My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 341

Gianna

The motorcycle slowed down as Raphael steered us off the empty scenic road and pulled into a deserted gas station. He stopped right next to the fuel pump. He kicked the kickstand down, and we both unfastened our helmets, letting the cool morning air rush over our faces.

I climbed off the back of the bike, stretching my legs as my boots hit the pavement. My stomach let out another loud growl, reminding me exactly how long it had been since I last ate. I looked over at Raphael, who was already reaching for the fuel nozzle.

“Alright, Mr. Logical,” I said, a playful grin spreading across my face as I unbuttoned my cargo pockets to grab my wallet, “While you feed your beautiful machine, I am going to feed myself. I am going inside that convenience store, and I am going to get us two massive blue raspberry slushies and the biggest bag of salty potato chips I can find.”

Raphael stopped, his dark eyes narrowing slightly, “I am not drinking liquid sugar and eating fried grease at six in the morning, Gianna,” he said, his voice flat and disapproving. “That is garbage.”

“Oh, yes you are,” I shot back, stepping away from the bike and walking backward toward the glass doors of the store. I pointed a finger at him, “You made me run through the woods. You owe me. You are going to sit on this bike, you are going to drink your artificial chemicals, and you are going to eat these potato chips with me. No arguments.’

A slow, dangerous smile crept onto Raphael’s face, the dark corners of his mouth twitching up. He just reached into his tactical vest, pulled out a black credit card, and held it out toward me between his two fingers.

“Take my card!” he yelled out after me.

I let out a playful scoff, lifted my hand and flipped him the bird, sticking my middle finger straight up in the air with a grin as I pushed through the glass doors of the convenience store.

The bell above the door let out a loud chime as I stepped inside. The air inside smelled like old coffee, burnt hot dogs, and cleaning chemicals. The store was totally empty except for two people, a guy with grease-stained skin sitting behind the cash register, and a tall, dirty-looking man in a ripped leather jacket standing right next to the counter, smoking a cigarette inside the store.

I ignored both of them, walking straight to the back where the bright slushie machines were spinning. I grabbed two of the largest plastic cups available, pulling the lever down and filling them to the very top with the bright blue, icy liquid. Then, I walked over to the chip aisle, grabbing a massive, family-sized bag of salty potato chips.

I walked back to the front, placing the two heavy slushies and the big bag of chips right onto the plastic counter. Just before checking out, I noticed a rack of chocolate bars next to the register. I leaned over, picking up a few bars of milk chocolate to add to the pile.

“Hey there, beautiful,” a rough voice said right next to my ear.

It was the guys in the leather jacket. He had moved closer, leaning his elbow on the counter, his yellow teeth showing through a nasty smile. He smelled like stale alcohol and cheap smoke.

I didn’t say anything. I kept my eyes glued to the chocolate bars in my hand, completely ignoring him, hoping he would just leave me alone.

The clerk behind the register let out a chuckle. He didn’t look at the food on the counter intent to y straight down to my chest, staring hard at the thin black fabric of my crop top where my breasts were eating slightly from the walk.

“Look at those titties,” the clerk spat, as he leaned forward on his knuckles, “Man, they look so fucking sitt. Té love to take my burning cigarette and put it out right on them. I bet you’d make a real pretty smutted.”

Stone

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The words hit me like a bucket of ice water. My entire body went perfectly stiff. My fingers froze around the chocolate bars, my heart suddenly hammering against my ribs. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t breathe. I just stared at the counter, my mind completely locking up with fear.

The man standing next to me let out a mean, loud laugh, “Yeah? Let’s see how she likes it.”

Before I could even process the words, the man came forward. He took the glowing, red-hot tip of his lit cigarette and pressed it brutally right against the side of my left breast.

The heat hissed instantly against the thin black fabric of my shirt, melting the cloth away in a fraction of a second. The red-hot ember sank straight into my bare skin. A sharp, agonizing flash of pure pain exploded through my chest, burning deep into my flesh.

