My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 181

Gianna’s face turned a deep, bruised red. The insult stung worse than the rough stretch of my fingers. She was pissed, furious that I was using her own rebellion against her while I had her staked out on a bar counter. My fingers stripping away her ability to think, let alone speak.

“Just find her,” Vince snapped, oblivious to the fact that the girl he was worried about was currently soaking my hand. “Get her back to the house before her mother actually fucking dies.”

“I’ll handle it,” I said, my gaze locked on Gianna’s trembling lips. “I’ll make sure she’s dealt with. Personally.”

“Don’t do anything to her. When you find her, you bring her straight back. No lectures, no intimidation. She’s... fragile,” Vincenzo sighed.

I almost laughed. I looked down at the “fragile” girl currently impaled on my hand.

“Fragile is a relative term, Vince,” I said, “In my experience, even the most delicate systems have a breaking point if you apply pressure to the right nodes.”

Gianna’s eyes went wide, a silent snarl curling her lip as she listened to me talk about her like a piece of faulty hardware.

“Just get it done,” Vince snapped. “If her phone is in the trash, use the city’s bio-metric grid. Find the girl.”

“I’ve already decrypted her likely pathing, Vince,” I lied easily, my thumb finding the swollen bud of her clit and applying pressure.

Gianna let out a muffled, choked sound against my shoulder, her body bucking as a fresh wave of heat crashed over her. She was vibrating, her entire nervous system was overwhelmed.

“I have a ninety-eight percent probability on her location,” I continued, “I’ll have her back before her mother even finishes her next drink.”

I swiped the screen to end the call, and tossed the phone aside and grabbed her chin, forcing her to look at me. Her fake blue eyes were drowning in tears of pure, frustrated lust, her chest heaving so hard the lace of her bra was nearly shredded.

“Did you hear that, Gianna?” I hissed, my fingers giving one deep thrust that made her toes curl against the floor, “I need found you. And I’ve decided you’re a high-risk asset that needs to be... sequestered.”

I watched the anger flare in her gaze, but it was too late. Her body was already surrendering, the pulsing of her walls around my fingers telling me that no matter what Vince said, I was going to do everything to her.

I felt the first tremor hit her. It started in her ankles and traveled up her shaking thighs like an electric current. I used my other hand to grab the neckline of her lingerie to keep her face locked onto mine.

“Look at me,” I told her, “Look at the man who’s doing this to you.”

She looked.

And then, she snapped.

The orgasm hit her. She let out a long, broken moan that vibrated against my skin. Her head fell onto my shoulder, her teeth sinking into my trapezius as she sobbed into my skin.

I kept my fingers inside her, feeling the violent aftershocks pulse against my knuckles, one after another. Her thighs were vibrating so hard she started to slide, her feet slipping on the carpet, but I held her up, my hand

remaining deep and still inside her soaking heat.

1 let her come down slowly, listening to the frantic, panicked thud of her heart against my ribs. I could feel the dampness of her tears on my shoulder.

“Now,” I whispered, as I gave my hand one final, slow twitch against her walls. “Tell me again, little mess... who exactly is the easy one?”.

Janedoewritings

Author

Another chapter coming in a few hours!

But first, enjoy this one and DO NOT read ahead without commenting here...

And yes, Gianna slut-shamed Raphael.

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 182

Raphael

+15 Barius

“Now,” I whispered, as I gave my hand one final, slow twitch against her walls. “Tell me again, Little/mess... who exactly is the easy one?”

Gianna moved slowly, as if her bones had turned to liquid. She peeled her face away from the crook of my neck her skin dragging against mine. Her hand slid up from my shoulder, her fingers tangling in the hair at the nape of my neck, gripping me with a strength that told me she was still reeling.

I didn’t let go of her either. My hand stayed firm on the back of her neck, my thumb stroking the sensitive skin just behind her ear. We stood there, draped over one another in the middle of that dark, red-lit room, our chests heaving.

I looked down at her, and for the first time tonight, the mask was completely gone.

Slowly, I withdrew my hand from between her legs. I felt the wet slide of her skin against mine, the friction of the lace as I pulled away. I didn’t hide it. I didn’t look away. I lifted my hand between our faces, my fingers glistening, coated in the clear, soaking evidence of how thoroughly I had just broken her.

I held her gaze, my eyes locking onto hers. I wanted her to see it. I wanted her to know that no matter what she said, this was the truth of her.

Then, I brought my fingers to my mouth.

I slid two fingers past my lips, my tongue swirling over the tips, licking them clean. I closed my eyes for a split second, a low hum vibrating deep in my chest as I swallowed the taste of her down.

It was better than any high I had ever engineered, more addictive than any code I had ever written.

When I opened my eyes, Gianna was staring at my mouth, her lips parted in a silent, shocked “O.” The flush on her cheeks deepened, spreading down her throat and over the tops of her breasts until she was glowing under the red lights.

I pulled my fingers out with a soft, wet pop and let my hand fall back to her waist, pulling her flush against my hard frame.

“Gianna,” I whispered, I leaned in until my lips were brushing against the shell of her ear, “You’re the sweetest thing I’ve ever had the displeasure of breaking.”

I felt the shudder go through her, a violent tremor that started at her neck and raced down her spine. She tried to pull her gaze away, to find some shred of her earlier pride, but it was gone.

She licked her lips, her tongue darting out to swipe over her bottom lip.

“If we do this,” she whispered, “If we really do this... there have to be rules, Raphael.”

I let out a low, dark sound that wasn’t quite a laugh. I roughly pushed her away from me, she stumbled a step back, caught herself and then glared at me as I leaned back against the bar, crossing my arms over my chest, watching the way she tried to pull herself together. She was standing there in those ruined rags, her legs still visibly shaking, and she wanted to negotiate. It was adorable.

“Rules?” I repeated. I let my eyes wander over her disheveled state, “Let’s hear them. What rules does a little secret think she gets to have?”

+15 Bates

involved. With you, I want the opposite. I want us to be nothing to each other.”

I stared at her. It was the perfect arrangement for a man like me, all the pleasure, none of the weight. But seeing the ghost of some old love in her eyes made me want to erase every memory she had of him.

I let a slow, cold smile spread across my face.

“Well, let me teach you how it works, little sister. It’s actually very simple,” I said, “There is no love here. There is only this.”

I reached out and grabbed her hand, my fingers locking around her wrist as I forced her palm flat against the front of my towel. I pressed her hand hard against the thick, pulsing length of my cock. It had been rock hard for her from the very first second I’d seen her tonight, and I wanted her to feel exactly what she had done to me.

“Do you feel that?” I hissed, “That isn’t love. That’s a physical reality. You aren’t a person to me right now, Gianna. You’re a fix. You’re a habit I’m going to indulge in until I’m absolutely sick of you.”

“Good,” she answered, “The feelings are mutual.”

I let go of her wrist, and she didn’t pull her hand away immediately. For a heartbeat, she let it linger there, her palm absorbing the thrum of my pulse through the towel, proving she wasn’t just a victim,.she was a participant.

“Mutual,” I repeated, “I like the sound of that. It makes things so much cleaner when there’s no pretense of innocence.”

I stepped back, the sudden gap between our bodies feeling like a drop in temperature. I turned and walked toward the wardrobe in the corner, to change into clean clothes.

“Scrub that makeup off and get out of those rags before I take you home,” I told her without looking back. I nodded toward the door on the left, “Use the shower. There are plenty of womanly options in the closet, pick something that fits.”

Chopte 185

15 Banus

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

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“That was already a given,” I muttered.

“I’m saying it anyway,” she shot back. “You don’t get to blur lines just because you feel like it.”

My jaw ticked, but I said nothing.

“Fourth,” she added, “you don’t control me outside of this.”

That one made me smile, “That’s not how this works.”

“It is for me,” she said immediately. “You don’t get to tell me where I go, what I wear, who I talk to. This”-her voice tightened just slightly-“this doesn’t give you ownership over my life.”

I took a step closer, “You’re asking for a very specific kind of arrangement,” I said.

“I’m setting boundaries,” she corrected.

I held her gaze for a long second then gave a short nod, “We’ll see.”

“Fifth-”

I cut her off with a dry, mocking laugh, “There’s more? You’re writing a whole manual over there.”

She made a face, her nose crinkling in genuine annoyance. “We don’t catch feelings. None. Not a single one.”

I let out a loud, harsh laugh, shaking my head. She sounded so young, so incredibly naive.

“I’m serious,” she insisted, “It’s not just about love. I don’t want your concern. I don’t want your care. I don’t want your protection or your special attention. I don’t even want your hate. And I won’t give any of that to you. We use each other when we need a fix, and that’s it. We ignore each other the rest of the time.”

