red and puffy. They were trying to see who could stay under the longest to win a chance to go home. A group guys stood around the tank, throwing high-denomination chips onto a pile.

I walked past a circle of men who were throwing gold darts at a target painted onto a man’s bare back. Each time a dart hit, the group let out a loud woo! and high-fived each other.

I walked straight to the private bar in the corner. The bartender didn’t say a word. He just handed me a wet, hot

towel.

I looked at my reflection in the polished gold of the back bar. My face was a mess. A streak of blood was drying across my cheek, and my jaw was already starting to bruise. I wiped the blood away, then threw the dirty towel onto the counter.

“Bourbon,” I said. “Neat.”

The glass was pushed toward me. I took a long sip, the burn of the alcohol cutting through the taste of copper in my mouth.

“The girls from the Garden are on the main stage, sir,” the bartender whispered.

I turned around, leaning my elbows against the bar. My eyes scanned the room. In the middle of the hall, several silver poles had been set up. Girls were climbing them, their bodies twisting in the red light.

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Chapter 159

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+15 Behus

They were wearing masks, lace, silk, leather and tiny outfits that left nothing to the imagination.

I didn’t look at their faces.

I looked at the way they moved.

Most of them were just trying too hard. They arched their backs and pouted, throwing themselves around the poles with a desperate hunger for attention. I watched a girl in a red mask, but her spin was heavy and lacked life/ I watched another in black, but her movements were stiff, like she was counting the beats in her head.

Then, the smoke from the machines cleared for a split second, and I saw her.

She was on the far pole, tucked away in the shadows. She had on a silver wig that glowed like cold moonlight and a lace mask that hid her skin. But the way she moved... fuck.

It wasn't a stripper's dance. It was something else. She was fluid, like water. There was no friction. She didn't just climb the pole, she floated up it. When she spun, it was so smooth it made my head dizzy. She looked weightless, like the gravity in the room didn't apply to her.

Every move was perfect. Every stretch of her leg, every arch of her back was long. It was mesmerizing. It was the kind of grace that made you realize just how ugly the rest of the world was.

I felt a sudden heat flare up in my gut. My throat went dry. I took a hard swallow of my bourbon, but the burn of the alcohol was nothing compared to the fire she was starting under my skin. Most girls danced to be seen.

She danced like she was the only person in the universe, and that was the hottest thing about her. It was the kind of movement that makes a man want to ruin his life just to touch it once.

And I knew it was her, it was definitely her.

I had been looking for this girl. I had searched every corner of this shit city, and here she was, dancing in my own

house.

I took a long, slow drink of my bourbon, my eyes locked on the curve of her waist. I couldn't fuck my step-sister. But this one? This silver-haired creature was right here.

She would be the perfect fix for the itch Gianna put under my skin.

"Found you, you little bitch," I whispered.

I pushed away from the bar. I walked with my eyes locked on the silver hair and the way those long, smooth legs moved in the air.

I headed for the private booth in the corner. It was a dark spot with a curved velvet seat and a private pole that went straight into the ceiling. I sat down and sunk into the cushions. I spread my legs wide, my knees pointed out. I rested one of my arm along the top of the seat.

One of my guards stepped out of the dark. He stood next to the table, waiting for a word.

"Mattia," I said. I didn't look at him. I kept my eyes on the girl. She was still spinning, still looking like a dream I didn't want to wake up from. "See the silver one? On the far end?"

"I see her, boss."

“Bring her here,” I ordered, “Tell her I want a private show. And tell her she better move just as smooth as she’s doing now, or I’ll be very fucking disappointed.”

+15 Banys

Mattia nodded once and walked off into the smoke.

I sat back and watched. I saw him reach the stage. I saw him say something to the man guarding the stairs. Then I saw him walk up to her. He leaned in close. I saw her body go still for a split second. She didn’t look at me, not yet, but I knew she felt my eyes on her.

I waited. I tapped my fingers against the velvet. I had been hunting this girl for months... and now, finally, the little menace was walking straight into my fucking hands.

Janedoewritings

Author

I know I’m making you all wait for the reveal, but trust me, the wait will be worth it. We’re about to step right into the dirty little secret territory, and things are going to get intense from here.

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Chapter 160

Gianna

I let my body go limp, then tight, then limp again. I closed my eyes and let the bass of the music fill the hollow spaces in my chest where my heart used to be.

Because at this moment, I felt nothing.

Up. Twist. Slide.

My mind kept flickering, like a broken lightbulb. One second I was here, the next I was back in the bathtub, the water stinging my nose. I pushed the memory down. I had to focus.

I have to save her. I have to bring Morgan back before Cole ruins what is left of her.

I wondered where she was right now. Was she in a room like this? Was she looking at the ceiling, trying to count the cracks to stay sane? Whatever I had to do tonight, whatever parts of me I had to sell, it couldn’t be worse than what Cole was doing to her.

I swung into a high arc, my legs pointing toward the ceiling. The world was upside down. It looked better that way.

A heavy shadow moved at the edge of the stage.

I didn't stop, but my skin went cold. A man in a dark suit was standing there. He leaned over and said something to the guard at the steps.

Brianna, who was on the pole next to mine, slowed down. She leaned toward the man, "She charges a lot for private sessions. You can't just take her," she snapped.

The man didn't even look at Bri. He kept his eyes on me, like I was a piece of luggage he had been told to collect.

"Money is not the issue," the man said. His voice was deep and flat, "He wants her. Now."

He..My stomach did a slow, sick flip. I didn't know who 'He' was. My heartbeat fastened, a frantic thud-thud-thud against my ribs. It could be Dante... or it could be him. What if... what if he recognized me?

No. He can't. He won't. I didn't look like myself at all. I was a stranger.

I was wearing layers of heavy makeup that felt like a second skin. I had in colored contacts that hid my real eyes. I had the silver wig and a lace mask that covered almost everything. As long as I kept my distance, as long as I didn't speak, maybe he wouldn't notice.

But what if he still did?

I didn't even know what would happen if someone here recognized me. The letters of the alphabet started to dance and tangle in my head-D-E-A-D. Yeah, that's what going to happen.

I swallowed, stepped down the stage and let the man lead me. My legs felt like they were made of glass. I followed the man's broad back through the crowd. We passed people in masks, people laughing, people doing things that made me want to close my eyes and never open them again.

I felt like I was walking through a dream where I didn't have any feet. I was just floating, being pulled toward a dark corner of the room.

We stopped in front of a large, velvet booth.

The man in the suit pushed me toward the booth. I kept my head down, watching the way the silver hair of my wig fell over my shoulders.

I was trying to focus on my breathe, then, I looked up.

The world stopped. The music, the screaming guests, the smell of alcohol, it all went dead. My heart didn't just thud, it hit my ribs like a fist.

Raphael was sitting there.

But it wasn't Raphael the businessman in a fancy suit.

It wasn't even Raphael the mobster I saw when he was around his brothers.

It was the Raphael that only comes out at night. The predator.

And right now, he looked like a nightmare that had come to life in the woods. He wore a black shirt that was so tight it showed every muscle of his chest and shoulders. His arms were huge, covered in veins and tattoos. His tactical boots were covered in wet, brown mud.

And his eyes looked exactly like it did when I saw him the first time, a light, piercing brown, like clover honey held up to a flame.

But it was the red that made me choke. There were spatters of blood on his neck and a smear of it across his jaw.

He looked like death itself had come to sit in this velvet booth.

And he looked so beautiful it made my eyes sting.

I felt a heat rush to my face, a deep, shameful pull in my stomach. I hated myself for it. I hated that even now, when I was terrified, my body recognized him.

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