The pain finally broke my paralysis. I let out a sharp, choked gasp, stumbling backward so hard that my boots skidded against the dirty linoleum floor. I dropped the chocolate bars, the candy clattering loudly across the floor

I didn't grab the chips. I didn't grab the slushies. I turned around and sprinted toward the entrance, my hands trembling violently as I pushed the glass doors open, the little bell chiming wildly behind me.

I burst out into the cool morning air, completely terrified. My chest was burning like fire, and my lungs felt like they were completely collapsing. I couldn't get any oxygen in. I was hyperventilating, taking short, frantic breaths as I ran blindly back toward the motorcycle, my eyes wide with pure panic.

I couldn't breathe. My lungs felt small, tight, and completely empty. Every time I tried to suck in air, my throat locked up. I staggered over the rough ground toward the motorcycle, my legs shaking so badly I could barely keep my balance.

But I wasn't just in the gas station parking lot anymore. The smell of the burn and the sharp sting on my breast dragged me backward, pulling me deep into the dark corners of my own mind.

Suddenly, the bright morning sky disappeared. In my head, I was back in that cold room from my childhood. The white walls. The heavy smell of burns. I could see the doctor standing over me, his face completely blank as he held the small, glowing metal tool in his hand.

"You need to focus, Gianna," the doctor's voice echoed loudly inside my head, ringing in my ears, "Your mind is too slow. The pain will wake your brain up. It will help you concentrate."

The ringing grew louder, turning into a dizzying buzz that made my head spin. Another voice broke through the noise, loud and angry. It was my father. I could hear him slamming his hand down on the wooden desk in his study, his eyes glaring down at me while I cried over my textbooks.

"You are so fucking stupid!" my father's voice shouted inside my mind, making me flinch out in the real world as I took another shaky step toward Raphael, "You are dumb! Read it again! Understand it! You have to be something, Gianna! You are nothing right now!"

I let out a loud, pathetic sob, tears finally bursting from my eyes and streaming down my cold cheeks. I gripped my head with both hands, trying to block out the noise, but the doctor's voice came back, lower and more terrifying this time.

“The regular treatments aren’t working anymore, Gianna, your body is used to it. You have a really high tolerance for pain,” the doctor whispered in my memory, the sound of his latex gloves snapping together making my skin crawl, “Your father says you are still failing. From now on, I am going to target your sensitive parts. We need to make sure your full brain wakes up. Don’t move.”

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gasped for air, a choked sound tearing from my throat. The memory of the heat sinking into my skin when I was a little girl mixed completely with the fresh burn on my chest.

Then, a different voice sliced through the chaos, newer, colder, and full of disgust. It was Leone. I could hear him speaking to me in the dark, as he pushed me away from him.

“The doctor completely ruined your thigh with those burns, Glanna,” Leone’s voice sneered inside my head,” They look disgusting. They are ugly. I absolutely hate looking at them while I am fucking you. Cover them up.’

The voices spun around and around in a wild, chaotic circle, screaming at me, calling me stupid, calling me ugly. telling me I was broken. My mind was completely spiraling out of control, falling into a deep, dark hole where couldn’t find the bottom.

I stumbled blindly, my boots tripping over a rock in the pavement. I didn’t even realize I had reached the bike until my hands hit the metal of the engine tank. I collapsed against it, my chest heaving up and down in fast, frantic jerks, my face completely soaked in tears as I looked up at Raphael through wide tear-filled eyes.

Raphael’s hands clamped down onto my shoulders the exact second I collapsed against the motorcycle. He caught me effortlessly, his strong fingers digging through the fabric of my clothes to hold me steady. He pulled my shaking body right against his solid chest, his arms wrapping around me without even asking a question.

But the safety of his arms couldn’t stop the storm inside my head. I couldn’t breathe. My throat felt like it was glued shut. I kept taking those short, frantic, little gasps of air, my chest heaving up and down so fast it hurt. Tears were pouring down my face.