I kept shaking my head, a mocking grin plastered on my face. “Do you honestly think I fall in love every time I fuck someone? You really have a high opinion of yourself.”

She raised an eyebrow, “Maybe not after once. But repeatedly? People get... attached. It’s biological.”

I gave a few long, mocking nods, “Oh, attached. Right. You think I’m some little boy who doesn’t know how to keep his head straight? You don’t have to worry about me ‘catching feelings’ for you, Gianna. It isn’t going to happen in this lifetime.”

She rolled her eyes, “I’m not saying it will happen. I’m saying it shouldn’t.”

I stepped closer, invading her space until she was forced to look up, “Is this something you do?” I asked, my voice a taunting drawl, “Is that why you added the rule? It isn’t for me; it is for you. You’re afraid you’re going to fall for your big brother just because he finally gave you the attention you’ve been starving for.”

“Ha ha,” she snapped, the sarcasm dripping from her tongue, “I won’t fall for you, Raphael. I’m just saying that because the last guy I was with... the only guy I was with... I loved him a lot. I don’t know how this works without that.”

The mention of another man, the only other man, sent a surge of aversion through my chest that I wasn’t prepared for.

“The only guy?” I repeated, “You mean the one who taught you those tricks?”

She flinched, but she didn’t look away, “It doesn’t matter who he was. Point is, I’m used to feelings being

involved. With you, I want the opposite. i want us to be nothing to each other.”

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I heard her move, “You have women’s clothes in your closet?”

I stopped, my hand resting on the handle of the wardrobe as I looked over my shoulder at her. A smirk played on my lips.

“I have a habit of ripping clothes off women, Glanna. But I’m a gentleman, I can’t exactly have them/walking out onto the street naked,” I said, “So, I keep a stock, just in case. Various styles, all sizes.”

I didn't look back as I walked toward the bathroom, I needed a shower again. I had what I wanted.

I had her trapped, her rules, pride, and all.

I spent four long hours at the Void, drinking and laughing with my friends while Gianna stayed locked in my private suite.

I had already handled the fallout. I sent a text to Vincenzo saying I'd found her near a public library, claiming she'd been mugged and her phone was gone.

That way, the trap would snap shut before she even saw it. Vincenzo or my father would force a security detail on her, and her days of sneaking into places like this would be over.

Things have changed tonight.

For the first time, thanks to my brother's interference, I couldn't just pull up a file and read her life story. I was flying blind. But as I sat at the booth, watching the smoke curl in the air, I realized I didn't want to run a background check anymore. There was no sport in that. No hunt. It would be much more satisfying to peel those layers back myself, one by one.

As the early morning light began to bleed through the high windows, the Void started to empty. The music died down, and my friends filtered out one by one. I was finishing my drink when a loud argument broke out at the front entrance.

I stood up, adjusting my cuffs, and walked toward the commotion. A group of women-the strippers I'd ordered for the night-were standing in a circle, shouting at my guards. They looked tired, their makeup smeared, but they weren't moving.

"Where is she?" one of them snapped, her voice high and angry. "The girl with the silver hair. She came in with us, and we aren't leaving until we see her."

I stepped into the light, "The party is over," I said, "Get out."

The woman who had spoken stepped forward. She was wearing a cheap fur coat over her costume, her eyes narrowed. "No. We know how guys like you work. We saw her go off with you. If she's hurt, or if you're holding her

"I told you to leave," I repeated, my patience snapping.

"We don't care who you are," another one chimed in, crossing her arms. "She's one of us. We look out for our own. Bring her out or we call the cops."

I didn’t waste any more breath. I reached behind my back, pulled my piece from its holster, and leveled it at the woman in the fur coat. The click of the safety being switched off made her step back.

+15 Banes

They all froze.

“Listen to me, you lowlife whores,” I hissed, “You are never to speak her name again. You are never to look for her, and if you ever try to contact her again, I will make sure you vanish into the same dirt you came from.”

“She’s my sister!” the first one yelled, her voice shaking even as she looked at the barrel of the gun. “You can’t just take her like-”

“I can do whatever I want,” I cut her off, the barrel of the gun, “She doesn’t belong with people like you. My guards are going to walk you out, and if I ever see your faces near my property again, I won’t be this nice,” I turned towards my guards, “Throw them out. Use force if you have to.”

As the guards grabbed their arms and dragged them toward the street, I watched them go with a sense of disgust. I couldn’t believe Gianna was spending her time with trash like this.

She was better than them-miles above them.

It was obvious what had happened. These lowlifes had probably seen her face, her body, and realized they could make a fortune if they dragged her into their world. They had manipulated her, used her looks and the way she moves to pull in bigger tips while she did the heavy lifting.

I tucked the gun back into my holster, yeah, I wasn’t going to let this happen again. I turned and walked straight

towards the suite.

It was time to go see my little secret again.

Janedoewritings Author

Hey, loves!

I hope you’re enjoying it so far.

Now tell me... what do you think of Gianna’s rules?...

+15 Banes

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 185

Gianna

The click of the lock made me snap awake, my heart thumping hard against my ribs. I scrambled to sit up, my hair a mess and my head spinning.

I had no idea how long I'd been out. With no windows to show the sun and no clock on the wall. My phone was gone, likely at the bottom of a sewer as Vincenzo said. After we'd finished our little "negotiation" earlier, I had showered until my skin was pink, scrubbed every trace of that glitter off me, and changed into a light blue summer dress covered in tiny yellow sunflowers.

Then, because my stomach was twisting with hunger and I had nothing left to do, I'd collapsed onto the mattress. It was easily the softest bed I'd ever touched, like sleeping on a cloud made of silk, but the luxury didn't make me forget I was a prisoner.

Raphael stood in the doorway, looking entirely too put-together while I felt like a mess.

"Finally awake, Princess?" he asked, his voice a low, mocking hum.

I glared at him, my eyes narrowed, "I thought you'd forgotten you had a human being locked in here. Or maybe you were just waiting for me to starve to death?"

Raphael leaned against the doorframe, crossing his arins over his chest, his eyes slowly traveling from my toes up to my face. "You look better in sunflowers than in that silver plastic wig, Mess. It almost makes you look like you have a soul."

I swung my legs over the side of the bed, the hem of the sunflower dress fluttering and completely ignored what he said, "You locked the door, Raphael," I said, "Explain. Now. Why am I currently your captive?"

He stepped further into the room, his eyes scanning me from my hair down to my bare toes again, as if he were physically incapable of looking away.

"You aren't a captive," he said, "The Void was full of people tonight. My friends, my business partners, the kind of guys who look at a girl like you and see a target. I wasn't about to let any of them get a look at my stepsister. You're family, Gianna. You don't belong around people like that."

I let out a short, dry laugh, standing up so I could face him, “Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you were the moral compass of the family now. You were perfectly fine with me being ‘around people like that’ when it was your hand up my dress.”

He frowned, “That’s different. I’m me. They’re... everyone else. I’m protecting the family brand.”

I rolled my eyes so hard it hurt. I took a step toward him, a playful, biting smirk tugging at my lips, “You’re really leaning into the protective older brother role, aren’t you? It’s a little late for that, don’t you think? Especially since we’re currently in a room together and you’re looking at me like you want to eat me.”

I tilted my head, my voice dropping to a fake, sweet whisper.

“If you keep this up, people are going to start playing Sweet Home Alabama every time we walk into a room together. Is that the vibe you’re going for, Raphael? Are we moving to the mountains to start a commune? Do I need to start calling you ‘Brother-Husband’ or is just ‘Cousin-Lover’ fine for the Christmas card?”

His jaw tightened, a small muscle jumping in his cheek, but a dark, amused spark lit up his eyes. He reached out, his fingers lingering just a second too long as he tucked a strand of hair behind my ear.

Chaptai 185

+15 B3/09

“Don’t be gross, Gianna. Your attempt at low-brow shock humor is beneath your IQ,” he muttered, though his voice lacked any real bite. “Now, are you going to keep talking, or are you ready to go home and tell Vincenzo how mugged’ and ‘scared’ you are?”

+15 Barns

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i froze, the smirk sliding right off my face. “Wait... what? Mugged?”

He looked down at me, “It was the only logical variable to introduce. I told them I found you wandering near the public library, disoriented. I told them a guy jumped you, took your phone, and you hit your head in the struggle.”

I felt the blood drain from my face. My hands started shaking for real this time, “Raphael, are you insane? My mom is going to go nuclear!”

“She was already losing her mind thinking you were dead,” he said with a casual shrug, his voice completely flat.” I simply gave her a socially acceptable reason for her hysterics.”

“No, you don’t understand!” I paced the room, my mind racing. “She won’t let me leave the house for a year! I had a plan! I was going to tell them I stayed over at a friend’s house andI lost my phone!”

