

Chapter 12 No.12

Luca Rossi POV

The training camp was hell on earth.

It wasn't the officer's academy we had attended as teenagers. This was the raw recruit camp, the mud pit where the Outfit broke in the lowest level of muscle.

My father had stripped us of our rank. We weren't Lieutenants. We weren't even Soldiers. We were grunts.

Every day was a cycle of pain, exhaustion, and humiliation. We hauled sandbags in the rain. We sparred with men twice our size who took pleasure in beating the Underboss's former favorites.

I wiped blood from my split lip and sat on the edge of my cot. The barracks smelled of stale sweat and despair.

Matteo was in the bunk below, staring at the ceiling. He hadn't spoken much in weeks.

My phone buzzed.

It was a contraband burner phone I had managed to smuggle in. I checked the screen.

Restricted Number.

I almost ignored it. But something—a lingering habit, perhaps—made me answer.

"Luca?"

The voice was a garbled, wet sob, barely recognizable.

"What?" I snapped.

"Luca!"

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14:15 

It was Sofia.

"I told you not to call me," I said, my hand tightening around the cheap plastic.

"I'm at the hospital," she shrieked, the sound distortion piercing my eardrum. "They... oh god, Luca, my face... they cut my face!"

I paused. The air in the barracks seemed to drop ten degrees.

"Who?"

"Some guys... they cornered me outside my apartment... said I owed a debt... said the Vitiello family sends their regards."

I went cold.

Elena's father.

The Underboss didn't leave loose ends. He hadn't just ordered a beating; he had ordered a correction.

"Luca, please," she wailed, her words slurring together. "I need surgery. I need money. They said it will scar if I don't get a plastic surgeon tonight. Please! I'll do anything! You loved me!"

I closed my eyes.

In the darkness behind my eyelids, I pictured Sofia's face. The flawless skin. The innocence. The face I had put on a pedestal.

The face I had chosen over Elena's loyalty.

"You wanted to be part of the world, Sofia," I said softly.

"What?"

"This is the world," I said, my voice devoid of emotion. "Debts get paid in blood."

"Luca, I'm bleeding! Help me!"

"I can't," I said.

"You loved me!"

The accusation hung in the air, heavy and false.

"No," I said. "I never loved you."

I waited a beat, letting the truth settle in the silence.

"I just hated that I couldn't control her."

Silence on the other end, broken only by her ragged breathing.

"I'll die!" she screamed, her voice cracking. "I'll die in the gutter!"

I looked down at Matteo. He was watching me, his eyes hard and knowing. He gave me a small, sharp nod.

"Then die in the gutter," I said.

I hung up.

Block Contact.

I tossed the phone onto the mattress.

"She's gone?" Matteo asked.

"She's history," I said.

I lay back on the cot, staring at the rusted springs of the bunk above me.

"We have to get out of here, Matt," I whispered. "We have to work our way back up. We have to get strong enough."

"Strong enough for what?"

"Strong enough to go to New York," I said. "Strong enough to bring Elena home."