“Look at this report card, Gianna!” my father’s voice roared in my head, the sound of paper ripping echoing in my ears, “This is for your own good! The doctor is going to fix you, whether you like it or not!”

I let out another loud, choked sob, my body twitching against Raphael. The cold smell of the doctor’s office flooded my senses again.

“You’re flinching too much. The heat needs to sink deep into the skin near her groin this time. It is the only way to shock her nervous system.”

And then Leone’s voice came back. I could remember him holding my face in his hands, his eyes looking at me with so much intense affection, but then his gaze dropped down to my body, and his face completely twisted with deep disgust.

“I love you so much, Gianna, you know that,” Leone’s voice whispered in my head, “But these marks... they are truly disgusting to look at. I hate seeing them when we are together. I hate touching them while I am fucking you. You don’t need these treatments anymore if they are just going to ruin your beautiful body. Your skin, your looks, your perfection, that matters so much more than some stupid lessons or some stupid degree. Stop letting him ruin what belongs to me.”

I buried my face into Raphael’s tactical vest, crying out loud as the words cut through me like knives. I was completely trapped in the past, drowning in the words of the three men who had controlled my life for so long.

Raphael pushed me back just a few inches, holding me at arm’s length so he could look at me. His eyes were scanning my face, seeing the pure terror in my wide eyes. Then, his gaze dropped down to my chest.

Right at the side of my black crop top, a small circle of fabric had been melted away, leaving a black-edged hole. Right inside that hole, my bare skin was bright red, blistered, and oozing a tiny bit of blood where the hot ash had burned straight into the flesh.

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Raphael froze.

His face went perfectly pale, his jaw clenching so hard that the muscles in his cheeks popped out like stones. The calm, logical businessman completely vanished.

A deep, dark, and terrifying panic took over his features.

“Gianna,” he sneered, his voice deep, rough. His hands shook just a tiny bit as he cupped my face, his thumbs. wiping the hot tears from my cheeks, “Gianna, look at me. Breathe. Look at my eyes.”

I couldn’t. I just kept shaking, my head rolling back against his arm.

I let out a trembling sob, my vision so blurry from tears that he just looked like a tall shadow. But I focused on the light brown of his eyes, staring into them like a lifeline.

“Breathe with me,” he whispered, his thumbs gently wiping away the hot tears that were streaming down my face. He took a deep, slow, and very loud breath, puffing out his chest to show me how to do it, “In and out, Gianna. Match me. You are safe. I have you.”

I tried to mimic him, my chest jerking as I sucked in a shaky, small breath of air. He kept his eyes locked on mine, his touch so tender that the screaming voices of the three men in my head finally began to fade into the background.

He took my shaking hand and pressed it flat against his own chest, right over his heart.

“Breathe with me,” he instructed softly, his breath warm against my hair. “Feel my chest rise. In... and out. Slowly.

The cold room from my childhood started to vanish, replaced by the warmth of his hands.

He waited patiently, keeping his breathing slow until the frantic gasps in my throat finally calmed down into trembling sighs.

Once he felt my muscles stop shaking so violently, Raphael slowly lowered his gaze to look at my chest again.

A heavy, dark stillness settled over Raphael’s features. He looked back up into my eyes, his thumbs still gently tracing my jawline.

“Who did this to you?” he asked, his eyes glancing toward the glass doors of the convenience store for a fraction of a second before locking back onto mine, “Who touched you?”

I sniffled, blinking the remaining tears away as I tried to pull my shirt together to hide the burn. “Let’s just go, Raphael. Please, let’s just get on the bike and leave. I want to go home.”

“Who. Did. This. To. You?” he gritted through his teeth.

The soft, gentle tone he had used to calm me down was entirely gone.