Raphael let out a dry, condescending laugh, “You losing your phone doesn’t explain why you vanished off the GPS grid for six hours, or why your signal last pinged near a warehouse district. I ran the probabilities, Gianna. Your plan was a zero-percent success rate. Mine is a hundred. It’s clean, it’s believable, and it makes me the hero who saved you.”

“Your plan makes me a victim!” I yelled, frustrated that his cold logic was actually making sense.

He shrugged again, “Unless, of course, you had a better plan? One that involves explaining why you were wearing a silver wig and shaking your ass for twenties? I’m all ears, little sister. I can still call Vince back and tell him the

truth.”

“I hate you,” I whispered.

“I know,” he replied, “Now, fix your face. You’re supposed to be traumatized, not annoyed. We’re going home.”

I continued to curse him under my breath, my voice barely a whisper as I trailed behind Raphael. I was exhausted, starving, and currently being managed like a high-risk stock option.

As we stepped out of the suite and into the main halls of this house, I froze. In the daylight, the devilish, neon- drenched nightmare of last night had vanished. It was... gorgeous. Sunlight poured through massive windows, illuminating beautiful moldings and marble that looked like it belonged in a French palace. Cleaners were moving through the lounge, buffing away the sins of the night before until the floors glowed like glass.

Then I glanced through the massive French doors leading to the backyard.

My heart didn’t just drop, it stopped. In the distance, near the edge of the woods, men were dragging bodies across the grass. Piles. They were stacking them. One, five, ten... it looked like fifty dead bodies piled up like cordwood in the morning sun.

“Raphael,” I breathed, my voice trembling as I pointed, “Are those... are those people?”

He didn’t even turn his head. He just kept walking toward the front entrance, checking his watch.

“Pedophiles, Gianna,” he remarked, “They deserved worse.”

He pushed open the heavy front doors without a second thought, leaving me staring at the pile of dead men while the sun continued to shine.

The morning air hit me hard, parked in the circular driveway was his beast of a bike.

I looked at the bike, then back at his stupidly handsome, arrogant face, “Where’s the car? I’m not getting on that

+15 Bantes

death machine.”

Raphael reached into a side compartment, pulled out a matte black helmet, and tossed it at my chest. I caught it with a grunt.

“Oh, did the princess expect a chauffeured limousine to whisk her away?” he said, swinging a long leg over the seat, “How tragic for you. You’re getting the bike, or you’re walking. Try to keep up.

“And what are you going to wear?” I asked, holding the helmet out to him, “You only have one.”

“I’ll be fine. You wear it,” he said, “I’d rather not have to explain to Vincenzo why your head is smeared across the asphalt if we hit a pebble.”

Chapterler

+15 Borus

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“How chivalrous. Truly,” I snapped. “I’m not getting on. Call a car.”

Raphael turned the handlebars, the engine roaring with a sound that vibrated in my teeth. He looked at me, Listen closely, Princess. It’s either the bike, or I tie a rope around your waist and drag you behind me like a pull- toy. Your choice.”

“I hate men,” I muttered, slamming the helmet onto my head. “Seriously. Who gave your gender the right to speak? It was a mistake. A huge, evolutionary mistake.”

I marched over and hiked up the hem of my sunflower dress, swinging my leg over the back of the Ducati. The seat was hot, and the vibrations were already making my skin itch.

“Don’t get any ideas,” I warned, staring at his broad back tight in a t-shirt, “I’m only doing this because the alternative involves road rash.”

“Hold on,” he ordered.

Just to spite him, I gripped the metal rail behind the seat until my knuckles turned white, “I’d rather fly off the back and take my chances with the pavement than wrap my arms around you like some pathetic damsel.”

“Suit yourself,” Raphael said, a dark smirk audible in his voice.

He kicked the bike into gear and twisted the throttle. The Ducati surged forward with a violent jerk that nearly threw me off the back. My dignity lasted exactly half a second before the sheer force of the acceleration forced me to scream and lunge forward, my arms wrapping tightly around his waist just to stay on the damn bike.

“I still hate you!” I yelled over the wind, burying my face in his back as we tore down the driveway, leaving the pile of bodies and the beautiful, cursed mansion behind.

First, he blackmails me out of the only job that actually pays well. Then, he traps me into working in his stupid, high-tech office under his thumb. And now he’s literally turned me into a human backpack.

I squeezed his waist tighter, mostly so I wouldn’t fall to my death, but I sent a silent prayer up to the universe

anyway.

I truly, deeply hope a bird poops on him. Right on his expensive, arrogant head.

The Ducati leaned hard into a sharp curve, the wind whipping my hair around the edges of the helmet. We were flying, the world blurring. Then, through the visor, I saw it. A tiny, neon-lit oasis sitting on the corner of a dusty intersection, a fast-food joint.

“AHH!” I let out a high-pitched squeal that pierced right through the wind and likely his eardrums.

Raphael jerked the handlebars, the bike wobbling for a terrifying split second before he brought it under control. He pulled over to the shoulder, the gravel crunching under the tires as he killed the engine.

“What?” he barked, and snapped his head around, his eyes scanning the road behind us like he expected an

ambush.

I scrambled off the back of the bike, fumbling with the helmet strap until I could rip the thing off. My hair exploded in every direction, but I didn’t care. I pointed a trembling finger at the faded yellow sign of the burger place.

“I’m starving!” I cried, my stomach letting out a roar to back me up. “I haven’t eaten since yesterday. I need a cheeseburger before I go home and act traumatized. I can’t do ‘fragile victim’ on an empty stomach, Raphael. I’ll

get low blood sugar and pass out for real.”

Raphael stared at me, then at the sagging building, then back at me. “You have to be joking. We are ten minutes from the house. You can eat something that didn’t come out of a deep-fryer there.”

“Ten minutes is too long! My body is literally eating itself!” I started walking toward the entrance, my/sunflower dress fluttering in the breeze. “I’m going. You can either sit here and look moody on your bike or come in and watch me eat.”

X

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“Gianna, get back here,” he snapped, but I was already halfway to the door. I heard him mutter a string of very colorful curses under his breath, before I heard the heavy thud of his boots following me.

The inside of the place smelled like old oil and salty heaven. I marched up to the counter, my eyes fixed on the menu board like it was a holy text.

“I want a double cheeseburger with extra pickles, a large order of fries, and a large Oreo shake,” I told the teenager behind the counter, who looked like he wanted to be anywhere else on earth. “And make the shake thick.”

I turned to Raphael, who was standing three feet behind me, looking like a misplaced god in a world of plastic booths.

“What do you want?”

He looked at the grease glistening on the grill and curled his lip in genuine physical pain, “I don’t put that disgusting, processed garbage into my body. It’s practically poison.”

“Suit yourself.” I turned back to the cashier. “Just the one meal, please.”

The kid tapped on the screen, “That’ll be fifteen-fifty.”

I reached into the tiny handbag that went well with my lingerie but not so much with the sunflower dress, but Raphael’s hand was already moving. He flicked a sleek, black titanium credit card onto the counter before I could even blink.

“No!” I snapped, my inner feminist leaping to the front of the line. I shoved his hand away with a sharp smack. “I pay for my own food, Raphael.”

He frowned, his eyes darkening. “It’s fifteen dollars, Gianna. Don’t be ridiculous. I’m paying.”

“No, you aren’t. We have an agreement,” I reminded him, as I slapped my crumpled twenty-dollar bill onto the counter, “I’m not a pet you’re taking out for a treat.’

“Paying for a burger isn’t ‘controlling’ you,” he hissed, leaning down so only I could hear him.

“To you, maybe,” I shot back, taking my change from the stunned cashier, “To me, it’s a leash. And I’m not wearing one.”

He looked like he wanted to punch the wall, but he didn’t say another word. He just stood there, jaw locked, while we waited for the food. When the tray finally arrived, I grabbed it and marched over to the furthest booth, sliding onto the cracked vinyl seat.

Raphael sat opposite me, looking like a king sitting on a trash heap. He pulled out his phone immediately, his thumbs flying across the screen, ignoring me completely. Or so it seemed.

I unwrapped the burger, the smell of melted yellow cheese making my mouth water. I took a massive, unladylike bite, closing my eyes as the salt hit my tongue.

“You realize that meat is probably forty percent soy filler and ten percent floor sweepings, right?” Raphael said without looking up from his phone. “The oil they use for those fries hasn’t been changed since the mid-nineties. It’s a hotbed for bacteria. You’re basically eating a heart attack wrapped in wax paper.”

I swallowed and took a long, loud sip of my Oreo shake, looking him dead in the eye. “It’s delicious. You should try

it.”

