

FIVE DEFIANT WOMEN

SCREENPLAY

PART ONE

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FADE IN:

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

Morning light pours into the vast gourmet kitchen. Opera plays gently throughout.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

Sometimes shit happens and I'm one of them. This is my story of the dangerous and vengeful family I was born into.

SOPHIA GUGINO (late 30's), dark hair, dark eyes, eccentric, FRANCO GUGINO's wife and stepmother to Francesca, wears high heels, a tight skirt, and a blouse that accentuates her curvaceous figure.

SOPHIA

(muttering loudly)
Well, well, he is coming home after all. What did I do to deserve this second chance, hm?

Sophia cooks in her kitchen, unaware of everything else around her.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

The minute I know his memory is coming back, I will just have to kill him again, and this time it will be permanent. Ah, this needs olive oil, and this should do it.

EXT. PAVED DRIVEWAY - DAY

(P.O.V.) The opera carries through the kitchen window as boots advance in rhythm, then stop exactly on the flourish.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sophia sways to the music, dropping bowls into the sink. Her burner phone vibrates inside her apron.

SOPHIA

(angry)
Why are you calling me now? I told you I don't want to be disturbed today. You deal with it, it's a small situation. I am cooking right now... ciao.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(sighs, pauses)
Stupid idiot.

A bullet tears through the open window and strikes Sophia in the side of her neck.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(cries out)
Ahhh! What the fuck!

Glass shatters onto the marble floor as Sophia drops to her knees.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(terrified, in agony)
No, no, you son of a bitch! You won't get away. I will kill you fuckers!

The door creaks open. Boots approach the fallen woman. The hitman presses the muzzle of the weapon to Sophia's chest.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(fighting to speak)
You -- do you think you'll get away with this? You can't... wait, argh!

Sophia's body hits the floor. Her eyes remain fixed, lifeless, as blood spreads rapidly around her.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
(cynical)
Well, I'm not sorry. I never liked that woman, I never trusted her. She was evil and jealous of me and everyone my father cared about. She betrayed us all. Sophia competed with my bond with my father. She tried to break me, but I was his daughter, his blood. I have the reign.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - LAS VEGAS - DAY

FLASHBACK. FRANCO GUGINO (27), handsome like an Adonis, and his father DON LUIGI (70), lean, salt-and-pepper hair, sit in recliners inside a half-built house. A big color TV plays The Price Is Right, eyes on the models, as they wait for CARLO SANTO (27) and GIUSEPPE CASTA (29) to arrive with Chinese takeout.

Carlo comes in carrying the takeout.

CARLO
(apologetic)
Sorry, boss. I took so long -- had to get
gas before I picked up the food.

Franco interrupts Carlo.

FRANCO
(shouting)
Shut up, will ya, I'm trying to
concentrate on which door the car's gonna
be behind. Door one or two -- I think it's
number three! Yes! What did I tell ya, I
know this shit, I can read minds!

Luigi ignores Franco momentarily while he eats.

LUIGI
(mocking)
Oh yeah, tough guy, you can read Bob
Barker's mind through the fucking TV? Then
read my mind right now.

FRANCO
(sarcastic)
What, you want me to read your mind right
now? Pops, it was a figure of speech,
Jesus Christ.

Luigi glares at Franco while devouring his meal.

LUIGI
(scoffing, yelling)
Yeah, wise guy, you can't read anyone's
mind, so don't ever say that. And don't
ever tell me to shut up again. I don't
care if there's chaos around us -- stay
focused, keep your poker face. Learn to
read the faces in front of you and the
room you're in. None of this bullshit
about reading minds.

FRANCO
(defeated)
Alright, Pop, I got it. Let's move
forward. I'm not mad at you for the

lecture. Now stop busting my balls, you're embarrassing me.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - DAY

Giuseppe, Franco's main capo, begins cleaning up the pile of empty containers.

GIUSEPPE

(smiling)

When's the remodeling on this house gonna be done? And what'd I miss? Never mind, boss, I don't want to know. Hey, you ready to head out? We've got business. I wanted to help before I fly home -- that old man and his child bride in the kimono will be at the casino office. He's very interested in meeting with you, so I set it up and confirmed it with Jeff O'Conner to get the contracts ready. The Yakuza speaks English just fine, you know. Hiromi, his wife, keeps her head lowered. She's a beautiful woman, you notice? I'm scared to even look at her -- the guy might have a sword and cut my head off.

Franco keeps pace with Giuseppe, who won't stop talking.

FRANCO

(listening)

No, you didn't miss anything, just Pops busting my balls. Yeah, I've noticed. Used to imagine what she wears underneath that kimono.

Luigi gives Franco a wink, tapping his nose, as Carlo heads out. Franco turns back around.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

(kissing Luigi's forehead)

Bye, Pops, see ya later.

LUIGI

(whispering)

Don't forget, our intention isn't to go backwards -- it's to keep this family going, not end up like the families that are dead or locked up. The future is

legitimate business. Here in Vegas, we do everything legal -- the gaming, the gambling, whatever. You're the head casino manager of the Atlantis and the Marquis. Make it so, Franco.

FRANCO

(unsure, confused)

What are you saying, Pop? Legitimate? I like what we were doing. I don't know, Pops, I gotta have a meeting with everybody. If this is your wish, then I'll do it for now. We gotta hear what the others think. I was born to live and die in the streets.

Luigi and Franco stare at each other.

LUIGI

(clearing his throat)

I was wrong to show you that life, Franco. Your mother -- God bless that woman's soul -- she suffered and fought to protect you from greedy enemies. I don't want that life for your children, you hear me? We can live long, healthy, happy, and prosperous -- like what's written inside the damn Christmas cards.