I sucked in a sharp breath, looking at the hard lines of his face. After everything that had happened to me as a child, after the way my father, the doctor, and Leone had treated me, I had made a strict promise to myself. I had promised that I would never ask another man for help, that I would never depend on anyone to protect me or fight my battles.

But as I looked into Raphael’s dark eyes, I realized something shifted deep inside me. I didn’t feel that way about him... not anymore. I trusted him with the broken pieces of my past. I trusted him with... myself.

“Those men... inside...”

+15 Bartus

And that’s all I managed to say before everything he had just told me on the road, all that perfect logic about keeping his life in separate boxes and keeping his violence strictly under control shattered to absolute pieces right in front of my eyes.

Janedoewritings Author

Enjoy!

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Gianna

1PT

At first, Raphael did not lose his mind in a loud, angry way. Instead, a calmness washed over his entire body. His face became completely still, like it was carved out of stone.

He reached down and took my hand. His palm was warm, and his long fingers wrapped completely around my trembling knuckles, holding me.

“Come with me,” he said.

He didn’t wait for me to answer. He started walking, as he led me back across the empty gas station. My heart began to hammer against my ribs all over again as the convenience store grew closer and closer, but his hand pulling mine kept me moving forward.

We stopped just outside the glass entrance. Through the clear windows, I could see the dirty linoleum floor and the bright blue slushie cups still sitting abandoned on the plastic counter.

Raphael stopped walking and turned his body toward me. He let go of my hand and placed his palm flat against the small of my back, gently nudging me toward the frame of the door.

“Go on first,” he murmured, his dark eyes looking over the top of my head toward the inside of the shop, “I will follow right behind you.”

Panic seized my throat. I instantly went stiff, my heels digging into the concrete as I shook my head back and forth violently. My breathing hitched, and I wrapped my arms tightly around my waist, trying to hide the ugly burn on my chest.

“No,” I whispered, as I took a tiny step backward against his arm, “No, Raphael, please. I am not going back in there.”

Raphael didn’t get frustrated. He didn’t force me. He simply leaned down a little, bringing his face level with mine so that I couldn’t look anywhere else. His eyes locked straight onto mine with an intense focus that completely cut through the panic in my brain.

“Gianna,” he said softly, his voice a deep, soothing purr that vibrated right in my chest, “Look at me. Don’t you trust me?”

I stared back into his eyes, my breath catching in my throat. I looked at the calm expression on his face, the absolute strength in his broad shoulders, and the way he stood in front of me.

Suddenly, a strange, beautiful feeling washed over my entire body. It was a deep, pure sense of safety, a kind of protection that I had never felt a single time in my entire life.

When I was with my father, I was always waiting for the next scream. When I was with the doctor, I was always waiting for the pain. When I was with Leone, I was always trying to hide my flaws so he wouldn’t look at me with disgust.

But standing here with Raphael, the whole world felt quiet. I knew, with absolute certainty, that as long as this man was with me, nobody in the universe could ever hurt me again.

“Of course I trust you,” I whispered, the words coming out small but completely honest.

A tiny, almost invisible nod passed through his jaw. He dipped his head slightly, using his hand on my back to give

Chooter me another gentle, encouraging push toward the entrance.

I took a deep breath, steeling my nerves, and pushed the glass door open. The little metal bell above the frame let out that same loud, cheap chime.

I stepped onto the dirty floor first, my boots making a soft clicking sound.

The two men were still standing exactly where I had left them. The dirty pervert in the ripped leather jacket was leaning against the cigarette rack, and the clerk was sitting behind the cash register, counting a stack of dollar bills.

At the sound of the chime, both of their heads snapped toward the door.

The moment the clerk’s greedy eyes landed on my face, a nasty grin spread across his face. He tossed the money down on the counter and leaned forward on his thick knuckles, his eyes sliding instantly down to the burnt hole in my top.

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“Well, look who decided to come back,” the clerk spat, letting out a dark, ugly chuckle that echoed off the plastic shelves, “What’s the matter, bitch? Did you come back for more?”