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“I prefer my arteries unclogged, thanks,” he muttered, “It’s unhygienic. Low-class. It’s food for people who have given up on their health.”

I rolled my eyes, dipping a fry into the shake because I knew it would annoy him. As I chewed, I noticed him tilting his phone at a weird angle. He wasn’t typing anymore. He was holding it steady, the camera lens pointed directly at my face while I had a mouth full of burger.

I narrowed my eyes. He was taking pictures, I think, “Stop it,” I mumbled around a fry.

“Stop what?” he asked, his expression perfectly blank.

I managed to demolish half the burger and a mountain of fries before the grease started to win. I wasn’t done, though. I signaled the cashier for a to-go box and, while I was at it, ordered a fresh second meal, another double cheeseburger and a large shake.

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 189

C

Raphael sat there like a statue of judgment, his eyes flicking from his phone to my face with a look of pure disgust.

“Finistred with your sodium intake for the year?” he asked, his voice a dry rasp.

“Almost.” I slapped my last few crumpled bills on the counter, making sure he saw that I was still the one handling the check. I tucked the leftovers under one arm and grabbed the fresh, steaming bag with the other.

I marched out the door and Raphael followed. In the corner of the parking lot, sat an old man in a threadbare coat his eyes downcast.

Without a word, I walked over and set the fresh bag and the milkshake down beside him. He looked up, startled and I gave him a small, quick nod before turning back to the bike.

Raphael was already standing by the Ducati, holding the helmet out. He looked from me to the homeless man, his brow furrowing.

“You realize he’s probably just going to trade that for a bottle of something, right?” he said the moment I reached

him.

“And you realize that’s not my business?” I snapped, reaching for the helmet, “He’s hungry. I had money.”

I reached out to take the helmet, but he pulled it back an inch, his eyes dropping to my fingers. “Did you wash your hands? You have grease and salt all over your skin. I’m not having you smear fast-food remnants all over the inside of a four-thousand-dollar helmet.”

I looked at my hands. They were definitely shiny. I looked at him, standing there in his pristine, white designer T- shirt, looking down his nose at me like I was a stray cat.

A wicked thought struck me.

“Oh, you’re right,” I said, “Safety first.”

Before he could react, I stepped into his space and grabbed the front of his shirt. I rubbed my palms vigorously against the expensive fabric, wiping the burger grease and salt right across his chest in two wide streaks.

“There,” I chirped, letting go and snatching the helmet from his frozen hands, “All clean.”

Raphael looked down at the dark, shiny stains on his chest, then back at me. His jaw was clenched so tight I thought his teeth might shatter. His eyes went from light brown to pitch-black, a vein throbbing in his temple.

“You,” he hissed, his voice vibrating with a level of pissed-off I hadn’t seen yet, “Are a dead woman, Gianna.”

“Can’t kill me yet,” I said, shoving the helmet over my head, “You still have to get me home so I can act traumatized, remember?”

I swung my leg over the bike and patted the seat behind him. He didn’t say another word, he didn’t have to. The way he kicked the kickstand up and roared the engine was loud enough to tell me I’d be paying for that one later.

But as I wrapped my arms around his waist for the ride back, the smell of greasy fries lingering on his shirt was the best thing I’d smelled all day.

The Ducati slowed as the towering iron gates of the Capone estate groaned open.

As we rolled up the long, winding driveway, my throat tightened. The dread I lived with every single day... all of it came rushing back like a dark wave.

C

+15 Bghys

I looked at the back of Raphael’s head, my chest aching for a reason I couldn’t name. For a few hours, between the heat of the bedroom, the negotiations, and the greasy burgers, the weight had actually been gone.

I hadn’t been a puppet or a prize.

I had just been... me. Annoying, hungry, messy me.

For a few hours, I’d actually forgotten that my life... my real life was a mess.

Janedoewritings Author

Enjoy!

...XOXO

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 190

Gianna

The Ducati growled one last time before Raphael killed the engine, the sound echoing off the walls of his garage.

I sat there for a second, my heart hammering against my ribs. The peaceful bubble we’d been in for the last few hours didn’t just pop, it shattered. I fumbled with the helmet strap, my fingers trembling so much could barely get the click to release. When I finally yanked the helmet off, I took a deep breath.

“Gianna.”

I froze, my hand still holding the helmet. I didn’t even have to turn around to know who it was. That low, stern tone belonged to Salvatore, my mother’s husband.

I slowly turned, my boots scraping against the floor. They were all there. Standing in a semi-circle.

Salvatore stood in the middle. To his right was Vincenzo, and next to him was Adriano, the Underboss, his arms crossed over his chest, his eyes scanning me before moving to his brother behind me.

And then there was my mother.

“Gianna! Oh, my God, Gianna!”

She didn't just walk toward me, she stumbled. I noticed a weird hitch in her step, her right foot dragging just a little on the floor. Her hands were shaking, not just from the panic, but a fine, tremor that made her look sick.

She reached me and practically tackled me, her fingers digging into my shoulders with surprising, desperate strength.

"Look at you! You're here!" she shrieked, her voice hitting a pitch that made my ears ring. She started hovering over me, her hands fluttering over my face, my arms, my hair, "Where does it hurt? Did he touch you? Did that animal hurt my baby?"

"Mom, I'm fine," I whispered, trying to pull back, but she was hysterical.

"You're not fine! And whose dress is this? This isn't yours, you absolutely hate anything with a floral print!" she tried to smooth out the sunflowers, but her fingers suddenly locked up, turning into a stiff claw for a second before she forced them open again. She winced, a brief flash of confusion crossing her face before she replaced it with anger. "How could you be so stupid? Walking near the library at night? Alone? Do you have any idea what they do to girls like you?"

She swung her hand, not to hit me, but a wild, jerky motion of frustration. She missed my shoulder entirely, her arm swinging too far to the left as if her brain had miscalculated where the air ended. She swayed on her feet, and for a second, I thought she was going to collapse.

"I... I just wanted a book, Mom," I lied.

"A book? You almost got killed for a book!" Her face was turning a blotchy red, and her breathing was ragged, You're shaking!"

I wasn't the one shaking. She was.

"1

Vincenzo stepped forward, his dark eyes fixed on Raphael, who was still standing by the bike, "Did you find out who did this?"

C +15 agriya

"I'm trying to," Raphael replied.

He stepped forward, and casually adjusted his shirt, the one with the grease stains I'd left on it, and looked my mother in the eye.

"She was with me for the last few hours, Hazel," Raphael said, cutting through my mother's high-pitched sobs, I took her to a safe house first to make sure no one was

following us. She’s fine now. Nothing bad happened to her. The guy who jumped her was a coward. He ran and he was smart enough to stay out of the library’s surveillance blind spots. There’s no clear view of his face.”

Adriano tilted his head, his eyes flicking between me and Raphael. He looked like he didn’t believe a single word, but he didn’t say anything. He just watched.

I looked at Raphael. He was already looking at his phone. He had lied to the three most dangerous men in Chicago for me, and he hadn’t even blinked.

“Go, Gianna,” Salvatore ordered, “Go to your room. We will discuss your punishment for this lapse in judgment tomorrow.”

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Chapter 191

“Punishment?” I repeated, my fear momentarily eclipsed by a spark of indignation. “I just lost my phone, it’s not a big deal and you’re talking about punishment?”

Salvatore turried his head toward me, his neck tendons standing out like steel cables. Looking at him then, it hit me, every single one of his sons was just a different version of him. They all shared that same towering height, the same thick, ink-black hair, and those brown, piercing eyes that looked right through you. Whether it was the way they stood or the way they watched, they were all carved from the exact same cold stone.

“You are a Capone now, Gianna,” he snapped, “The sooner you accept the reality of that name, the better it will be for everyone in this room. Especially you.”

“I didn’t choose the name, and I definitely didn’t sign up for any of this,” I said, “I went to the library. I walked down a public street. Normal people do things like that every day without needing a full strategy meeting just to leave the house.”

Salvatore took a step toward me, his shadow stretching long across the garage floor.

“Normal people do not have a target painted on their backs by every rival crew from here to Detroit!” he almost shouted at me, “Your mother married into this life. She is a Capone. You are her daughter. That means you are leverage. People could snatch you off the sidewalk just to make us dance to their tune.”

“I’m not a-”

He jabbed a finger toward the door, cutting me off instantly, “We cannot risk your safety, and yet you stubbornly refuse to let anyone watch your back. You treat our protection like a personal insult!”

“I don’t want men in suits following me to the grocery store!” I screamed, “I won’t allow it. I won’t have bodyguards hovering over me like I’m some piece of fragile glass.”

Salvatore’s eyes turned into cold, hard flints. He looked at me with a terrifyingly flat expression, “I’m done asking, Gianna. I’m not requesting your permission anymore. I will force it. You will have a detail, or you will not leave this house. Those are your only two options.”