Franco shakes his father's hand, kisses him again, and exits.

FRANCO

(tender)

Hey, Pops, say goodbye to Giuseppe -- he's leaving us tonight. Flight back to Naples, his wife Andrea's having another boy. Carlo will be taking over his post, alright.

Luigi gives a thumbs-up and falls asleep.

EXT. JAR BRIDGE WILDERNESS - PRESENT DAY - DAWN

DON FRANCO (45), tall and fit, olive-skinned, brown hair, piercing dark eyes, wipes the morning dew from his mustache. He stands above his teenage daughter, FRANCESCA,

AKA FRANKIE (16), who peers downfield through the scope of her hunting rifle at her prey -- a trophy elk.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

Most girls my age don't wake up excited thinking, I just can't wait to get out there and shoot me an elk. But I do. I love the power behind my rifle. And if I had any complaints, my father wasn't interested in my feelings, or in negotiating.

FRANCO

(exasperated)

Hey, Frankie, slow your breathing, kid, you know what I mean? Come on, Frankie, steady, do it already!

Francesca is perfectly still, focused on her kill. She ignores her father.

FRANCESCA

(frustrated)

Shhh -- can you please be quiet and chill out, Pops. I got this... and... boom!
Done. That's how you do that.

A perfect bull's-eye. Franco freezes, then lowers into a crouch, eyes locked on Frankie. He rises.

FRANCO

(infuriated)

Listen, kid, stand up. Don't ever disrespect me like that again, and when I'm talking to you, you stay quiet and listen up. Don't get cocky. If you want to be respected like me -- especially because you're a girl -- don't get cocky, be sharp and observe. Show your poker face. It's important, especially for people like us. We survived because your grandfather Luigi was clever -- we took it first, no questions asked. We outran the tigers. You get it?

Francesca stares at Franco with defiance.

FRANCESCA

(arrogant)
Yeah, sure, I get it. Now can I go? I've got Krav Maga in an hour -- self-defense techniques I can use in real-world situations. And don't forget, Uncle Carlo, my ballet's tomorrow. Are we going to make it back on time? I gotta be there on time, okay? See you back at the lodge.

Franco lifts a hand in a playful swat, but Frankie reacts quickly, retreating.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)
(chuckling)
See you later, Poppa! I can show you some moves if you want. I love you, Pops!

Franco glares at his only daughter as Frankie runs to the waiting car, flashing a peace sign. Carlo joins Franco as they watch Francesca.

FRANCO
(chuckling)
What did I raise? That girl's trouble someday. I feel sorry for whoever crosses her. She's tough, Carlo. Yeah, let's go, we've got a meeting with Sakamoto at the lodge. Zoom call in an hour.

Carlo nods in agreement.

INT. HALLWAY - CORRIDOR - DAY

FLASHBACK, CONT'D. Francesca walks down the hallway, passing her father's office. A noise stops her, and she slips into the guest closet next door, pressing her ear against the wall.

FRANCESCA
(to herself)
I don't care if I get caught. I just need to know what's happening in there. Oh my God.

Francesca presses her ear to the wall -- a woman's voice with her father. She sits still, dozing off, then wakes.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

(worried)
Oh no, what the hell? Who's in there with him...

INT. HOSPITAL - LABOR AND DELIVERY - DAY

FLASHBACK, CONT'D. Franco holds his mistress's hand -- beautiful STELLA JONES (late 20's), dark brown hair, blue eyes, a Las Vegas dancer -- as she gives birth to their child.

STELLA
(screaming)
Oh my God! Franco, Franco, the baby is coming!

Franco stays at her side, watching the obstetrician closely until the baby's head emerges. He watches the nurses work around him.

FRANCO
(excited)
Benvenuta! We have a girl, Stella, and she's a beauty, like you, baby. Un mondo di felicità.

STELLA
(exhausted)
I want to name her Francesca. Francesca Jones -- Frankie for her nickname, after you, Franco.

FRANCO
(disagreeing)
No, no, Stella, she's not a bastard. I'm right here. Her Poppa's right here with his two favorite girls. Ah, she's so cute and beautiful, she's got a strong grip. Francesca Gugino -- long live!

EXT. MONTESSORI SCHOOL - DAY

Stella parks her Maserati. Four-year-old Frankie hops out in jeans, a pink Supergirl T-shirt, and Converse high-tops.

STELLA
(softly)

Come on, my little princess. Frankie, you look so cute, I love what you're wearing. Give me your hand, baby, it's your first day. Are you excited?

FRANCESCA

(sweetly)

Thank you, Mommy. No, I'm not excited. I like pink, it's pretty. Are there other kids in there? Are they nice, Mommy?

Stella stops and bends down to her level. She hugs her daughter.

STELLA

(worried)

Frankie, are you scared, baby? This is going to be exciting, and you'll be busy -- lots of activities, painting, learning to count, maybe planting a fruit tree. And you'll sing your ABCs, just like we've been doing at home. Mommy has to work too, and sometimes Poppa will pick you up if I can't. Don't worry about the other kids -- you know why? Because you're my Supergirl, and you're tough. Now let's go conquer the world!

Stella walks beside Frankie, their hands clasped, tears falling unseen behind her Ferragamo sunglasses.

FRANCESCA

(smiling)

Thank you, Mommy. Hugs and kisses. I love you best.

EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE - DAY

Carlo arrives in his Mercedes with Stella and six-year-old Frankie. He helps a frail Stella out and unbuckles Frankie. Stella grips Carlo's arm while Frankie holds her other hand.