The pervert in the leather jacket let out a mocking laugh, taking a slow drag from his cigarette. He stepped away from the counter, his yellow teeth showing through a filthy smile again as he looked me up and down.

“I knew she liked it,” the man sneered, as he pointed the glowing red tip of his cigarette toward me “Look at het, she’s still shaking. She probably wants me to put the rest of this out on her other side. Come here, little girl. Let’s see if you can make a louder sound this time.”

The glass door swung open and shut behind me. Raphael stepped out from behind me. He didn’t draw a weapon He just stood there, his massive, broad-shouldered frame completely filling the doorway.

The mocking laughter from the two men cut off instantly.

The dirty pervert in the leather jacket froze mid-step, his smile disappearing so fast it was like it had been slapped off his face. His yellow teeth clicked together, and his hand still holding the glowing cigarette started to lower slightly.

The clerk behind the register stood straight up, his knuckles lifting off the counter as his chest went completely rigid. Both of them stared up at Raphael, their eyes wide, their bodies turning totally stiff with immediate intimidation.

Raphael stood at least a head taller than both of them, and the sheer size of his arms and chest made the small store feel microscopic.

Raphael didn’t even look at them. He kept his eyes perfectly forward, walking past the man in the leather jacket and the pervert instinctively took a fast step backward, pressing his spine hard against a shelf of potato chips just to get out of Raphael’s way.

Raphael stopped right in front of the cash register. He looked down at the plastic counter, his eyes calmly scanning the two large cups of blue slushie, the family-sized bag of chips, and the few bars of milk chocolate that were still sitting there.

Slowly, smoothly, he reached into his pants pocket, pulled out a wallet, and opened it.

“Is this all you wanted, babe?” he asked. His voice was incredibly smooth, and perfectly relaxed, like we were just standing in a nice grocery store on a regular Sunday afternoon.

I stared at him, my mind completely spinning. I blinked through my dry tears, my chest still throbbing with pain, completely confused by how calm he was being. I looked at him, then I looked back at the two men, who were watching his every move like rabbits watching a hawk.

“Raphael...” I whispered, my voice trembling as I took a tiny step closer to his side. “I... I don’t want it anymore. Let’s just go.”

“It’s okay,” Raphael murmured softly, not a single bit of anger in his tone. He didn’t look up from his wallet.” You’re hungry. You need to eat.”

He pulled out a crisp, hundred-dollar bill and tossed it casually onto the counter right in front of the frozen clerk. Then, Raphael reached out his hands, easily gathering up the two slushies, the big bag of chips, and the chocolate bars. He turned his body toward me, a small, incredibly gentle smile appearing on his lips.

“Hold it for me, yeah?” he said softly.

The 46

My hands shook as I reached out, taking the plastic cups and the snacks from him, pressing them against my chest. I couldn’t take my eyes off him.

Once my hands were full, Raphael slowly turned his head back toward the clerk behind the register. The gentle warmth in his face completely vanished, replaced by a loose, lazy, and arrogant look. He leaned one of his elbows on the plastic counter, looking completely relaxed, like he was just sharing a dirty joke with a couple of guys at a bar.

Shore

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“A real nice piece of ass, isn’t she?” Raphael said, letting out a low, rough chuckle that sounded completely friendly, but made my stomach drop into a cold pit. He gestured with his chin toward me, “I can’t blame you guys for staring. When a girl looks like this, men are going to want to touch. It’s just human nature.”

The intensity in the roorn shifted instantly. It was suffocating. I gripped the slushie cups tighter, my heart freezing in my chest. He was talking about me like I was nothing but an object, like I was just some cheap body for men to look at.

But behind the cash register, the clerk let out a sudden sigh of relief. Hearing Raphael speak like that completely broke his fear. A nasty, confident smirk crept back onto the clerk's face, and he leaned back forward on the counter.