The heat in my chest boiled over, “You don’t get to tell me what to do!” I shouted, stepping closer to him despite the warning look my mother was giving me, “You aren’t my father, Salvatore! Stop acting like you have a say in my life. You’re just the man my mother married, nothing more!”

I saw Vincenzo’s jaw tighten. Adriano went completely still. Even Raphael looked up from his phone, his eyebrows slightly raised. Salvatore just stared at me with an expression that said I had finally crossed a line I couldn’t

uncross.

“Go to your room,” he said, “Now. Before I decide that house arrest is too lenient for you.”

I turned my gaze toward my mother, who was leaning heavily against Vincenzo, her face pale and her eyes darting nervously.

“Mom, tell him!” I cried, “You promised me. When we moved into this house, you said no one would control me here. You said things would be different, that I’d have my own life.”

My mother opened her mouth, but her lower lip trembled uncontrollably. She looked at Salvatore, then back at me, her hands twisting into the fabric of Vincenzo’s coat, “Gianna, honey... it’s for your safety. Things are... they’re complicated now.”

“No!” I shouted, the betrayal stinging worse than the adrenaline, “I’m done with ‘complicated.’ I’m twenty-one

years old. I’m an adult, and I’m moving out. I’m finding my own place, and I’m leaving tonight. I don’t need your permission, and I definitely don’t need his.”

I pointed a shaking finger at Salvatore.

Salvatore’s expression shifted from anger to something much darker, “You move out of this house, Gianna, and you become the easiest target in the city.”

“Then let me be a target!” I snapped.

get t

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Chapter 192

“Fine,” Salvatore said, “You want your own space? You’ll move into a Capone-owned property. A penthouse with reinforced glass and a security team in the lobby. That is the only ‘moving out’ you are doing.”

“No. I’m finding my own place. Somewhere you don’t own,” I insisted, my jaw set.

Salvatore let out a harsh laugh that sent a chill down my spine. He stepped directly into my personal space, towering over me until I had to crane my neck to look him in the eye.

“Listen to me very carefully, little girl,” he hissed. “If you set foot in an apartment that isn’t under my control, Í will have a guard standing in the same room where you sleep. He will be there when you eat, he will be there when you shower, and he will be sitting in a chair three feet from your bed while you close your eyes. I’m not letting you get snatched and break my wife’s heart just because you want to play ‘independent woman.””

“You can’t do that!”

“In this city, I can do whatever is necessary to protect what belongs to me,” he countered, “You want to fight me? Try it. But you’ll find out very quickly that your adulthood means nothing when I decide to pull the strings.”

“Then you’re going to have to chain me to the floor,” I spat, “Because I will make your life a living hell until you realize that I am not one of your properties.”

Salvatore’s eyes narrowed, “You think you’re the first person to tell me ‘no,’ Gianna? You think your little tantrums will change anything? You don’t have the power, the resources, or the name to stand against me.”

The air in my lungs turned to ice. My blood started to boil, a hot, toxic wave of pride rising up my throat. He really thought I was some nobody?

“You think I don’t know who I am?” I stepped even closer, “You want to talk about power? You want to talk about names? I have the resources, Salvatore. I have the blood. I am the only daughter of Don Giovanni Toricelli. I was born into the Philadelphia Syndicate. My father rules the East Coast.”

I felt the men in the room go completely still.

“One call,” I whispered, “That’s all it takes. One call to my father and he will bring a literal army to these gates and take me home.”

The words had barely left my mouth when the world blurred.

My head snapped to the side, the force of it so violent that I stumbled. A white-hot, stinging heat exploded across my cheek, making my eyes water instantly.

I slowly turned my head back, my hand rising to cover my burning skin. I was gasping for air, my brain trying to process what just happened.

My mother stood there. Her chest was heaving, her right hand still shaking from the impact. She had never hit me. Not once. Not when I was a kid, not when I was a bratty teen, Never.

“Mom?” I whispered, my voice sounding small and broken.

“Go to your room, Gianna,” she said, “Right now.”

“You... you hit me,” I choked out, “You’re taking his side? After everything?”

“I am taking the side of your life,” she replied, “It is for your own good. You will not speak that man’s name in this house ever again. Not as long as there is breath in your body. Now, move your feet before I lose what little

remains of my patience.”

I stared at her and realized I didn’t know this woman at all. She looked like a stranger wearing my mother’s face.

I glanced at Salvatore. He didn’t look angry anymore. He looked almost satisfied. I didn’t say another word. I pushed past her and ran, the sound of my breathing echoing in my ears as I fled into the house.

Janedoewritings

Author

Alright, I’m logging off and going to bed

Another chapter coming when I wake up, I’m too tired to function right now.

While I’m gone, let me know what you think!.

P

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 193

Raphael

C

Dad and Hazel were gone. It was almost pathetic the way he followed her, moving like a lost puppy on a short leash.

He worshiped the very ground Hazel walked on, and it was starting to cloud his judgment. He was so busy trying to protect his precious, fragile wife that he was turning this house into a cage for everyone else.

He was ready to go to war just because she didn't want her daughter to have a life of her own.

The moment they were out of earshot, I turned toward Vincenzo. He stood there with his hands in his pockets, his face as still as a statue. He didn't look shocked. He didn't even look surprised by the bomb Gianna had just / dropped.

"Don Giovanni Toricelli?" I stated, "Are you serious right now? We've been living with a Toricelli under our roof this whole time?"

I felt a surge of anger. I had been close to her-closer than anyone- and I had no idea she was the daughter of the Philadelphia Syndicate. I hated being kept in the dark. It made me feel like a fool, and I don't do well with being a fool.

Vincenzo cut me a cold look, "It's not our business, Raphael. Dad is handling it. That's all you need to know."

"No," Adriano snapped, stepping forward, "That's not good enough. If we're harboring the daughter of a Don, we need to fucking know about it. We're the ones who have to deal with the fallout if Philly decides to show up at our gates with a death wish."

"We aren't 'harboring' her," Vincenzo said, "Toricelli knows better than to step foot in Chicago without an invitation. He knows the cost. Besides, the man doesn't want her. There hasn't been a word between Gianna and

her father in years."

I could still feel the phantom heat of Gianna's skin against mine from earlier, and the thought of her mother's hand striking her face was playing on a loop in my head.

“Why did you stop me?” I demanded, my voice vibrating with a level of pissed-off I couldn’t hide, “Every time I tried to dig into their past, you shut me down. You told me to leave it alone.”

Vincenzo shrugged, a casual movement that made me want to hit something, “Dad took care of her records himself. It’s his personal mess, so it stayed off my desk.”

Adriano let out a dry, barking laugh that held zero humor, “Yeah, that’s rich. He’s got his nose in every single one of our private deals, but we’re supposed to look the other way while he brings a Toricelli into the family? The math doesn’t add up.”

“Because we are not our father, Adriano!” Vincenzo roared. He looked at both of us, his expression telling us he was finished playing nice, “I will not become him. I’m not going to disappoint our mother beyond her grave by turning into a carbon copy of that man. Gianna, Hazel, and Jules-they are his choices. His business. Let him deal with the headache.”

He took a step closer to me, his dark eyes boring into mine.

“If any of this actually touches the Outfit, if it threatens our families or the business, then we step in and we get personal. Until then, stay out of it.”

Chat 193

+15 Bates

Adriano gritted his teeth, “That sounds real nice and noble, V. But while you’re busy trying not to be Dad, he’s out here bringing a war to our doorstep. If Philadelphia finds out she’s here, they won’t care about Dad’s mid-life crisis or his dying wife. They’ll see a kidnapping.”

“It’s not a kidnapping if the other person doesn’t even want them,” Vincenzo said.

“You saw her face,” I said, “Hazel hit her. Hard. For just saying his name.”

Vincenzo’s gaze shifted to me, “Hazel is losing her mind, Raphael. The sickness is eating her brain. She’s scared:”

“She’s not just scared, she’s terrified,” I countered, “She’s terrified of what Gianna said. You say Toricelli doesn’t want her? Then why is Hazel acting like mentioning him is a death sentence? Why is Dad so desperate to keep her under lock and key?”

I thought about the heat of Gianna’s skin, the way she looked at the bodies in the woods without vomiting, and the way she refused to let me pay for a fifteen-dollar burger. She had that Toricelli pride in her bones. It wasn’t something you could just wash off with a new name.

“I’m not dropping this,” I said, “You can play the loyal son all you want, Vincenzo. But I’m the one who has to deal with her every day.”

I turned away from them, and walked into the house. My head was spinning with possibilities. I was going to find out every single thing her father had ever done to make Hazel that afraid.