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE - DAY

Franco sits on the couch using WhatsApp while he waits for his girls to come home.

FRANCO

(scoffing)

Take care of the assets in that account, Marco. It can't just sit there, you know what I mean? If you don't have the guts, go rub the bull's balls outside that building, or I'll get someone else to handle this. Don't get shaky, my friend, calm down. It's time to buy some shares, and I'll let you know when to trade. You got it? Yeah, yeah, alright. Ciao.

Carlo and Stella step inside, and Frankie races in to greet her Poppa.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

(happy)

Alright, alright, you got me right in my heart, baby girl. Now run along with Uncle Carlo into the kitchen, he'll make pizza and ice cream while Mommy and I have a chat, okay?

Frankie skips away with Carlo as Stella sits. Franco bends down before her, taking her hand.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

(concerned)

Whoa, Stella, honey, what's the matter? What happened at the doctor's? Did somebody mistreat you, baby? Just tell me and I'll take care of it.

STELLA

(distraught)

Franco, I have cancer. Ovarian cancer. I have a couple of months, maybe weeks. I need to know you'll care for Frankie, and make sure she doesn't inherit this.

Franco's face falls, drowned in shock, frozen.

FRANCO

(gutted, devastated)

What? What are you saying, Stella -- you're not going to survive this? We've got to get another opinion, a third opinion. You can't just die, baby, we have

Frankie to raise. She's gonna need you, I need you, Stella...

Franco's voice trails off as he sinks into her lap, Stella's tears pouring over him.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
(emotional)
What are we going to tell our princess?
We've got to tell her something, my love, okay?

STELLA
(nodding slowly)
Okay, we'll tell her something. Promise me -- nothing sad. She's our Supergirl, our hero, our miracle baby...

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
My father loved my mother, and he respected her. Stella wasn't like the other women he dated behind Sophia's back. I remember a lot -- I was perceptive, and they told me something. I couldn't understand that something good was going to die, my beautiful, sweet mother. My father changed after she died. He was angrier, snapped at everyone except me. He had to rely on Sophia to raise me, but he kept an eye on me, just in case my stepmother abused me. I never told him. I wanted to stand on my own two feet.

INT. FRANCO'S OFFICE - PRESENT DAY

HIROMI SAKAMOTO (mid-20's), a beautiful Asian woman, straddles Franco as they have sex. Franco's tight grip on her hips draws a moan.

HIROMI
(moaning)
I want you, please don't stop... harder, I like it that way, ohhh, yes.

Franco covers her mouth as their ecstasy peaks.

INT. FRANCO'S OFFICE - PRESENT DAY (CONT'D)

Hiromi smooths down her dress, combs through her hair, and watches Franco button his shirt. She goes to him.

HIROMI

(softly)

Franco, I'm three months pregnant. I'm going to have our baby.

Franco stares at Hiromi in silence, then takes her hand.

FRANCO

(whispering)

Are you sure? You want this baby? I mean, I'm happy to have another kid, but we have to keep this secret, do you understand? No one can know. I'm taking responsibility, don't worry about that. It's not going to be easy -- I already have Francesca, and another baby outside my marriage... Oh my God, a baby. Do you know the sex yet? What are we having?

Hiromi's eyes well up with tears.

HIROMI

(nodding)

Yes, we're going to have a boy, Franco. You must keep Sophia away from me, or I'll have no choice but to eliminate her. I can hide, but only for one more month. I won't be returning here until next year. You already have my partnership on the casinos -- if anything changes, don't hesitate to discuss it with me. Now you have a family in me. We have a bond.

Franco scoops Hiromi into his arms and embraces her.

FRANCO

(teasing, growling)

Alright, tough Momma-san, but you swear nothing is going to harm you and my unborn son? You gotta be careful. Trust no one but me. Otherwise, you'll stay in the Atlantis penthouse. Let's get you both out of here. I'll come to your room later, give you a proper send-off.

HIROMI
(reassuring)
We'll be fine. I have security around me
at all times, and Takahashi is loyal to
me. He'll kill if I ask him to.

Hiromi exits Franco's office. Takahashi Sato and the driver
rush to her side, quickly opening the door.

INT. HALLWAY - GUEST CLOSET - PRESENT DAY

Francesca cracks the door and peers out as Franco escorts
Hiromi down the hall.

FRANCESCA
(muttering)
Well, I guess it's been Hiromi all along.
I hope Sophia finds out, that'll be loads
of fun. Hiromi Sakamoto, Poppa's secret
lover. A baby boy? A brother? What are you
doing, Poppa? Holy shit.

Francesca inches out of the closet, listening, then breaks
into a run, racing to her room.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
Let me begin with Hiromi Sakamoto. She was
a child bride, forced to marry at sixteen
to a Yakuza boss from Tokyo, an old
geezer. Hiromi was beautiful, smart, and
obedient. By twenty-two, she came
regularly with her husband, AKIRA
SAKAMOTO, wearing a kimono, walking behind
him with her head down. Every six months
they met with Franco -- they were
investors and partners in our casinos.
Then, over the next couple of years, Akira
wasn't showing up much. But Hiromi did, in
beautiful dresses and high heels. She
became the Yakuza boss when Akira got sick
and eventually died. She wasn't meek or
quiet anymore. Sophia grew weary of her
visits and suspected Hiromi was having an
affair with Franco.

I overheard Carlo mentioning that Akira had a heart attack.

