My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 76

+15 Bris

First of all, this is a dark mafia romance. I always include detailed trigger warnings at the beginning, so you know exactly what kind of story you're stepping into. Choosing to read something with darker themes and then being upset by those same elements doesn't quite align, the darkness is part of the story, not separate from it. Secondly, I make a conscious effort to give each character their own identity. I don't want my characters, male or female, to feel like copies of one another. If anything, their differences are intentional. When you look closely, you'll see that each of them carries a distinct personality, which keeps the story from feeling repetitive.

Thirdly, I always draw inspiration from real-world elements. I research, I explore the darker sides of power, and then I shape it into a more romanticized version for storytelling. But that doesn't mean I'm going to strip away the darkness entirely.

Now, about the "hunts feel high school-ish" comment. I genuinely have to ask... what kind of high school are we talking about?

What teenagers are organizing events that involve this level of planning, power, wealth, and control? What high schoolers have access to that kind of influence? Because last I checked, they don't. These are not playground games, they are tied to ultra-rich, deeply corrupt individuals and families who operate on a completely different level.

And this brings me to an important point: mafia characters are not meant to be morally perfect. If you're looking for soft, honorable, or traditionally "good" male leads, this genre, especially my stories, might not always give you that. The mafia world is not built on kindness or morality, it's built on power, survival, and cruelty.

Kunderstand that not every character will be for everyone, and that's completely okay. But I ask that you meet the story for what it is, not what you wish it to be.

That said, I always appreciate thoughtful discussion, and if you have genuine questions, I'm more than happy to answer them

And just to be clear, this isn't criticism toward any of you. I love you all, You're the reason I'm still here, still writing, even on days when I feel like giving up.

Peace and love

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Raphael

+15 Bar

I sat at my desk. I pulled my laptop toward me, my fingers were shaking just a little as I typed in the code for the security feed.

It was my biggest fucking tell. My body did that whenever the rage got too hot, or whenever my nerves were pulled too tight. It was like a glitch in my head that I hated with every part of my soul.

The screen flickered to life, showing the grainy, blue-tinted hallways and the crowded hall of the mansion.

I found the camera for the VIP corner. There they were. Ciro was leading Gianna through the crowd. I watched as he pushed her gently into a corner. Even through the fuzzy video, I could see how out of place she looked. She was standing stiff, her head darting around.

Then, Ciro checked his watch and leaned in to say something to her before he walked away toward the back exit. He was going to make the drop for Dante.

The second he was out of sight, the shadows moved.

A pack of four girls slid into the frame. I recognized the way they walked before I even saw their faces. High- society trash. Heiresses I'd grown up with in the same wealthy circles. Girls who thought the world was a toy because no one had ever had the balls to tell them "no." They moved in a tight line, their dresses shimmering like snake scales under the strobe lights.

They cornered her. I watched as they stood over Gianna, their mouths moving fast, their faces twisted into sharp smiles. Gianna tried to step away but one of them pushed her.

"Don't touch her," I hissed at the screen, my grip on the laptop tightening until the plastic groaned.

They dragged her toward the bar. Gianna was shaking her head, her hands up as if she was begging them to stop. I watched as she forced Gianna's head back and tied it around her neck. Gianna reached for the knot, but they slapped her hands away. They were laughing. I could see their shoulders shaking with it, their mouths wide and ugly. To them, she wasn't a person. She was just a toy they could play with because they were bored.

I didn’t waste a breath. I swiped the trackpad, switching the angle to the high-definition feed over the main bar. This was the one that would give me the names I needed to write their death warrants,

They were laughing. Jessica. I recognized the green hair and the arrogant tilt of her head. Her father owned the biggest diamond firm in the country, and he’d raised a fucking bully. She leaned in close to Gianna’s ear. I bypassed the lag and fast-forwarded the timestamp, tracking them as they moved toward the edge of the hunting grounds.

Jessica held something between her fingers. A small, bright blue pill.

Molly.

She waited for the perfect moment, when Gianna gasped to speak, she shoved the pill deep into her throat.

I watched Gianna’s body react instantly. She began to cough violently, her frame shaking with the force of it. Her face turned a dark, painful red on the screen as she struggled to pull air into her lungs, the chemical forced down her gullet. The girls didn’t help. They just laughed and started dragging her toward the tree line.

A roar of pure rage ripped out of my chest.

+15 BU

“SICK BITCHES!” I screamed.

I didn’t think. I just acted. I slammed the laptop shut and threw it across the room. It hit the far wall and shattered into pieces, wires and plastic flying everywhere.

I stood up, my chair flying backward and hitting the floor. My blood felt like boiling oil. They had forced her into a nightmare just because they were bored.

I turned around, my chest heaving, my eyes searching the room.

My gaze fell on the couch.

Gianna was still there. She was laying flat on her back, her head tilted toward the ceiling. She wasn’t watching the room. She wasn’t watching me. She was staring at the light on the ceiling with wide, glassy eyes. She looked so peaceful, her fingers moving slowly over the velvet, completely lost in the chemical world they had forced her into.