"Right?" the clerk said, feeling brave again, "Man, I thought you were gonna be pissed. But yeah, she's fine as hell. We were just having a little fun with her, you know?"

"Hell yeah," the pervert in the leather jacket bragged, lifting his chin up as he pointed at the burnt hole in my shirt, "She tried to act all tough and ignore me, so I had to show her what a real man feels like. Pressed my cigarette right into her titties. You should have heard the sound she made, man. I bet she barks real nice when you touch her like that at home."

They didn't notice the way Raphael's dark eyes were perfectly tracking the cigarette in the man's hand. They didn't notice how his body was slowly, and silently shifting.

"She does," Raphael answered, "And you enjoyed making her make that sound?"

"Hell yeah, we did," the pervert laughed, stepping a little closer to Raphael, completely blind to the monster he was playing with, "If you're done with her, you should leave her here with us for an hour. We can show her a real good time."

Raphael smiled. It was a wide, bright, and incredibly beautiful smile, but his eyes stayed dead, dark, and completely frozen.

"Thank you," Raphael murmured softly, "Thank you for telling me exactly what you did, because now..." he paused, his gaze moving slowly from the clerk behind the counter to the man standing right in front of him, the bright smile still fixed on his handsome face. "Now you're going to fucking die."

The smile on Raphael's face didn't fade. It just grew wider as he moved.

He didn't give them a second to breathe. His right hand shot forward, wrapping around the neck of the pervert in the leather jacket. His fingers dug deep into the man's throat, choking off his laugh into a terrified gasp. I gasped as Raphael lifted the man completely off his feet and slammed him face-first onto the counter.

Red exploded everywhere, splashing across the counter as the man's nose shattered completely, spraying thick, dark blood across the glass.

"Hey! What the fuck-" the clerk behind the register screamed, as he scrambled backward, trying to open a drawer to grab a weapon.

Raphael didn't let him. While still holding the pervert down with one hand, his other hand reached across the counter and grabbed the heavy metal cash register. With one pull, he

ripped the machine right off its wires and swung it like a hammer, slamming the heavy metal box straight into the side of the clerk's face.

The crunch of bone was loud and wet. The clerk spun through the air, his teeth flying out of his mouth in a shower of blood before he crashed heavily into the cigarette rack behind him. Dozens of plastic packs tumbled down.

The pervert on the counter was choking on his own blood, trying to claw at Raphael's crushing grip. Raphael pulled the man up by his hair, his dark eyes totally blank, empty of any human emotion. He reached into the man's leather jacket pocket, pulled out the lighter and the pack of cigarettes, and tossed them onto the counter.

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With his free hand, Raphael grabbed a glass jar full of pickled eggs from the display rack. He brought it down with absolute force straight onto the pervert's right knee. The glass shattered into thousands of sharp pieces, The heavy liquid mixed with the blood on the floor, and the man let out a high-pitched scream as his kneebone split completely apart.

Raphael dropped the screaming man onto the wet, bloody floor. He stood over him, like he was just doing a simple chore. He picked up the pack of cigarettes. He pulled out a whole handful of them-at least six or seven-and stuffed them all into his own mouth. He grabbed the lighter, flicked the flame, and lit all the ends at once until they were glowing a bright, angry, scorching red.

He pulled the burning cigarettes from his lips, holding them bundled tightly together between his fingers like a thick torch of pure fire.

He knelt down, pressing his heavy combat boot directly onto the pervert's chest, pinning him to the floor so he couldn't move a single inch. The man wept, his hands shaking as he begged for mercy, his face a swollen, bloody mess.

"Please," the man choked out, blood bubbling from his lips, "Please, stop-"

Raphael didn't say a single word. He leaned forward and drove the large bundle of glowing, red-hot cigarettes straight into the man's left eye and cheek.

