

THE MAFIA'S OBSESSION

Alessio

I feel like shit when I open my eyes. Where the fuck am I?

I'm standing up. But not with my own strength. As I process my surroundings, I realize my feet are tied to a pole, my arms sticking out and tied to a crossbeam.

The way I'm positioned, it's like I'm Jesus on the cross. I'm even shirtless.

I sure as shit don't feel like Jesus. Maybe Jesus after a bad night of drinking. I try to move my arms, testing the tightness of my restraints.

They're tight enough.

"Oh good, you're awake," says a voice from across the room. Gio the Butcher walks over to me, grinning. "I didn't want to start while you were still asleep."

I scan the room around me. Windowless, clean, and bright, with cleavers, hacksaws, corkscrews, and other horrifying implements lining the walls.

It's a fucking murder dungeon.

Gio produces a scalpel, sliding it slowly down my cheek. I try not to wince, very aware of how easily it could pierce my skin. "You're brave, I'll give you credit. We'll see how long that lasts." "Whatever Anthony Gonzalez offered you, I can offer more," I tell him, my words unsteady. "I'll double it. Triple it."

He lets out a delighted cackle. "Gonzalez? You think Gonzalez is behind this? Who gives a shit about him? I sent him to jail. Why would I be working for the guy whose job I'm about to take?"

I can feel my heart rate getting faster as the scalpel slides down to my neck. "What did you do with Ayla?"

He cackles again. "Ayla? I didn't do anything with her. Sal took care of that."

I mouth wordlessly, my brain trying to process. "Sal?"

"Yes, dumbass, your dear old Uncle Sal. AKA, the obvious person who would have taken over for your grandfather if you didn't screw him over by butting in. Did you really think all your captains were just going to lay down and let an outsider take the top job?"

Gio drags the scalpel down to my chest and cuts a long, thin line down my right pec. It fucking stings, even though I know the wound is superficial. I growl, trying not to let my pain show.

"So why are you involving Ayla in this? Let her go, and I'll cooperate with you."

He shrugs. "Sal thought she might make good leverage. Apparently, you've been a hard man to kill. Honestly, I'm beginning to think your old boy Sal might be a bit of a fuckup. You know he was supposed to get you and Nazio out of the way before you even married Ayla? Instead, he only finished half the job. Couldn't get you with the car bomb, and then he fucks it up again today. Our partnership is purely one of convenience, I assure you."

I wince as he brings the scalpel to my face again, and he smiles. Then he turns around and goes to his wall of blades, making a show of picking his next one.

"This would be fun, wouldn't it?" he asks, pointing a hacksaw at me. "But that's for later. That's for getting big old you into much smaller pieces."

I don't want to give him the satisfaction of an answer. My mind is racing, searching for some method of escape.

It's not coming up with much.

Gio returns holding a Bowie knife. "Maybe I'll ask Sal to turn Ayla over to me when he and his boys are done with her. She'll be more fun than Dominguez Gary, that's for sure." He pauses, enjoying my reaction. "I think when I get my hands on Mr. Gary, I'm going to feed him to the piranhas. That would be fitting, wouldn't it? But not you. No, I have special plans for all your bits and pieces. I'm going to encase your skull in resin, isn't that cool? It'll be a great centerpiece."

I'm unable to contain my grunt of pain as he cuts my chest with the Bowie knife, right underneath the other cut.

"It's so interesting how different knives cut differently, isn't it?" Gio asks me conversationally, examining his handiwork. "The cut with the scalpel is so much cleaner."

He shrugs his shoulders, then drops his blade as though it's a microphone. "Okay, fuck it. I want to try the hacksaw."

My eyes jump immediately to the knife as it clatters to the ground. He looks amused by my reaction. "Oh, you want this? You think it will help you get out of your little predicament?"

Gio's eyes flash cruelly. He walks behind the big cross-thing I'm tied to, and to my surprise, he loosens my hands. They fall to my sides, aching.

"Go on," he sneers. "Do your worst."

He turns his back and walks lazily to the other side of the room to retrieve his hacksaw. I'm still bound tightly by my ankles and my waist, but I use all of my energy to bend over, trying to grab the Bowie knife.

Gio looks back and sees me just as I manage to wrap my fingers around it. His eyes narrow and he grins. He moves closer to me and stands just out of range as I swipe at him with the weapon, unable to reach.