+15 Bgnus

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But seeing Ciro sitting there, the man who brought her here, made that fire roar.

I walked toward him. I didn't say a word until I was standing right over him, my shadow swallowing him whole.

"I... I just wanted to hang out with her," Ciro whispered, he wiped a smear of blood from his lip. "I swear. I didn't know she was that important. I thought she was just... your dad's new kid. I didn't think it was a big deal."

I dropped down, grabbing him by the front of his ruined shirt and slamming him back against the wall. I got so close to his face that I could see the tiny red veins in his eyes.

"Not a big deal?" I hissed.

"Boss, please-"

"What were you doing with her, Ciro?" I barked, the question exploding out of me. I shook him so hard his head snapped back against the wall once more, "What were you doing? Tell me. Do you want to fuck her? Is that it? You look at her and see something you can just take?"

I felt a sick, hot knot of anger tighten in my chest, making it hard to breathe.

"Do you want her?" I leaned in even closer, my teeth bared. "You want to be her boyfriend? You want to hold her hand and take her to movies while she's under our roof? Is that the dream, Ciro?"

"No! No, I swear, it wasn't like that!"

I let out a dark laugh that didn't feel like mine. I pointed a shaking finger at Gianna. She was still laying there, her head tilted back, her eyes fixed on the ceiling as if she were watching a different world.

"She looked like easy prey to you, didn't she?" I snarled, "You saw a girl who was lonely, a girl who didn't know the rules, and you thought you could be the one to show her around? You thought you could be the big man?"

I dug my fingers into the bone of his jaw, squeezing until I felt his skin bunch up under my grip. I wanted to bruise him. I wanted him to feel the exact moment my mercy ran out. He let out a small, pathetic whimper, his eyes darting around the room like a trapped rat.

"Do you want to fuck my stepsister, Ciro? Hm? Is that the plan?"

I gave his head a violent shake, snapping his neck back and forth until his teeth rattled. He looked like he was about to cry.

“No, Boss, I-”

I didn’t let him finish the lie. I pulled my fist back and buried it deep into the center of his face. The sound of the impact was dull and heavy, like a hammer hitting a piece of meat. It shut him right up.

He slumped back, his head hitting the floor with a hollow thud. I stood over him, my knuckles throbbing with a satisfying heat. That punch wasn’t for the rules. It wasn’t for the family. It was for the image in my head of him even looking at her. It was for the fact that he thought he could bring someone like Gianna into a place like this.

“If I ever see you within ten feet of her again,” I said, “I won’t just break your bones. I will make sure there isn’t enough of you left for a funeral. Do you understand me?”

Ciro nodded frantically and I turned my back on him, my eyes falling on Gianna.

“Get up,” I ordered.

+15 Benus

Ciro scrambled to his feet, and wiped his bloody nose with the back of his hand, looking at me with pleading eyes. He was waiting for a bullet. He was waiting for the end.

“You aren’t patrolling the mansion anymore,” I told him, “You aren’t going to be a guard. You aren’t going to wear a suit. You aren’t going to be anywhere near this house, and you sure as hell aren’t going to be anywhere near my family.”

I continued looking at her as I said the words.

“You’re going to the docks,” I hissed, “The south side. The fish packing plant. You’re going to spend your days knee-deep in guts and salt. You’re going to haul crates until your back breaks and scrub the floors until your hands bleed. You are the lowest man in this family now.”

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The docks were where we sent the men we wanted to forget. It was back-breaking, filthy work that smelled of rot and death. It was a death sentence for his social life, his ego, and his future.

“Boss, please... the docks? I can’t-”

“You’ll do exactly what I say,” I ordered, “Or I can just drag you back to that hunting ground and leave you there for the dogs. At the docks, you’ll stay in the dark where you belong. If I even hear a whisper that you’ve stepped foot in the city center, or if I see your face on a security camera within a mile of Gianna, I will personally feed you to the bay.”

I walked over to the door and yanked it open that made the guards in the hall jump to attention./

“Get him out of my sight,” I snapped, “Take him to the harbor tonight. Don’t let him stop to pack a bag,” I cut him off, my glare pinning him to the spot, “He goes with exactly what he has on. If he’s still on this estate in ten minutes, I’m holding you responsible.”

That was all they needed to hear. They dragged him out of the room, his pleas fading down the long hallway until a heavy door slammed shut somewhere in the distance.

The only sound left was the soft, rhythmic breathing of the girl on the couch.

I walked over and sat on the very edge of the couch. She was still staring at the ceiling, her eyes huge and dark, reflecting the dim light like two black diamonds.

Then, her head tilted. Slowly. Very slowly.

She looked at me, and her face softened into something loose and dreamy. She reached out. She didn’t touch my chest this time. Her hand traveled higher, her touch light as a feather, until her thumb brushed the bridge of my

nose.

“Right there,” she whispered, “I hit you right there.”

I felt my jaw tighten. I remembered the punch. I remembered the sting of it, “Yeah. You did.”