The sound was terrible. A loud hiss filled the convenience store as the extreme heat melted through the man's skin, burning straight into his flesh. The horrible smell of burning hair and scorched skin filled the air. The pervert's body went completely stiff, his back arching off the floor as a loud, screeching scream tore from his throat, a sound so full of pure agony it didn't even sound human anymore. Raphael held the fire there,

pressing it down harder, turning his hand slowly to make sure the heat destroyed everything beneath it.

Behind the counter, the clerk was trying to crawl away on his hands and knees, leaving a thick trail of dark blood on the linoleum.

Raphael stood up, tossing the crushed, bloody cigarette butts onto the floor. He walked over to the counter. He reached down and grabbed the clerk by his ankles, dragging him backward through his own blood until he was out in the open.

Raphael looked around the store, his eyes landing on a metal stool near the corner. He walked over, picked it up with one hand, and brought it back.

He raised the heavy metal stool high above his head. His muscles flexed beneath his tactical vest, his face perfectly still and calm as he looked down at the weeping, mangled clerk. And then, with everything he had, he brought the metal legs of the stool crashing down again and again, breaking bones and spilling blood until the store was completely silent.

Raphael stood in the middle of the blood and the broken glass, his chest rising and falling. He looked down at the two mangled men groaning on the floor. His face was still beautiful, but his eyes were completely empty, like two black holes that sucked in all the light in the room.

He turned around and walked over to the tall glass coolers against the wall. He opened the doors and began grabbing bottles of strong alcohol, bottles of heavy vodka, rubbing alcohol, and cheap whiskey. He brought them back to the center of the room, his boots making a wet, sticky sound as he stepped through the pools of blood.

He twisted the cap off the first big bottle of vodka. He tipped it upside down and poured the clear liquid straight onto the pervert’s burned, bleeding face. The high-volume alcohol sank deep into the open cigarette burns and

the shattered skin of his nose.

The pervert let out a choked shriek, his whole body shaking and twitching in pure agony as the liquid set his open nerves on fire.

15 Bah

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Raphael the walked over to the clerk, who was coughing up thick pools of dark blood on the floor. Raphael opened another bottle and dumped it right over the man's broken head, the liquid mixing with the dark red stains on his clothes. He kept walking around the store, opening bottle after bottle, splashing the stinging liquid over their broken legs, their torn chests, and all over the wooden shelves and paper displays.

The smell of raw alcohol and copper blood was so thick it made the air hard to breathe.

Raphael stopped walking and stood right between the two weeping men. He looked down at them. He still didn'y sound angry, he sounded like a cold psychopath who was just playing a game.

"You want to know what it feels like to be burned?" Raphael asked softly, his lips twitching into a small, dark smile,

"You like the smell of burning flesh? You want first-hand experience?"

The clerk tried to lift his bloody hand, begging, his voice a tiny, wet wheeze. "Please... no... stop..."

Raphael ignored the words. He turned his body slightly and looked over at me. I was still standing near the door, my arms locked tightly around the cold slushies and the big bag of chips, my eyes wide with tears.

Raphael walked over to me through the blood. His movements suddenly became completely different. He didn't touch me with violence. He reached out with his warm hand and gently wrapped his fingers around my upper arm. His touch was so soft, so tender, it felt like he was holding a delicate flower.

He slowly guided me toward the front entrance, leading me out of the store. He placed me gently on the dry concrete walkway just outside the large, clean glass windows.

"Stay here, Mess," he whispered against my ear, "Watch."

He turned around and walked back inside the store, leaving me outside. Through the clear glass windows, I could see absolutely everything. The store looked like a horror movie. The two broken men dragging their mangled bodies across the linoleum floor, trying to escape.

Raphael walked back to the center of the room, stepping right into the middle of the alcohol pools. He reached into his vest and pulled out the pervert's small metal lighter.

He looked through the glass window, his dark eyes locking straight onto mine. He gave me a slow, beautiful, and incredibly chilling smile.

With a quick flick of his thumb, a small yellow flame burst from the lighter. Raphael casually dropped the burning lighter straight into the pool of alcohol at his feet.

