

## THE MAFIA'S OBSESSION

Ayla

I'm awake, but I can't move my body. My head is killing me. Dimly, I have an awareness that I'm tied up, but not in the fun way.

Sal. He did this. I blink my eyes open and everything stays black. Where am I? A car. I'm in the back of a car. It's moving. Am I on the freeway? I can't see anything, but I can hear it. Is there something covering my face?

"Goddammit," says Sal's voice as I shift positions. "I knew I should have given you a bigger dose."

"Why are you... doing this to me?" I struggle to ask, my lips barely cooperating.

"I'm not doing this to you, I'm doing this to your husband. You're just an insurance policy in case Gio fucks up and we need to use you as bait."

I groan as my head starts to throb. The car lurches to a stop, and I hear Sal get out. Then the door to the backseat opens. I wince, completely blind and helpless. A rough hand grabs my arm and fingers tap my bicep, searching for a vein.

"Noooo!" I squeal, struggling pointlessly as I realize what is happening. The needle burns as it pierces my arm, and everything disappears again.

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Alessio

“Gio,” I say, putting my game face on as I walk into the bar and greet him.  
“Thanks for meeting me. This is a conversation for the back room.”

He nods, getting up from his seat and following me through the door to where we can talk privately.

“My wife was kidnapped,” I tell him bluntly as soon as the door is shut. “It just happened. I don’t know who has her, but I suspect Anthony Gonzalez is behind it. Do you know if anybody on the street is still loyal to him?”

His eyes go wide. “Aw fuck, somebody took your Ayla? When was this?”

“Almost an hour ago. Do any of the other captains still talk to him?”

Gio bites his lip. “Not that they tell me. But let me think about it...”

There’s a knock on the door. I spin around instinctively. Then something hits me in the back of the head so hard I can’t keep my feet under me. I fall to the ground, the world spinning. The last thing I see before I go black is Gio the Butcher crouching over me, holding a syringe.

Ayla

Everything is fuzzy when Sal stops the car again and opens the back door. I blink as he pulls the bag off of my head, the world suddenly flooded with white. My head is pounding. My eyes can’t focus.

“Come on, get up,” he growls, snipping what must be zip ties to release my arms and legs. “Get the fuck up. I’m not gonna mess up my back carrying you.”

He drags me out of the car, and I struggle to find my feet. It’s too bright for me to tell where I am, much less to run. Sal keeps a tight hold of me as he leads me into a building and shoves me through the front door.

“You got the bitch!” says a voice I don’t recognize. “Fuck yeah! What about Alessio?”

“Gio’s taking care of it,” says Sal. “And then we won’t need her at all.”

I flinch as a hand grabs my face, squeezing my cheeks. “Such a pretty thing. Be a shame to just kill her.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll get your turn with her when all this is over. We all will.”

The hand pushes me backwards by my face. Both men chuckle as I stumble into some kind of desk and fall to the ground, which feels like wood flooring. Still unable to see well, I’m forced to use the desk to get back up, my body barely cooperating because of the drugs.

“You have another zip tie? I want to do her hands again.”

They push me back to the ground and force my wrists behind my back as I curl in the fetal position. A plastic zip tie goes around my wrists, and they pull it tight enough to hurt. I whimper, lacking the strength to resist them. It’s a lot harder to return to my feet this time, and they don’t help me in any way.

I lean against the desk for support, and behind me, my hands find an object that I recognize. It’s a Bic lighter. Praying they can’t see what I’m doing, I slip it into the back pocket of my jeans.

“Put her in the basement,” says Sal. My blurry vision is starting to focus, just in time for him to lead me down a flight of stairs and into a dark room. He shoves me to the floor again, and it’s especially painful without my hands to break my fall. He flicks on a light and secures my ankles with another zip tie.

“Don’t worry, you’ll see me again,” he winks as he walks back up the stairs. “I know you like fucking the boss of the Razione family. So I’ll keep you around after I take over. For a while, at least. And you can still fuck the boss of the Razione family.”

He turns off the light and closes the door behind him.

Immediately, I pull the lighter out of my pocket. Then I start squirming, trying to get my hands past my legs so they're in front of me. I only barely have the flexibility to do it, so I kick off my shoes to make more room. The plastic digs painfully into my wrists as I squeeze them over my butt, and finally, past my feet.

Once my hands are in front of me, I grab the Bic. I lie on my side, trying to find a way to position the lighter so that I can flick it.

When I finally get a flame, it slips out of my hand. Whispering a swear word, I feel around the dusty cement floor to retrieve it, and my hand finds a rubber band that's probably been there for years.

Wait. Could that work? I put the rubber band around the lighter vertically, so it's holding the button down, then take about 20 tries to get a flame lit with the rubber band still in place. Eventually, it stays on.

Fuck yeah.

Hands shaking, I balance the lighter upright on the floor and mentally prepare myself for what I'm about to do.

This is definitely going to hurt.

I grit my teeth as I hold the zip tie over the flame. It stings, no matter how I position it. But I can see it sizzling, and smell the awful scent of burning plastic.

Ow! The skin on my wrists starts to burn so much I have to stop. The zip tie isn't fully melted through, but it's most of the way there. I put one of my knees between my wrists and push until the plastic snaps.

I stay still, terrified they will have heard me from upstairs. When the door to the basement doesn't open, I take a deep breath and set about using the lighter to free my feet.