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 194

+15 agriva

Vincenzo might be the boss, but he didn’t see what I saw. He didn’t see the way Gianna’s face looked when her own mother hit her. He didn’t see the fire in her eyes when she claimed her father’s name.

There’s a story there. And I don’t buy for a second that a man like Toricelli just wants nothing to do with his only daughter.

1&1

Gianna

I lay face-down on the bed, the fabric damp and cold against my cheek from the stream of tears. My face felt swollen, the heat of the slap still humming under my skin.

I wanted to stay here forever. I wanted to let the darkness of the room swallow me whole until I didn’t have to be a Capone or a Toricelli or anything at all.

Then, the red numbers on the bedside clock flickered.

I sat up so fast the world tilted. My heart suddenly kicked into a panicked gallop.

Cole Mercer.

The money.

Morgan.

Midnight was the deadline. If I didn’t get that payment through, we’d lose Morgan.

Every ounce of self-pity evaporated. It didn’t matter that my mother had turned into a stranger. It didn’t matter that Salvatore wanted to cage me. Nothing in my messy, broken life was more important than making sure Morgan was safe.

I'd let them slap me a thousand times, I'd let them chain me to the floor, as long as it meant she was okay.

I scrambled off the bed, wiping my eyes with the heels of my hands. I needed a phone, and I needed it now.

A soft, hesitant knock came from the door. It was the same one I'd been ignoring every half hour for the last ten

hours.

"Gianna?" a tiny voice whispered. "Please, open the door."

I rushed to the door, unlocked it, and yanked the small figure inside. I clicked the lock shut before she could even

breathe.

Jules stood there in her oversized pajamas, her big green eyes swimming with tears. Without a word, she threw her arms around my waist and buried her face in my stomach.

"I saw," she choked out, her voice muffled against my stomach, "I was hiding on the stairs. I saw Mom hit you. I'm so sorry, Ginny."

I felt a fresh pang of hurt in my chest, but I shoved it down deep. I couldn't be the one falling apart right now. I smoothed her hair, my touch gentle.

C

"It's okay, Jules. It's fine," I lied, "Mom is just... she's stressed. It didn't even hurt that bad. Really. Don't worry about me."

"But she never hits us," Jules sobbed, looking up at me, "Never."

"I'm a big girl, I can take it," I said, forcing a small smile I didn't feel. "But listen, I need your help. I need a phone. Right now. It's a literal emergency."

Jules stopped crying and sniffled, looking around the room cautiously. Then, she reached into the deep pocket of her pajama pants and pulled out a slim device.

"Here," she whispered, holding it out to me, "Use mine."

I stared at the glowing screen in her hand, my jaw dropping.

"Jules?" I breathed, looking from the phone to her innocent, ten-year-old face. "Why on earth do you have your own smartphone?"

“Dante got it for me,” Jules said with a casual shrug, as if she were talking about a piece of candy rather than a phone.

I stared at her, my brain stalling, “Dante? Dante Capone?”

Jules nodded, a small, proud smile lighting up her face. “Since you’ve been so busy and... you know, stopped hanging out with me as much, I was really struggling with my math homework. Dante noticed. He started helping me every night. He promised that if I aced my big mid-term, he’d get me whatever I wanted. I got an A+, so he got me this.”

She held the phone like a trophy.

A cold, uneasy feeling settled in my stomach. I looked at my little sister, my innocent, sweet Jules and felt a wave of nausea. She was settling in. She was starting to feel at home with these people, the very people I was planning to run away from.

I couldn’t deal with that heartbreak right now. I had to focus.

“I’ll explain why that’s a problem later, Jules. Just... let me use it,” I said, my voice tight.

I grabbed the phone, and the letters on the keypad didn’t stay still, they danced and flipped.

“No, no, no,” I whispered, my thumb hovering over the screen. I tried to type my password, I couldn’t. I kept hitting the wrong keys, the characters looking like alien symbols instead of the words I’d memorized, “Jules, I can’t-the words are moving. I can’t make them stop.”

“Gigi? What’s wrong?” Jules asked, her voice small and scared.

Borys

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 195

The frustration boiled over into a dark energy. I raised my hand and slammed my against against my own temple,

once, twice.

“Stupid! Just work!” I hissed at my own brain.

“Ginny, stop!” Jules cried out, her eyes wide with terror.

I felt the stinging heat on my cheek where my mother had hit me, and the self-loathing took over. I raised my hand and slapped myself hard right on the same spot. And then I did it again, I hit myself so hard my head barked with pain, and I knew instantly it would bruise.

Jules let out a sob, reaching for my hands. “Please! Don’t hurt yourself!”

I stopped, gasping for air, I looked at my little sister, her face streaked with tears, and felt a wave of shame, shouldn’t be doing this in front of her, but I was drowning. Then again. I wasn’t just hitting myself, I was trying to knock the noise out of my head.

“Jules,” I breathed, shoving the phone into her hands. “I can’t... the letters are moving. I need you to type the PIN. Please. It’s 4-9-2-6. Just do it for me.”

Jules wiped her eyes with her sleeve, her hands trembling as she took the phone. She tapped the numbers in quickly. The app chirped and opened.

I leaned over her shoulder, my heart stopping. There it was.

I blinked, trying to force the numbers to stay still.

$100,000.00

I had only asked Raphael for ninety thousand. He had sent ten thousand extra. The sight of it didn’t make me feel good. Why would he even do that?!

“He sent it,” I breathed, my heart cold, “The money is there.”

I looked at Jules, whose face was wet with tears and twisted in fear. I felt like a monster for scaring her, but I didn’t have a choice. I gripped her shoulders, leaning in close.

“Jules, listen to me. I have to go. Right now. If I don’t leave this house in the next ten minutes, something terrible is going to happen to my friend.”

“But the guards are everywhere,” Jules whispered, “Salvatore said you weren’t allowed to leave.”

“That’s why you have to help me,” I said, “You know this house better than I do. I need to sneak out, Jules. I need you to help me get past them.”

Jules bit her lip, her small face turning serious. She looked at the bruise forming on my cheek, and then at the door.

“The back kitchen entrance,” she whispered, “Dante told me it’s for the staff. And there are fewer guards there. I can distract them for a few moments, if we’re fast, we can make it.”

She grabbed my hand, her fingers small and cold, and led me out into the hallway. We moved like two thieves, pressing our backs against the cold walls every time we heard the tread of boots or the crackle of a radio.

We reached the service stairs, and stopped, “Stay here,” Jules breathed, pointing to a dark alcove behind a stack of silver catering crates.

Carson 195

+15 Bgnus

I watched through a gap in the boxes as she stepped out into the bright light of the service hallway. Two guards were standing by the heavy steel door, their rifles slung over their shoulders.

“Excuse me?” Jules said, her voice small and trembling perfectly. “I can’t sleep. My tummy hurts really bad and I can’t find anyone in the kitchen.”

The guards immediately softened, “Oh, hey, little miss. It’s okay. Let’s get you some ginger ale from the kitchen, yeah?”

As they turned their backs to lead her toward the pantry, Jules looked over her shoulder and gave me a tiny nod

I didn’t waste a second. I bolted.

I stayed low, as I pushed through the heavy steel door and felt the shocking bite of the night air. I was out. I was actually out. The damp grass of the back garden felt slick under my feet as I sprinted toward the perimeter wall, heading for the spot where a large oak tree draped its branches over the stone.

I reached the wall, my fingers scrambling for a grip on the rough rock. I threw my leg over the top, ready to drop down onto the public sidewalk and run until my legs gave out.

“Going somewhere?”

I froze, my heart dropping into my stomach. I slowly turned my head, my hands still gripping the top of the wall.

Silvio was standing there, leaning against the trunk of the tree I had been planning to use as my escape route.

His dark eyes fixed on the purple bruise blooming across my cheek.

“It’s a little late for a jog, don’t you think?”

Janedoewritings Author

Hey, guys!

I know I said I was going to bed, and you probably thought I dropped into a coma... but I didn't. I just stepped out for a bit to run some errands.

P

+15 8g/vas

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 196

Gianna | Age 5 | Toricelli Estate, Chester County, PA

The room was very big and very quiet, except for the sound of the clock on the wall. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

I sat in Daddy's big leather chair. It was so huge that I felt like a little bug lost. The room smelled like the spicy brown water Daddy drinks. In front of me was a book with a lot of tiny black marks on the pages.

"Again, Gianna," Daddy said, "Focus, my little Donna," he stood behind me, and his big hands felt warm on my shoulders, "You are going to rule everything one day. You'll be the Queen of Philadelphia. And Queens have to know what the paper says."

His voice was like a big, warm hug, but his eyes were very serious. He stood right beside me, his hand resting on the back of my neck. I loved Daddy more than anything. He was the strongest man in the whole world, and he always told me I was his princess.