A massive, bright blue and orange wall of fire exploded instantly, tearing across the floor. The flames caught the alcohol on the pervert's clothes and face first. In a second, the man was completely covered in bright fire. He rolled around on the floor, his clothes melting into his skin as he let out a long, high-pitched, screeching scream of pure horror.

The fire spread fast, climbing up the shelves and catching the clerk's hair and clothes next. The whole inside of the convenience store turned into a bright furnace of heat and orange light. Through the thick glass window, I watched the shadows of the two men twisting and shaking in the middle of the bright flames, their screams muffled by the thick glass.

Raphael watched them burn for a few long seconds, completely unbothered by the thick black smoke rising to the ceiling. Then, he turned his back on the fire and walked slowly out the front door, stepping back into the cool morning air next to me, like he had just finished a normal day of work.

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Chapter 350

Gianna

+15 @ar.4

The hot air from the fire rushed out into the parking lot, but the second he reached me, everything felt completely still again. He did not look back at the flames. He kept his eyes locked straight ahead as he placed his palm flat against the small of my back.

His touch was incredibly gentle, a clear contrast to the brutal violence he had just used inside. He guided me slowly across the gas station, walking me away from the heat and toward his parked motorcycle. I walked beside him like a robot, my fingers still locked tightly around the cold plastic slushie cups and the bag of potato chips, my brain completely numb from what I had just seen through the glass window.

When we reached the black bike, Raphael did not get on right away. He let go of my back and reached down to his side, his fingers wrapping around the grip of his glock. He pulled the weapon from his holster.

He stood tall in the middle of the empty gas station lot, his sharp eyes scanning the high metal poles and the corners of the roof.

Bang!

A small surveillance camera attached to the corner of the convenience store roof shattered into pieces, plastic and glass spraying down onto the concrete.

Raphael shifted his feet, his arms perfectly steady as he aimed across the lot toward the main entrance sign.

Bang!

Another camera, hidden right under the plastic awning over the fuel pumps, exploded into a cloud of white dust. He turned his body in a circle, his dark eyes spotting a third camera mounted high up on a pole near the main road. He raised the gun, aligned the sights, and pulled the trigger one more time.

Bang!

The glass lens blew apart, the broken wire dangling uselessly in the wind.

Once every visible camera was completely destroyed, Raphael lowered the gun but did not put it away. He reached into his vest with his left hand, pulled out his phone, and pressed a single button on the screen. He held the phone up to his ear, his face completely expressionless.

“Wipe everything,” Raphael said into the phone, “I want every single trace of my movement gone from the city database for the past twenty-four hours. Delete every camera feed, every traffic loop, and every toll booth record along the outer roads. Everywhere my bike has been, make it disappear completely. Do it now.”

He didn’t wait for a reply. He ended the call and slipped the phone back into his vest pocket.

He walked over to the nearest fuel pump, reached out and grabbed the long rubber hose of the gas nozzle. Instead of putting it back into the machine, he squeezed the handle hard and began pulling it across the ground.

Thick gasoline poured out of the nozzle in a clear stream. Raphael walked in a slow line, dumping the highly flammable liquid all over the concrete, soaking the base of the fuel pumps, and splashing it across the path leading straight to the front doors of the burning store.

He tossed the empty plastic nozzle onto the wet ground. He walked back to the motorcycle, where I was standing perfectly frozen, watching his every move.

He lifted his heavy handgun one last time. He didn’t look at the store. He didn’t look at the fire inside. He just aimed the barrel straight down at the big puddle of gasoline spreading across the concrete right beneath the fuel pumps.

“Hold on to your food, babe,” he murmured softly.

He pulled the trigger.

The metal bullet hit the concrete, creating a tiny, bright spark of heat. The second the spark touched the gasoline, a massive, roaring sheet of orange fire erupted into the sky. The flame raced along the trail of fuel like a glowing snake, hitting the main pumps in less than a second.