FRANCESCA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Listen, these women I saw growing up, having them inside my home, was jarring. My stepmother Sophia, the evil one; Rapheala, the kind one; and the stern Paola. They held executive roles my father created for them after they fled their homeland in Sicily. Their husbands had worked for Grandpa Luigi back then, served long prison sentences before eventually getting killed. They were widows and needed help, so Grandpa Luigi made it his mission to get them and their families out, one by one. They left behind their husbands' crimes -- racketeering, drugs, extortion, and murder. My father had to please Grandpa Luigi. And eventually something big happened, and my father had to cut both women loose from his legitimate business.

INT. THE ATLANTIS - EXECUTIVE OFFICE - PRESENT DAY

Franco is mid-meeting with three women. RAPHEALA MORONE (40's), a petite blonde, wholesome beauty with a quiet personality, wears a Chanel business suit. Her only son, Antonio, was killed in a car accident at sixteen.

RAPHEALA

(pleasant)

Good morning, everyone. It's going to be a busy day. I hope this won't take long -- so what is this about?

PAOLA AGLIERI (50's), tall and fit, short silver hair, aggressive, openly gay, sits like a padrone in jeans and western boots, smoking.

PAOLA

(agreeing)

Yeah, Rapheala's right, what are we doing here?

Franco's wife, SOPHIA GUGINO (late 30's), from Naples, dark hair, dark eyes, buxom, joins the meeting, dressed in a Valentino suit. Sophia is the youngest of them. She waits for the meeting to begin.

CARLO

(observing)
Good to see you all, ladies. Franco should be off the phone soon. Is everyone well?

RAPHEALA
(smiling)
Yes, Carlo, I'm well, thank you for asking. Hopefully you are too.

Carlo returns a kind smile. The other two ignore him, busy on their phones.

INT. FRANCO'S OFFICE - PRESENT DAY (CONT'D)

Franco approaches the table, commanding the room. The women stop scrolling, attention shifting to him.

FRANCO
(intense)
Hello, ladies, thank you for taking time away from your busy schedules to be here today. I've been carrying this weight on my shoulders for months. Before Luigi -- my father -- died, he was insecure about how to protect our assets better. He was concerned about the future. And of course I always said that it is. Today I feel the same as he did. My heart is broken, but that's life, no?

PAOLA
(impatient)
Hey, boss, get to the point, what are you getting at, you're making me nervous. What do you mean your heart is broken?

Franco pauses, breath catching, then moves on.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
So, like I was saying before you interjected -- we've been doing well without paying off any cops or feds to get us out of trouble, should we ever get into one. And so far, so good. That's why I have Jeff O'Conner, attorney at law, and his boys, and I want to keep it that way. Legitimate business -- my casinos are doing exactly that.

Franco studies them; their expressions shift to defiance edged with arrogance.

RAPHEALA

(chuckling)

Legitimate? What about the Sakamotos -- they're not exactly legit, or are they?

FRANCO

(smiling)

As far as our investors are concerned, it's not my business what they do over there. On our side, it is. They went into the casinos with nine hundred million dollars, and the rest was in a cashier's check. They were very cautious with their investment, and I respect that.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

(uneasy)

The fact that I made you, Rapheala, and you, Paola, executives when your husbands were terminated from the inside makes me want to change things around here quickly. Look, we're not from the old country anymore, we're Americans. I have zero investments over there and I don't owe anybody anything. But if somebody tries to fuck around with me and my family, that's going to be a problem. I don't want war -- I'm not saying we're a target for some families, I don't think so -- but let me be clear, there is jealousy out there. I'm a man of my word. I'm a businessman who owns two successful casinos, and I won't let any more outsiders in. We already have the Sakamoto family -- we continue to be successful, they have no issue with us, we owe them our loyalty, billions of it.

Carlo rises, leans close, and whispers to Franco, all eyes on them.

Sophia's face tightens. At the mention of Hiromi Sakamoto's name, her expression hardens, disapproving.

FRANCO

(unnerved, calm)

Paola, I want you to take the first step. Clean up the side business you've been operating behind my back. Don't think for a moment I didn't know about the heroin and whatever other drugs you've got on the streets. Your business with the Mexican cartels has nothing to do with me and my casinos, you understand? Make that distinction clear to your associates and your distributor.

Paola is speechless for a moment.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Rapheala, did you think you could run a prostitution nightclub without people across town knowing, and not tell me? Are you two out of your minds? Where's all the money you've been keeping from me?

PAOLA

(angry, exposed)

What, you want us to apologize for being ambitious? You brought us in to help secure the casinos and run them with you, and now you want me and Rapheala to give it all up? Franco, we could get killed. We've got families to feed too, you know that.

Franco listens in silence until Paola sits back down, then slams his hands on the table.

FRANCO

(outraged, betrayed)

I don't want it and I don't need it -- you wanna know why? Because I'm the CEO of the Atlantis and the Marquis. I will not have any connection to yours or Paola's corruption. I gave you both and your families the life you dreamed of, but you got greedy and deceitful, and now I'm in a tough position. Am I understood? I don't want any involvement.

RAPHEALA

(trying to be convincing)

Rapheala speaks in Italian.

Mi stavo annoiando al casino e ho visto che Paola se la cavava bene con i soldi e non avevo niente di meglio da fare. Quello che ho guadagnato al casino e cio che ho investito con Paola. E un bel club che ho aperto, tu e Carlo dovrete venire a trovarlo. Non posso chiuderlo, Franco. Non si tratta solo di prostituire le loro ballerine professioniste!

TRANSLATION: I was getting bored at the casino, and I saw Paola was doing okay with her money, and I had nothing better going on. What I earned from the casino is what I invested with Paola. It's a nice club I opened, so come and visit. I can't shut it down, Franco, there are investors, I can't do it. It's not just about the girls -- their dancers are professionals!