“Oh, poor, poor you. If only your arms were just a little bit longer.”

I growl, almost losing my grip on the knife in my effort to stab him with it.

“Okay, okay, you’ve had your fun. Let me get my taser so I can get that knife from you nice and safe, and then we’ll play with the hacksaw the way we’ve both been looking forward to.”

He walks back to his weapon wall and gets a yellow taser, the kind you shoot at someone from a distance. In his other hand, the hacksaw. Doing the only thing I can think of, I try to pass the Bowie knife to my other hand and flip it around so I can hold it by the blade.

My fingers slip. I grasp for it. For that moment that the knife is beyond my grip, it’s like everything slows down. If I don’t catch it, this is all over.

I won’t see Ayla again.

And then my fingers close around the blade, the way I’ve practiced so many times with knives designed for throwing. Gio the Butcher spins around. Our eyes meet, and he aims the taser at me.

As he squeezes the trigger, I hurl the knife with every bit of strength and focus that I have. The barbs stick into my chest, shooting electricity through me, and I scream as my body convulses.

Ayla

Once I’ve melted through the zip tie connecting my feet, I explore the space I’m in, using the lighter to see. The room is dirty and messy, filled with boxes, file cabinets, and shelves. It must be a storage room.

One of the boxes has tools. I do my best to be quiet as I search through it, looking for a weapon. Not the drill. Not the level. The rubber mallet? Maybe.

A screwdriver. I know what it is the moment my hand closes around it. I pull it out of the box, attention focused on the sound of footsteps above me.

If anyone comes down here, I'm going to stab the shit out of them.

Alessio

My muscles spasm as the current flows through me. All I can feel is blinding, incredible pain. When it stops, I'm panting for breath, my body aching. It feels like I just ran 10 miles.

I look down at the barbs stuck in my chest, the wires trailing from them. My eyes follow the wires to the taser, which is still clutched in Gio Lombardo's hand.

He's on the floor in front of me, the Bowie knife sticking out of his neck. Dark red blood is trickling onto the concrete, almost reaching my feet. He's still twitching slightly, making a gurgling sound, and then he stops.

I'm in rough shape. Blood is flowing freely down my torso from the two cuts in my chest, and my whole body still feels fucked up from the taser. All I want to do is lie down, to sleep, but I can't.

Sal has Ayla. That's all that matters. Until I have her back, there's no such thing as rest. I pull the taser barbs from my chest and struggle to release the restraint around my waist, wishing I still had the knife to cut myself free.

Eventually, I'm able to shimmy the leather strap down to my feet. Then I go to work on my ankles as Gio's body bleeds in front of me. The restraints are secured from the back, which makes getting them off hard work, but eventually, I'm able to tug one of my feet free, and then the other.

I step into the pool of blood and take the taser from Gio's hand. It's a two-shot model, which means there's one cartridge left. Walking over him, I go to the weapon wall and pick out a clean knife, then exit the basement and creep up the steps.

I'm in Gio's home. I recognize it. There's the living room, complete with piranha tank. Creeping through the hallway, I see one of Gio's henchmen at the exact same time that he sees me. He startles, eyes going wide. He reaches for his belt.

I shoot him with the taser and he drops. He convulses as I mount him, pinning his arms with my knees and putting the knife to his throat.

"Where is she?"

He groans, and it takes him several seconds to be able to form words. "Who?"

"Ayla," I growl, grabbing his hair and thumping the back of his head into the ground. "My fucking wife. I know Sal has her. Where did he take her?"

"T-to his house," the man stutters softly, looking as woozy as I felt a moment ago.

I push the knife into his neck all the way to the handle, wipe it off on his shirt, and make my way through the house. To my relief, I don't encounter any more of Gio's men. I stop into a bathroom, and thankfully, the medicine cabinet has Vaseline and aspirin. I smear the Vaseline on my cuts to stem the bleeding, pop a couple pills, and head to the garage.

Once inside the garage, I grab Gio's keys from a hook on the wall and unlock his car, a black, 2000's-era Cadillac. There's a shotgun leaning in the corner and I take that, too, along with a box of shells from the shelf next to it.

Sal's house is also in Beauford Hills, not far from here. The drive should be about 10 minutes.

I'm going to make it in five.