But I wanted to be a Queen. I wanted to make Daddy proud so he would pick me up and spin me around and tell me I was his best girl. I squinted at the page. I tried to catch a spider, but it turned into a circle, and then the circle grew a tail and turned into a different spider.

"I... I see a 'B'?" I whispered.

Daddy didn't move, "There is no 'B' on that line, Gianna. Look again. Do it for Daddy."

I tried so hard. I stared until my eyes felt itchy and hot. The scratches started to dance. They hopped over each other. It made my head feel like it was full of bees. I picked up the heavy pen to try and draw the scratches, but my hand made them go the wrong way. They looked like sticks.

“I’m sorry, Daddy,” I said, “The spiders won’t stay still.”

I heard the click-clack of his shoes on the floor. He walked to the front of the desk. He wasn’t mean, he looked sad, like I had hurt his feelings. He picked up the long, thin wooden stick.

“Hands on the table, Gianna,” he said softly, “We have to clear the cobwebs out of your brain. We have to get the spiders out. Discipline is love.”

I knew what to do. I wanted to be good. I put my hands flat on the desk and I closed my eyes tight.

WHACK.

“Ah!” I tucked my hands under my arms, my eyes filling with big, hot tears.

“No, hands back,” Daddy said, “If you don’t focus, the world will beat you harder than I ever will. I’m doing this because I love you, Gianna. I’m fixing you.”

I put my hands back out. I was so scared, but I knew Daddy knew best. He was my Daddy. If he was hurting me, it was because I was doing something wrong, and he was helping me be a better girl.

Whack! Whack!

The back of my hands turned bright red, then a puffy pink. I bit my tongue so I wouldn’t scream. I didn’t want him to think I was a baby. I wanted him to be proud.

“Look at the book,” Daddy said, “Look now, while the sting is fresh.”

I looked and it was weird. For a tiny second, because my hands hurt so much, the spiders stopped running. They stood still. I saw a ‘C.’ I saw an ‘A.’ I saw a ‘T.’

“Cat!” I yapped, happy because I finally did it.

“Good girl,” Daddy whispered, patting my hair.

He turned toward the other man standing in the corner. Who walked over and looked at me with a frown. He bent down a little, just enough to see my hands better. His fingers were cold when he touched me. I tried not to pull away because Daddy was watching.

“Hmm,” he said.

“Did you notice the timing?” Daddy asked him, “Right after the stimulus, the response sharpens. She read.”

“Yes,” the man said quickly, “Because you forced her brain to choose.”

I blinked.

Choose what?

I didn’t understand, but I didn’t like the way he said it.

“Her mind is crowded,” he went on. “Too many signals. Letters don’t stay still because nothing holds them in place.”

He tapped lightly against the back of my hand and I flinched.

“Pain fixes that,” he said, “Pain creates urgency. The brain doesn’t have time to wander. It shuts down everything unnecessary and locks onto one thing. In her case, the letters. For a few seconds,” he continued, “she gets clarity. Clean input. No distortion.”

Daddy looked at me, “And that’s why she reads after?”

“Exactly. It’s unconventional but effective. A forced override.”

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I didn’t know what that meant but I knew it made Daddy nod.

“Can it last longer?” Daddy asked.

“That’s the interesting part,” he said. “If we repeat the stimulus, we can train the brain to stay in that state longer. We find the right amount,” he said softly. “Not too much, not too little. Just enough to keep her focused. She’s already very responsive. Some children shut down. She doesn’t. She adapts. Which makes her ideal,” he said

Daddy’s voice was quiet, “Ideal for what?”

“For study. We can map the exact point where confusion turns into clarity,” he went on. “Track it. Measure it. Push it further each time. With the right tools,” he said, “we won’t need the stick forever.”

Daddy placed a hand on my head, “She’s not broken, she is just... miswired.”

“And miswiring,” the doctor said quietly, “can be corrected.”

“She’s my life,” Daddy said, “I want her to be the best. Whatever you need to do to fix her brain, Doctor. I’ll provide the equipment. I’ll provide the... motivation.”

I looked at the red marks on my hands. They were starting to puff up. My hands hurt, but Daddy said he was doing it because he loved me.

The Doctor smiled, but his teeth were too straight and too white, “We’ll start with the sensors tomorrow. We’ll find out what’s broken, and we’ll prune the bad parts away.”

I didn’t know what “prune” meant, but I hoped it would make Daddy love me even more.

Пooked back at the spiders on the page. They were starting to move again, getting all messy and blurry. I looked at the wooden stick on the desk and then at Daddy.

I wanted him to love me again.

“Daddy?” I whispered, pushing my hands back toward him on the desk, “Can you do it again? I want to read the next word for you.”

Usually, I liked to hold my own spoon and pretend I was a grown-up, but today my hands were too heavy. They looked like two pink, puffy balloons. Every time I tried to wiggle my fingers, It hurt.

Mom sat close to me, her chair pressed against mine. She wasn’t eating her food. She held a spoon filled with warm carrot soup, moving it toward my lips like I was a little baby. Her eyes were all puffy and red, and every time she looked at the marks on my hands, a big, fat tear rolled down her cheek and splashed onto the white tablecloth.

“I’m okay, Mommy,” I smiled, “It only hurts a tiny bit now.”

Mom let out a sound like a broken toy. She put the spoon down and reached for my hands, but then she stopped, like she was scared to touch me. She started to sob, her shoulders shaking so hard that her diamond necklace made a clinking sound against her neck. “My baby,” she choked out, “My sweet, sweet girl. What did he do to you? How could he do this to you?”

Suddenly, the big wooden doors slammed open. The noise was so loud I jumped, and my hands hit the table. I let out a little whimper.

Daddy walked in and stood at the head of the table, looking down at us with his hands behind his back.

“Stop that noise, Hazel,” he said, “You’re making her weak. She needs to eat her lunch so she can get back to the study. The Doctor is already waiting, and he doesn’t like to be kept.”

Mom stood up so fast her chair fell backward with a loud thwack. She stepped in front of me, spreading her arms

out.

“She isn’t going back there! Not today, not ever!” Mom screamed. I had never heard her scream like that, “Look at her hands, Giovanni! Look at what you did! Please, just leave her alone. Let her play. Let her be a little girl. I won’t let you touch her again.”

Daddy walked closer, his shoes making a click-tap sound on the marble floor. He stepped right into Mom’s space until she had to lean back against the table, right over my soup.

“You won’t let me?” he let out a mean laugh, “You’re confused, Hazel. You think this is a house where you have a vote. You think you’re a partner.”

“I may not be your partner but I’m her mother. She is my daughter!” Mom screamed, her face turning bright red.

Daddy’s face changed. The skin around his jaw got tight, “No. She is a Toricelli. She is my blood. She is my legacy. You are just the woman I picked to carry her. Nothing in this house is yours. Not the diamonds around your neck, not the silk on your back, and definitely not the future of my heir. You have nothing. You are nothing.”

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He reached out and grabbed Mom’s chin, his fingers digging in so hard she had to stand on her tiptoes. I felt hot bubbling feeling in my chest. I wanted to bite his hand.

“She belongs to the Syndicate, which means she belongs to me,” Daddy said, turning his head toward the door where the men in suits stood, “Vance.”

“Yes, sir?” Uncle Vance said, stepping forward. He looked at the floor, not at us.

“My wife has way too much energy today,” Daddy said, “She thinks she can talk back because I’ve been too nice to her. She isn’t to be served anything today. Not a snack, not a

crumb, not even a glass of water. If I catch anyone giving her so much as a grape, I'll make sure you never work again.'

"Do whatever you want to me," Mom whispered, "Starve me. Lock the doors. I don't care. Just leave my baby out of this. She's five, Giovanni. She's just a baby."

"You still don't get it," Daddy hissed. He leaned in until their noses almost touched, "You don't make the rules here. You're a guest I keep around because you were a good vessel for my daughter. That's all."

He shoved her face away like he was bored of her. He straightened his tie and looked at his gold watch.

"I'm the one who puts food on this table," he said, "I'm the one who fills your belly and keeps the heater on so you don't freeze. Every breath you take is a gift from me. Since you want to tell me how to raise my daughter, you can spend the next day feeling exactly what it's like when I stop taking care of you. I have the power to feed you, Hazel, which means I have the power to watch you go hungry. By tomorrow, I expect you to be a lot more grateful for the life I give you."

I didn't like it. I didn't want Daddy to be mean to Mommy because of me. I tried to hide behind the big cloth napkin.

"Don't test me again," Daddy said, pointing a finger at her. "Because the next thing I take away won't be your dinner. It'll be our daughter. I'll send her to a school across the ocean, and you'll never see her face again."