Franco sits composed, hands clasped on the table, Carlo to his right. The door opens -- Jeff enters with William and Joseph. Briefcases snap open, files come out.

JEFF O'CONNER

(confident)

Here you go, Rapheala, and for you, Paola. Please read and sign. If you need more time to go over this, myself, Bill, or Joseph can help. They speak Italian very well.

Both women glance at Sophia, who's visibly unsettled.

JEFF O'CONNER (CONT'D)

(professional)

This is an exclusion from the pre-existing contract you both had when you were hired at the casinos. This is a legal contract of exclusion. You, Rapheala, and you, Paola, are being excluded from the Atlantis and the Marquis. You will not hold any positions, and you will both keep the earnings you've made from your side businesses. The casinos are giving you both a hundred fifty thousand dollars as a good-will parting gift. This is a stipulation and condition agreed between parties -- you and your associates are

never to step inside or near the perimeter of the properties.

SOPHIA

(pleading)

Oh, come on, Franco, they're our family. They worked hard for us. You cannot let them go like this. Have some compassion.

FRANCO

(calm)

I'm not banning them from being your friends. But from me. I've made this clear, and I've washed my hands of this betrayal. How should I cut them loose? The old way is terror first, then quick and easy, and no one ever feels a thing. That's compassion, and I'm being kind. Do you see the difference?

Rapheala quickly fills in the gaps before Paola cuts in.

RAPHEALA

(glancing at Carlo)

Why are we being punished, can't you understand -- you could have more than just your casinos, Franco. But I know you could do worse to me, and I will accept this offer and your gift. I'm sorry it went this way. I wish it hadn't. Thank you for your generosity.

PAOLA

(exploding, furious)

Franco, you're making a very big mistake. My business runs smoothly because I'm a godmother, and when a woman runs a business, it's like having a mother -- they'll do anything to please me. I appreciate what you and your Poppa did for us back then, and that won't be forgotten, but this? Che Dio ci aiuti!

FRANCO

(suppressed anger)

I'm humbled by your kind words, but you see, you girls got very greedy and never discussed anything with me. You went

behind my back, which could have
compromised the reputation of my casinos.
That's a classic betrayal. Now sign the
damned contract before I change my mind.
And get out.

After Paola's outburst, Franco rises, drifts to the window,
and watches his attorneys reflected behind him.

JEFF O'CONNER
(professional)
Alright, Franco, I'll execute these
immediately. Here are your copies. Thank
you, and have a good rest of your
afternoon.

The door slams. Franco turns to see Sophia on her way out.

FRANCO
(yelling)
Hey, where do you think you're going? You
can't go just yet. I'm not done,
especially with you. Go pour us a drink
and come here.

Carlo collects the signed papers, slips them into Franco's
briefcase, then exits, locking the door.

INT. FRANCO'S OFFICE - DAY (CONT'D)

SOPHIA
(eyes widened)
Yeah, sure, what's this about? Am I gonna
get a spanking? I haven't done anything,
Franco -- if you're accusing me of
something, no?

Franco leans back, nursing his scotch, eyes tracking
Sophia. With a small gesture, he signals her to stand in
front of him.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(playing obedient)
Now that you have me feeling uncomfortable
-- look, I did know about their
extracurricular business, but I didn't
help them with anything.

Sophia stands vulnerable in front of Franco, who glares at her incredulously. He rises, circles behind her, close enough for his breath to touch her skin.

FRANCO

(whispering in her ear)

So you knew. Get down on your knees and ask me for forgiveness, and while you're down there, unzip me and pray.

Time drags. Franco remains in control. Sophia exhales, conceding without a word.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Yeah, Sophia, I can't hear you. Stand up, turn around, bend over.

Franco's hands move under her dress as she confesses. He hikes her dress up further and enters her.

SOPHIA

(moaning)

Please, please forgive me, I will never betray you, my love. I won't!

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Sophia meets Paola and Rapheala behind a towering statue of the Virgin Mary. Dark veils conceal their faces as they kneel, light candles, murmur prayers, then slip to a wooden bench in the rear.

SOPHIA

(whispering)

Look, we've got to stick together, don't give it away, Paola. I managed to tell Franco I knew, but that I didn't help you. We can't afford to have him know that I bankrolled your businesses. He's a fake saint. I smoothed him over, that bastard.

The women lower their voices as a priest takes notice. One of Paola's men steps in, blocking his approach.

RAPHEALA

(retorting)

Easy for you to say, Sophia, but he could easily kill us. I never thought we'd get banned. What are we supposed to do now?

Rapheala's forehead shines with sweat, her gaze tense and on edge. Paola sneers, cutting her down with a mocking glance.

PAOLA

(snapping)

Ah, come on, Rapheala, stop being such a coward. Have some balls like us, will ya. It doesn't matter that we never get to step inside that casino again -- we've got our own success happening right here, right now. I have a new shipment Gonzales is bringing in tonight -- be ready with your best girls, take the VIP clients to smoke in the private rooms. I want to see how fast this new stuff hits.

SOPHIA

(agreeing, chuckling)

Paola's right, grow some balls, stop sweating. What's the matter with you? Let's get out of here, the heat's making my clothes stick. Hey! Father, get a new A/C, for God's sake.

On the way out, Sophia lingers, pressing money into the priest's hand.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

(sternly)

Here, take this. Eight hundred dollars, put it toward a new A/C.

FLASHBACK.

INT. TOKYO, JAPAN - DAY

On a hot rooftop, an older AKIRA SAKAMOTO, in a baseball cap, summer kimono, half-dazed, carefully snips at a bonsai, shears unsteady in his hand. Hiromi emerges onto the terrace balancing a tray of refreshments and a pitcher of iced green tea.