She let out a soft, bubbly giggle, and leaned in closer, her heat blooming against my side. She raised one finger and tapped the tip of my nose.

“You deserved it,” she murmured, “You’re so mean. So I was mean back.”

I let out an annoyed breath, “If you’re so tough,” I snapped, “why didn’t you punch the shit out of Jessica? Why did you let those bitches touch you?”

She flinched, just a tiny bit, and the hate flared back in her eyes for a second. She grabbed the lapel of my jacket, her knuckles white as she pulled me toward her. Even drugged, she had that fire in her.

“Who is Jessica?” she asked, her face inches from mine.

She slumped back against me then, her strength leaving her as fast as it had come. She leaned her head into the crook of my neck. I froze. Every muscle in my body went stone-hard. I could feel the curve of her hip against my thigh and the way her heartbeat was trying to match mine.

I tried to ignore it. I tried to focus on the rage, on the rules, on the word sister.

“Okay,” I snapped, though my voice wasn’t as steady as I wanted, “I’m taking you home. Can you walk, or is your brain too fried?”

I stood up, offering her a hand. Gianna looked at my hand, then up at my face. She reached out, but instead of taking my hand, she wrapped her arms around her own knees, looking up at me like I was the one being difficult.

“L/can walk,” she said, her voice trailing off into a hum. “I’m strong. I don’t need you to help me.”

She tried to shift, but her bandaged feet hit the floor and she winced, her face going pale. She looked back up at me.

“But,” she breathed, “I think I’d prefer if you picked me up. Might as well make yourself useful.”

“Fine,” I muttered, leaning down, “But don’t get used to it.”

I scooped her up. She felt lighter than she should. I carried her out the back exit, past the stone pillars, to where my matte-black Ducati was parked.

hapter 40

+15 Bgnus

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I looked at the bike, then at her. She was swaying in my arms, her head lolling back, eyes half-closed as she hummed some tuneless song.

“Dammit,” I muttered.

If I put her on the back, she’d slide right off the seat the second I hit sixty. She didn’t have the strength to hold on, and her brain was too fried to care about the pavement.

“Raphael,” she whispered, her fingers trailing over the collar of my leather jacket. “The bike is pretty.”

“Shut up, Gianna,” I said.

I swung my leg over the seat, kicked the kickstand up and looked at the narrow space between me and the handlebars.

It was the only way.

I grabbed her by the waist, lifting her high. I sat her right on the cold metal of the fuel tank, facing me. Her legs fell naturally over my thighs, her knees hooking around my hips. I pulled her forward until her chest was squished flat against my bare skin.

Fuck.

Her skin was hot, burning with the drug and mine was cold, but where we touched, it felt like a fuse had been lit. Because she was sitting on the tank, her core was pressed right against my fly. I felt my body react instantly, a hard ache blooming in my pants that made me want to punch a wall.

I was just a man.

And having her right there, wrapped around me like a vine wasn’t a good idea.

“Wrap your arms around my neck,” I snapped, “Now.”

She leaned in, burying her face in the crook of my neck. She looped her arms behind my head, pulling herself even tighter against me until there wasn’t a hair’s breadth of space left.

“So warm,” she sighed.

She shifted her weight, grinding slightly against me as she tried to get comfortable.

“Don’t move,” I hissed, my hands gripping the handlebars so hard the rubber started to groan, “Hold onto me tight or you’re going to fall off and paint the road red. You hear me?”

“I hear you,” she murmured into my skin.

I looked down at her and felt like a fucking animal. My dick was straining against my jeans, throbbing with every breath she took. It was a betrayal. My mind knew she was off-limits. My mind knew she was family. But my body didn’t give a shit about names or rules. It just wanted to turn the bike off and take her back inside.

“Fucking hell,” I whispered to the wind.

I kicked the engine to life. The bike roared, the vibration shaking through the frame, through the tank, and straight into both of us. She let out a tiny, shocked gasp and squeezed me harder, her legs tightening around my waist. The friction was enough to make me see stars.

I leaned forward, my chest pressing her even flatter, and twisted the throttle. We took off into the dark, the wind

whipping around us, but all I could feel was the heat of the girl who was supposed to be my sister.

I kept my eyes locked on the black asphalt, my knuckles white as I gripped the throttle. I was trying to focus on the turn, on the speed, on anything that wasn't the way her inner thighs were squeezing my waist. But every time I hit a bump in the road, she slid against the denim of my jeans, a slow friction that made a low, cursed growl catch in my throat.

Fuck.

I looked down for a split second, just to make sure she wasn't slipping.

Gianna was looking up.

The wind had blown her wild hair back, exposing the pale, smooth line of her throat. Her green eyes were wide, glowing in the moonlight, and they were fixed entirely on me. She looked at the hard line of my jaw, the scars on my neck.

Then she leaned up, her nose brushing the underside of my chin, her lips just a hair's breadth from the pulse jumping in my throat.

I cursed under my breath, a string of foul words that the wind whipped away. I twisted the throttle harder, the bike screaming as we hit eighty, then ninety. I needed the speed to kill the heat.

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