

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 2

I stepped even closer, my bare thigh brushing against the expensive wool of his suit trousers. I arched my back again, my spine supple as a whip, and let my arms flow upward, before I brought them down to graze my own collarbone.

I was using every bit of my ballet training, the control, the lines, the way I knew exactly how to shift my weight to make my hips sway just right.

Slowly, he reached out. His hand was large, his fingers long and tanned covered in tattoos. He started to reach for my waist, his palm open as if he wanted to pull me onto his lap.

I didn't think. I just reacted.

I caught his wrist with one hand and pushed it back toward his chest. I didn't break eye contact. I just gave a tiny, slow shake of my head.

Look, but don't touch, I'm not that kind of girl. I'm just here for the cash.

I expected him to get angry. I expected him to snap or call Mama D to complain. Men like this weren't used to being told "no," especially not in a room they paid for.

Instead, a slow, lopsided smile spread across his face. It transformed his face from a cold statue into something human, something even more dangerous because of how charming it was.

He didn't try again. He just leaned back into the leather couch, crossing one leg over the other, watching me with a look that said he was suddenly very, very interested in the girl behind the mask.

I slowly turned my back to him, arching my spine until I could see him over my shoulder. I moved my hips in a slow circle, the black lace of my thong barely covering anything.

I heard a soft rustle of fabric.

I turned back around, my silver hair stuck to my glittery skin. He was reaching into the inner pocket of his suit jacket.

He pulled out a thick wad of cash. It was all hundred-dollar bills, crisp and new.

He didn't just throw it at me. He didn't tuck it into the table. Instead, he held the money between two fingers and looked up at me. His light brown eyes were darker than before. He didn't say a word, but the way he tilted his head was a question.

Can I?

My heart was thumping so hard I thought it would burst through my ribs. Slowly, I stepped even closer, until my stomach was inches from his face. I didn't nod, but I didn't move away.

He leaned in. I felt his hot breath on my skin, his hand came forward, and he didn't just tuck the money in. He took his time.

His fingers slid under the strap, grazing the skin of my hip. He let his knuckles drag against me, pressing a little too hard, a little too long. The friction sent a literal shock through my system, an electric spark that started at my hip and shot straight to my core.

I gasped, my back arching instinctively. It was a reaction to the heat of his touch. He knew exactly what he was doing. His thumb traced the edge of the lace, dipping just an inch lower than it needed to, claiming a piece of me that wasn't for sale.

He looked up at me from his seat, that lopsided, beautiful smile growing wider as he saw my chest heaving. He watched my reaction like it was a show created just for him.

"Good girl," he mouthed, though no sound came out.

He finally let go, but the skin where he'd touched me felt like it was on fire.



“Gianna! If you don’t put those shoes on right this second, I am going to lose my mind!”

My mom’s voice went up an octave. I looked away from the mirror, where I’d been staring at my own eyes, trying to see if they still looked like the girl in the mask from two nights ago.

“I’m coming, Mommy! Chill! We aren’t going to be late!” I yelled back, grabbing a pair of nude heels from the floor.

I walked into the living room and found a scene of total chaos. My mom was wearing a floral dress that hugged her in all the right places, but her hands were shaking as she tried to fasten a gold hoop into her ear. She dropped the earring for the third time, a hiss of frustration leaving her lips.

“Here, let me,” I said, stepping in. I picked up the tiny gold circle and slid it through her lobe, clicking it shut.

“Thanks, G,” she breathed, patting my cheek, “I just want this to be perfect. Salvatore is... he’s different. He’s a good man, but his family... his sons. They’re the Capones, Gianna. They’re the kind of people who own the city. If they don’t think I’m right for him, or if they think you girls are... well, you know.”

“We’ll be the picture of grace,” I promised, giving her a wink, “They’ll think Jules and I grew up in a palace.”

I turned to my little sister, Jules, who was currently trying to fit a bulky Barbie doll into the tiny, sparkly purse Mom bought her for the occasion. She was wearing a dress with so many layers of pink tulle she looked like a walking loofah.

“Hey, Peanut,” I said, crouching down. I made a massive, goofy fish-face at her, sucking in my cheeks and fluttering my eyelashes until I looked completely ridiculous.

Jules burst out laughing, “G! You look like a weird frog!”

“I look regal,” I corrected her, poking her nose, “Now, listen. When we get to that house, if any of those guys look mean, just stick your tongue out at them when they aren’t looking. It’s a secret trick for good luck.”

“Gianna, don’t teach her that!” Mom groaned from the hallway, fumbling with her lipstick, but I saw the corner of her mouth twitch.

I stood up, smoothing the fabric of my cream-colored dress. Five thousand dollars. That stranger, the one with the beautiful eyes and the tattoos that felt like they burned into my skin had handed us a lifeline.

Because of that tip, I was able to cover this week's payment to Cole Mercer. I'll hand it over to him as soon as this dinner's finished. We still owe him more than I can even bring myself to say, but for now, at least he'll get his share. I even used a little of it to buy Jules the fancy shoes she's wearing tonight.

"Ready?" Mom asked, her hand resting on the doorknob while the Capone SUV idled outside, waiting for us.

She looked beautiful, even if she seemed a little tired, a little more fragile than usual.

It was just the nerves of meeting the legendary Salvatore Capone's inner circle.

"Ready," I said, grabbing Jules's hand and swinging it.

The SUV glided up the driveway, which was so freaking long. On both sides, Italian cypress trees stood.

The car slowed to a crawl as the house came into full view. It was a monster of a building, white stone, massive pillars, and a front door that looked like it belonged to a cathedral.

"Whoa," Jules breathed, "It's a castle."

“It’s a lot of windows to wash,” I muttered.

The SUV came to a perfectly timed stop right in front of the giant stairs. One of the suited men hopped out and opened our door, offering a hand to my mom. She took it, stepping out.

I stepped out after her, tugging Jules along with me...

And then I saw them.

Three tall men stood in a loose circle and my stomach dropped so fast I thought I might actually be sick.

Right between them stood the man from the strip club. And even with the thin glasses he was wearing now, I knew those eyes. Light brown, like honey held up to a flame.

Two nights ago.

Five thousand dollars.

His hand at my waist.

His eyes on me.

My stomach turned into a block of ice. I felt sick. I felt naked, even in my dress.

“Mum...” my fingers tightened painfully around Jules’, “Who... who are those people?”

My mother looked over at them, a bright, hopeful smile on her face. She had no idea. She didn’t know her daughter was a liar. She didn’t know where all that money really came from.

“Oh,” she said lightly, “That’s Salvatore’s sons. Adriano, Dante... and the one with the glasses is Raphael.”

Those eyes were the same ones that had watched me dance.

Watched me bend.

Watched me take his money.

The world tilted.

The man I stripped for.

The man who tipped me five thousand dollars like it meant nothing.

He was my soon-to-be stepbrother.

Cazzo.

Ruby Walker