HIROMI

(shielding her eyes from the sun)
Akira-san, koko ni kite nanika nomimono o
nonde kudasai. Nan-jikan mo atsui gaide
dete itanode, dassui shojo ni natte iru
kanosei ga arimasu.

TRANSLATION: Akira, come here and have something to drink.
You've been out here in the heat for hours, you could get
dehydrated.

Akira turns toward Hiromi's voice, pauses, shears still in
hand.

AKIRA
(senile)
A, nomimono o motte kite kurete honto ni
arigato. Tsuma ga jibun de okutte kita no
kashira? Gurasu ni sosoide, uchi ni
haitte, anata no karada o misete moraou
ka. Wakai tsuma to onaji kurai kawaii wa.

TRANSLATION: Ah, so sweet of you to bring me refreshments.
Did my wife send you instead of coming herself? Pour me a
glass, and let's go inside so I can see your body. You're
as pretty as my wife.

(P.O.V. -- AKIRA) Akira waves off the tray, his attention
caught by the young woman in front of him.

HIROMI
(puzzled, apprehensive)
Yoshi, ki o tsukete. Me ga mabushisa ni
nareru made, sukoshi yukkuri shite.
Daijobu? Sa, aratte.

TRANSLATION: Okay, be careful, take it easy for a minute
until your eyes adjust to the glare. You alright? Now go
wash up. You should drink some of this.

INT. SAKAMOTO HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Hiromi guides Akira into their bedroom. He throws his cap
on the floor, lays his shears on the table, then steps
away. When he returns, he glares at her like she's a
stranger.

HIROMI
(alert)

Akira-san, kochira ni kite sukoshi yasunde
kudasai. Watashi mo sukoshi hirune o
shiyou to omoimasu. Kono atsusa de
tsukarete shimatte. Nanika otetsudai
shimashou ka? Tsumetai mizu o
tsukaimashita ka? Akira-san, watashi no
koe ga kikoete imasu ka?

TRANSLATION: Akira-san, please come here and rest for a
while, I think I need a nap too, this heat is making me
tired. Do you need my help? Did you use cold water? Akira-
san, can you hear me?

AKIRA

(belligerent, violent)

He, ore no tonari ni netai tte? Omae,
shirigaru onna ka? Ore to yaru tame ni
tsuma ga yokoshita no ka? Owattara kane o
haratte yaru yo. Ore ga nani dekiru ka
misete yaru kara kotchi e koi yo. Kono
shirigaru onna-me, omae wa marude ore no
tsuma to issho da na!

TRANSLATION: Oh, you want to lie beside me? Are you a
whore? Did my wife send you to fuck, then pay you after?
I'll show you what I can do. Come here then! You're just
like my wife!

Akira violently attacks and rips at her clothes. Hiromi
falls backward. He bites down on her breasts; she fights
him off and crawls to the center of the bed, desperate to
escape.

HIROMI

(screaming in horror)

Stop, Akira! Stop! Argh, you fucking
asshole! Get away from me, stop!

Hiromi fights for her life, gets on top, yanks the pillow
free, and smothers him until his body goes limp.

HIROMI (CONT'D)

(heavy breathing, crying)

Die, you disgusting piece of shit! For so
many years you abused me, mentally and
physically, and I took it over and over
and over! I hate you! Go to hell, you hear
me! Now you're finally dead.

Hiromi, disheveled, takes the pillow off Akira's face and tucks it back under his head.

HIROMI (CONT'D)

(breathing heavily)

I should have done this a long time ago. I thought you would have changed as you got older, but you got sicker -- you only wanted me as your muse, taking pleasure in abusing me. You sick fuck. Now you're dead, and I will be more than just a figurehead in your seat. I will not step down. I will be better than you.

INT. THE EXTRAORDINAIRE CLUB - PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

Rapheala sits in a spacious office, eyes on live surveillance covering the floor and private rooms.

RAPHEALA

(paranoid)

Hey, Paola, where the hell is your man Gonzalez? He was supposed to be here thirty minutes ago. It's getting late and it's very crowded, this is the perfect time. What? What do you mean? Ah, shit! What are you going to do? Does Sophia know?

Rapheala clicks off, deep in thought, fixed on the monitors while the dancers perform.

RAPHEALA (CONT'D)

(muttering)

Oh, Jesus, what the hell -- how do I get out of this? Should I go to Carlo? Oh God, please let me find my way out of this.

The dancers are young and beautiful, exceptionally handpicked by a professional choreographer. The women are experienced. They've signed an NDA stipulating they will see and hear nothing.

EXT. ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO / NEVADA ROUTE I-40 - EVENING

Two men inside a Lincoln Navigator tear down a desolate road toward Las Vegas. Latin reggae pounds through the speakers. Headlights ignite ahead, blocking the road.

Another car surges up behind them, high beams blasting into the cabin. They're boxed in.

LINCOLN DRIVER
(bellowing in shock)
What the fuck, watch out! You
motherfuckers! Holy shit... turn! No!

The driver is blindsided. The Lincoln skids off the road at high speed, flips multiple times, and lands upside down.

(P.O.V. -- TORO AND NACHO) Toro and Nacho charge toward the Lincoln, breathing hard. They rip open the driver and passenger doors. Inside, both men hang upside down, still buckled in. Toro and Nacho fire, executing them with shots to the head.

TORO
(shouting)
Get the two suitcases out, now, hurry up!
Hey, I got an idea -- let's scoop up those
dry weeds, throw 'em inside. As much as
you can, fill the back and the front.