Then, Daddy reached his hand out to me. His voice went back to being sweet and soft.

"Come on, princess. Let's go see the Doctor. He has some new toys for us to try."

I looked at Daddy's hand. I wanted him to be happy with me. I wanted to be a good girl. I reached out, and the second my fingers touched his palm, Mom let out a loud cry.

"No, no, no!" she screamed. She lunged forward and grabbed me, pulling me into her chest so hard it knocked the air out of me. She wrapped her arms around me tightly, "Get away from her! I'll kill you! You touch her and I'll kill you!"

"Hazel, let go of her," Daddy shouted.

"Never!" Mom was kicking her legs and screaming, her hair falling all over her face. She was holding me so tight I could hear her heart thumping in my ear.

I started to scream too, because everything was loud and scary and I didn't know what was happening. I just wanted them to stop.

Daddy reached down and grabbed Mom’s arm with one hand and my waist with the other. He started to pull. It felt like I was being ripped in half. Mom was sobbing, her fingernails digging into my sweater as she tried to stay attached to me.

“Mine!” Mom shrieked.

With one big yank, Daddy tore me away from her. I felt her fingers slip off my arms, and then I was up in the air, tucked under Daddy’s arm.

“Take her to her room and lock the door,” Daddy ordered Vance, pointing at Mom.

Mom was on the floor now, reaching out for me, her face wet and her voice gone. I looked over Daddy’s shoulder as he carried me toward the study. I saw Mom getting smaller and smaller as the big doors closed. I saw her hand reaching out one last time before she disappeared.

“It’s okay, princess,” Daddy whispered, patting my back as I cried. “Mommy is just having a little time-out. Now, let’s go show the Doctor how smart you are.”

Janedoewritings

Author

Just a little glimpse... you might find some answers in here Drop a comment and then Swipe up for the next update.

Chaptaling

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Chapter 199

Gianna

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“Going somewhere?”

I froze, my heart dropping into my stomach. I slowly turned my head, my hands still gripping the top of the wall.

Silvio was standing there, leaning against the trunk of the tree I had been planning to use as my escape route.

His dark eyes fixed on the purple bruise blooming across my cheek.

“It’s a little late for a jog, don’t you think?”

I stayed frozen on top of the wall, my fingers digging into the cold stone until my knuckles turned white. My legs were dangling over the edge, halfway to freedom, but my body wouldn’t move.

Silvio didn’t look angry, he just looked bored, which was somehow much worse. He took a slow drag of his cigarette, the tip glowing like a small, angry eye in the dark.

“I’m... I’m just getting some air,” I managed to say.

“If you’re planning on sneaking out, this is definitely not the right way to do it,” he said. He flicked the ash from his cigarette, stepping closer to the base of the wall, “Actually, it’s probably the most painful way you could have picked.”

“What are you talking about?” I whispered.

“You think this wall is the end of it?” Silvio let out a short, dry laugh, “Raphael buried pressure sensors three feet under the dirt all around the estate. The second your boots hit that grass, a silent alarm goes off in the security room. They don’t send a guard to check it out, they just release the dogs.”

I felt a wave of cold sweat break out across my forehead. I looked down at the grass. It looked so soft and harmless,

and then back at him.

“And even if you made it past the dogs,” Silvio continued, “there’s a second fence hidden behind the bushes. It’s thin wire, almost invisible in the dark. Raphael has it hooked up to the main power line. If you touch it, the electricity will stop your heart before you can even scream. You’d just be a charcoal briquette on the lawn.”

The blood drained from my face. I gave him a forced, trembling smile. “Look, I... I really, really need to be somewhere right now. It’s a matter of life and death. If you just help me get out of here, I’d—”

He let out a loud, genuine laugh, “Wait, wait. Let me get this straight. You got mugged last night. You had your phone stolen. You supposedly hit your head in a struggle and had a concussion so bad Raphael had to go pick you up. Then you come back here, you insult the living shit out of my dad, and your mom slaps you hard enough to leave a mark like that.” He gestured vaguely toward my bruised cheek. “You still run your mouth until they officially put you on house arrest. You threaten my father and my very scary two older brothers, men who kill people for breakfast with your Toricelli blood. And then, on that same night, you try to climb a wall to sneak out, not giving a single shit about anything.”

I opened my mouth, my brain spinning. If I told him that I'd also spent last night negotiating with his brother so that we could fuck each other, his head would probably actually explode.

"Well," I muttered, "when you put it like that—"

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"You're my fucking hero, Gianna," he cut me off, his eyes bright with wonder and a hint of mischief. "I've lived here my whole life and I've never seen anyone flip so many birds to this family in the span of twenty-four hours. You're either the bravest person I know or you're actually insane."

He tossed his cigarette onto the ground and crushed it with his boot, a grin spreading across his face.

"Get down from there before the thermal cameras pick up your heat signature and the snipers in the west tower get curious," he said, reaching up to help me. "If you're going to do this, you're going to do it right. You can't be getting caught by a basic perimeter fence. It's embarrassing after everything you've pulled so far."

I slid down the wall, landing unsteadily on my feet. I looked at him, confused, "What are you doing?"

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"I'm teaching you the Silvio Special," Silvio whispered, throwing an arm around my shoulder like we were best friends heading to a movie instead of a girl trying to escape a house full of mobsters, "If you want to sneak out of this mansion undetected, you don't go over the walls. You go under the radar. Come on, Sis. If you're going to ruin Salvatore's night, I want to make sure you actually succeed. It'll be the funniest thing that's happened in this house since Adriano tried to cook."

He started leading me back toward a hidden cellar door, already whispering about camera loops and guard rotations with a giddy excitement.

"First rule of sneaking out: never trust the grass. Second rule: always bring a Capone who's bored enough to help."

Silvio didn't lead me back to the main house. Instead, he led me toward the detached garage.

“Everyone looks at the walls, Gianna,” Silvio whispered, “That’s where the sensors are. That’s where the cameras are pointed. But no one looks at the trash.”

He stopped at the back of the garage near a heavy industrial dumpster and pulled a small, black remote from his pocket. He didn’t press a button; he held it against a specific metal bolt on the side of the dumpster. A faint click echoed in the night.

“This is a service tunnel for the old plumbing and the fiber-optic lines,” he explained, sliding a heavy metal plate aside to reveal a narrow, concrete crawlspace, “It bypasses the pressure sensors because the pipes need to shift under the ground. It comes out three blocks away in the basement of the dry cleaner the family owns. That’s where we send the literal dirty laundry, not the bodies and the blood, just the shirts.”

I looked down into the black pit. It felt like staring into a coffin, “You’re joking.”

“Do I look like I’m joking?” Silvio checked his watch. “You have exactly four minutes before the guard patrol rounds the corner of the west wing. If they see me standing by a dumpster, they’ll ask questions. If they see you,

we’re both dead.”

I dropped to my knees and crawled into the cool, damp tunnel. It smelled like wet concrete and electricity.

“Wait,” Silvio hissed, leaning his head into the opening, “Take this.”

He handed me a small, high-powered flashlight and a hoodie, “It’s cold... And Gianna?”

I looked up at him, raising an eyebrow.

“Don’t take the left turn. There’s a nest of very grumpy raccoons that way. Take the right, follow the blue cables, and push the red lever at the end. It’ll drop you right into a pile of old suits.”

“Got it. Raccoons are bad, suits are good,” I muttered, starting to crawl.

“Exactly. Go. If you get caught, I was never here. I was in my room playing video games and being a disappointment to my father.”

“Okay,” I smiled widely, “Thanks.”

“Also, I expect a very big, very important favor for this. And maybe a story about why you’re so crazy. Also, you owe me a new hoodie. That one was vintage.”

I shook my head, laughing to myself, “Deal.”

I moved through the tunnel as fast as my hands and knees would carry me. It was tight and dark, but the blue

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+15 Banes

cables were easy to follow. Finally, I hit a metal wall. I found the red lever, pulled it, and felt a floor panel give way. I tumbled out, landing on a soft, dusty pile of plastic-wrapped suits.

I scrambled to my feet and pushed open the back door, stepping out into an alleyway three blocks away from the Capone estate.

I tucked the phone away, pulled Silvio’s hoodie tight around me to hide my face, and started to run toward the Rose Garden.

I sprinted two blocks away from the dry cleaners. I didn’t dare call an Uber, a digital trail was the last thing I needed. I reached the corner just as the heavy, blue-and-white shape of a CTA bus screeched to a halt. I

I jumped on, fumbling with the spare change, and slumped into a seat near the back.

When the bus reached the stop near the Rose Garden, I didn’t wait for it to fully settle. I hopped off and ran toward the entrance of the club.