

My Stepbrother's Dirty Little Secret

Chapter 8

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Gianna

+15 Bonus

“Is that so?” A deep, smooth voice asked from behind me.

I spun around so fast I almost tripped. Standing in our living room was Don Salvatore Capone. He wasn’t alone. Next to him stood a younger man I recognized as Don Vincenzo-his oldest son-and at least ten guards who seemed to fill every inch of the small space.

When did they even get here? My heart was hammering against my ribs. I had just called them predators, and now the king of the jungle was standing in my kitchen.

Salvatore didn’t look angry. In fact, he looked... amused. He stepped forward, a small smile playing on his lips.

“Buongiorno, Gianna,” he said. He didn’t raise his hand to strike me, instead, he looked at me with a soft gaze that made my anger feel small, “It’s good to be protective of your family. I respect that. I hope one day you’ll see us as part of that family, too.”

He turned to my mother and gave her a polite nod, his expression softening even more. He looked genuinely happy to see her.

Vincenzo, on the other hand, was like a wall of ice. He stood perfectly still, his suit without a single wrinkle. He didn’t smile, and his eyes stayed flat and dark as he scanned the room. He looked at me, and for a second, I felt like a bug under a microscope.

“The cars are waiting,” Vincenzo said. He wasn’t being mean, but he wasn’t being friendly either. He was just a man who wanted to get the job done, “We should move quickly. We have a schedule to keep.”

He didn’t comment on the names I’d called them. He just stepped aside to let the guards start grabbing

our boxes.

Salvatore reached out and lightly patted my shoulder, “Don’t be afraid, little one. You’ll find that we take very good care of what belongs to us.”

I swallowed hard, the hateful words I had prepared dying on my tongue. It was hard to keep up the act of hating him when he looked at my mother with such soft eyes.

Suddenly, a blur of movement shot past me.

“Papà Salvatore!” Jules screamed.

She threw herself at him with total trust. I held my breath, expecting him to flinch or push her away, but he didn’t. Instead, he let out a deep, warm laugh. He caught her easily, lifting her off the floor as if she weighed nothing.

“There’s my little bird,” he said, his voice full of genuine affection. He tucked her head under his chin,

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holding her close while she giggled.

I felt a sharp pang in my chest. It was a beautiful sight, the kind of fatherly love I had always told myself didn’t exist in that world. But then I looked over at Vincenzo. He was still standing by the door, his face like stone, watching the display with zero emotion. He looked like a man who was already counting the minutes until he could leave.

“Are you ready for your new room, Jules?” Salvatore asked, pulling back to look at her. “It’s got a view of the entire gardens. You can see all kinds of birds come out to eat in the mornings.”

Jules nodded fast, her eyes shining. She was already sold. She was already under his spell.

I looked at my mother, who was smiling through tears of relief. She thought this was the beginning of a fairy tale. I looked back at the rows of guards and the cold, silent Vincenzo. I knew better.

This wasn’t a fairy tale. It was a takeover.

Once we arrived at the estate, we were greeted by the women who had managed to survive life with these men. I tried to keep my guard up, but I knew I had to be polite if I wanted to last a week here.

I met Claire first. She was the wife of Don Vincenzo. They had a young daughter named Aurelia, and Claire was already pregnant with their second. She seemed to adore her husband, though, which I couldn’t quite wrap my head around.

Then there was Madeleine. She was the wife of the underboss, Adriano. She was much softer, with a gentle way of speaking that made you want to trust her. She talked a lot, and had a friendly warmth that felt out of place in a house of killers. She and Adriano had a son named Nero.

Named after the Roman emperor, I guess. I wondered if the kid would grow up to be a tyrant or if he'd inherited his mother's sweetness.

I watched them both closely as they welcomed us. They seemed happy, genuinely happy. They looked at their husbands like they were heroes, not monsters.

They led us deep into the mansion. The place was huge, but it felt like every hallway was watching us. Each person had their own space, but naturally, we were placed in Don Salvatore's wing. It was clear he wanted us close, where he could keep an eye on his new "family."

Claire walked me to my room. She moved with a bounce in her step. She pushed open a set of large doors and stepped aside, gesturing to the space inside.

"This is you," she said, her eyes bright. She leaned in a little, her voice friendly and full of life, "My wing is just down the hall. If you need anything, or if you just need to hide from all these men for a while come find me. My door is always open."

+15 Bonus

Ruby Walker