Toro, unaware that Nacho is already walking away with the two suitcases, goes berserk hurling weeds into the Lincoln.

NACHO
(yelling, pissed off)
Dude, you go do that. I gotta get these
suitcases out of here, they're heavy.
Hurry up, bro, let's go, light it up,
pendejo!

The Lincoln's backseat ignites. They stand and watch the flames.

NACHO (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Hey, man, we better go, it looks like it's
about to blow big. Shit!

EXT. I-40 - DESOLATE ROAD - NIGHT

They run, putting distance between themselves and the inferno consuming the Lincoln.

TORO

(heavy breathing)
Hurry up, Nacho. Come on... here, give me the other one. For a skinny dude you're slow.

NACHO
(huffing)
Yeah, easy for you to say, Toro, I got an old injury on my back from my boxing days, never got the treatment I should have. Thanks for the help, pendejo.

The inferno swells, and within seconds explodes. A phone rings somewhere inside the Lincoln. Nacho and Toro continue running toward their cars; explosion debris slams down nearby, missing their heads by inches.

NACHO (CONT'D)
(shocked)
Holy shit... it missed our heads! Hey, Toro, we should have checked their pockets, could've been something important.

TORO
(considering)
Nah, dude, are you serious? We need to drive, now. Forget about it, brother. Drive safe, meet you back at the casino. Wait for the phone call. Arrivederci.

INT. THE ATLANTIS CASINO - NIGHT

Franco and Carlo watch the surveillance monitors covering both casinos, faces lit by the flicker of the security feeds. Carlo's phone rings; he answers.

CARLO
(chuckling)
That's real funny, Nacho. Get back here with the suitcases and no more dilly-dallying, understand? Boss is waiting for your arrival.

(P.O.V. -- FRANCO) Franco idly swirls the ice cube in his glass. In the open desk drawer, his Smith & Wesson lies in plain view. Carlo relaxes in a large leather chair, reading a newspaper.

FRANCO

(anxious)

You know, generally people read the newspaper in the morning, during breakfast and coffee. You're special, Carlo, you don't do anything normal. When our friends get here, don't open the suitcases until they leave and you have their envelopes ready -- fifty K each. That was a gigantic task.

CARLO

(chuckling)

Aw, boss, I'm touched, I really am. You said I'm special. Yeah, just like you said, fifty K each. Why are you rethinking the payments? Is that why you've got your buddy over there? If I were you, I'd have it on top of the table in front of you.

Franco takes Carlo's advice and places his pistol on the table in front of him.

FRANCO

(smirking)

Yeah, you're right, showing it is better. That's why I can't live without you, Carlo.

A knock at the door. Nacho and Toro are patted down, smile for the cameras, and their pistols are confiscated before they're allowed in.

INT. THE ATLANTIS CASINO OFFICE - NIGHT

NACHO, a tall, skinny Latino with a bearded face, enters with TORO, his heavyset friend, dragging the suitcases. Franco stays at his desk as Carlo hands them their envelopes. The two men are speechless.

FRANCO

(stern, direct)

Any problems that could follow you back here? Now this is going to seem unfamiliar to you two, because I'm warning you both, and you know what I'm talking about -- it's not going to be pretty around here if the job you were hired for gets

discovered. I suggest you men get out of town tonight and go in different directions. Understand? Carlo, give them a little more.

Carlo digs into his pocket and hands them five hundred each. Nacho and Toro nod and leave the casino. Carlo unzips the suitcases; Franco snaps upright and moves beside him.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

(whistling)

Holy fuck, what are we looking at here, about two, three million, Carlo? So this is Paola's, and she supplies it to Rapheala's Extraordinaire. I'd love to be a fly on their wall. White China, pure white, Carlo -- but then again it could have fentanyl derivatives mixed in, deadly. Don't unpack it, put it in the vault. We're saints tonight, Carlo.

Carlo closes the suitcases and steps to the corner. A panel slides open, scans his face, and a door opens revealing the vault room.

FLASHBACK.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

(narrating)

That's right -- I remember when Poppa tricked me. He said he needed my help to look for a red bunny. I was eight years old, excited, standing on a chair. Poppa said to keep my eyes wide open. Then he helped me down and hugged me -- "it's for your future when you get taller," he said. That didn't make any sense, and I told him I didn't see a red bunny. Poppa went after me and yelled, "I found it!" Carlo laughed and took his turn. My father was no ordinary man -- he loved high technology. He figured enemies could cut off someone's hand and use their thumbprint, but no one could replicate a retina, so biometric security for the Atlantis was perfect. Later we did the same for the Marquis. Poppa took a Bible, placed his hand on it, and Carlo and I followed. We took an oath

and swore that no one could ever know about our secret vaults. No one, he repeated. From that day forward, only the three of us guarded the vaults.

INT. STELLA RISTORANTE - PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

Franco and Carlo, dressed in Armani suits, relax over red wine in a private corner booth set against burgundy seating, exposed brick, wood paneling, and mirrored accents.

FRANCO

(tipsy)

Did I ever tell you, Carlo, why I designed it with mirrors? You can see it all. I like sneaking a peek now and then at the people at each table, but most importantly, we sit facing every table. We have to be prepared at all times. And it was Stella's favorite color.

CARLO

(chuckling)

Yeah, boss, I've heard it before. I love it here, it's a special place, boss.

A marble bar counter, dark wood accents, and an open kitchen give the space a warm, inviting feel -- Franco's tribute, a memoir to Stella. Franco's general manager, ALBERTO COSTA (60), an employee for nine years and a good friend, met Franco and Carlo during their trips to Sicily.

ALBERTO

(cheerful)

Ciao, buonasera, Franco, Carlo. How are you both? Can I start you gentlemen with something? You're both starving, waiting for the birthday girl. We've got everything ready, so don't worry -- eat, eat!

FRANCO

(anxious)

Yeah, yeah, bring us the fritto misto, focaccia, and the little gem salad -- but we gotta wait for Frankie to order the mains. I want the filet mignon after. Oh,

don't forget, I want every table to have a glass of champagne to cheer Francesca. I'm tearing up, Carlo, where's my handkerchief?

CARLO

(laughing)

Alright, take it easy, boss, you're gonna make me cry too. Here, take mine, I swear I didn't use it to blow my nose. Ah, shit, we need food, we drank too fast. By the way, isn't Sophia supposed to be here for this?

(P.O.V. -- FRANCESCA) Francesca walks into her twenty-first birthday party, confident and poised, in a black chiffon organza dress, gold heels, and a Chanel clutch. She draws every eye. Her shoulder-length brown hair and sharp hazel eyes recall both parents. Staff and patrons applaud as she moves past the open kitchen, whistles trailing behind her.

INT. STELLA RISTORANTE - PRESENT DAY (CONT'D)

She greets Franco and Carlo in their booth. Both men embrace her.

FRANCESCA

(happily)

Aww, Poppa, this is so nice. I love you, thank you for this party. I can't believe you guys did all this for me. Uncle Carlo, come here, thank you so much. I'm sorry I'm late... I'm so hungry.

The birthday celebration continues, a towering cake and champagne flowing at every table. Francesca is officially named Franco's successor, inheriting the CEO title and partnered leadership.

FRANCO

(melancholy)

I wish your mother could have been here today. Stella would be so proud of you. Did you feel her here? Maybe I'm drunk, but I thought I felt her warmth sitting right here next to me. Ah, shit, I'm sorry, I'm emotional again. I almost forgot -- Carlo and I had this made for

you. Happy birthday, sweetheart.
Congratulations.

FRANCESCA

(adoring)

It's alright, Poppa, to be emotional today. Your only daughter turned twenty-one, I'm sure I'll be the same. You know I never forget Mommy, I do feel her sometimes.

Francesca opens her gift. Both men watch quietly as Frankie slides the gold and diamond signet ring onto her right pinky, "FG" engraved inside. Franco's and Carlo's phones vibrate. Franco ignores his; Carlo takes his.

CARLO

(serious)

Please excuse me, Frankie -- boss, I better take this call. I'm sorry.

Carlo takes the call and moves to the second level of the restaurant. The restaurant empties out. Franco waits for the right moment to speak openly to his daughter.

FRANCO

(smiling)

Hey, kid, did your old man do good tonight? You look beautiful, Frankie, and I am so proud of you. Now that you've reached twenty-one, it's serious time. You are my heir, my firstborn, and you know about your brother Hiroshi -- he's fifteen now. If something were to happen to me, Frankie, you take over, not Sophia or anybody else. Carlo will be at your side. Hiroshi's a good boy, it's time for you both to meet. He knows about you too. Hiromi will see to it that you both eventually meet. She's been my anchor. She's a good woman, and she's faithful, my voice of reason. But she's skeptical about Hiroshi living here.

(P.O.V.) Francesca sits stoic, listening to her father's instructions.

FRANCESCA

(chuckling)

Poppa, you've outdone yourself, and you've given me the world and then some. What happened to Mommy wasn't your fault. Please stop blaming yourself for her illness. I've been vigilant with my annual exams, I'm fine, no worries there. Now, what can I do for Hiroshi? Hiromi is his mother, and he's a Japanese citizen -- you should start applying for his dual citizenship. Have Hiromi bring him every six months and start establishing that. Is this what's been troubling you and Uncle Carlo?

Franco stares at his daughter.

FRANCO

(concerned)

Yeah, that's a very bold and bright idea, Frankie. But that means the boy has to be protected at all times. I'll have them stay at the penthouse at the Marquis rather than the Atlantis. Our trouble is with Sophia and the other two. I found out Sophia fronts the money for Paola and gets a forty percent cut. I filed for divorce -- she gets served in a couple of days. I don't love her, I never have. It was to help my father, and she's a scorned woman -- I don't blame her. She didn't come to your twenty-first birthday party like I asked her to. You know what she said? This place was named after my "whore mistress," and shame on me for naming it after her. That woman is a real piece of work. I can see it clearly now.

FRANCESCA

(anxious)

What's happening up there with that phone call? Hey, Uncle Carlo! What's going on, come down already?

Carlo comes rushing down the stairs toward them.

CARLO

(distressed)

Yeah, I'm coming, figured you two needed father-daughter time. Look, we've got trouble. Two young guys got caught working together, blackjack and roulette. Management recently hired two new dealers for those tables. Security's holding them. We need to go, Mark's waiting for us. Can you believe this shit, in this day and age -- dealer collusion, my ass.

Francesca gets to her feet, serious and concerned. Franco moves into action.

FRANCESCA
(smirking, joking)
And here I thought you were up there talking to a lover. You were taking too long, so I ate your cake.

The trio leaves the table.

FRANCO
(uncertain)
Frankie, I think you should go back home. I don't want them seeing you when we interrogate them. You know what I mean? You never want to do this, even when you take over. I want your hands clean at all times. We have people to do this.

FRANCESCA
(unyielding)
What? Come on, Poppa, it's my twenty-first birthday. You said it yourself, I've got to take my place, and now is as good a time as ever. You're looking at me like I've come unhinged -- I haven't. I'm preparing for that time, and that time is tonight. I want to see how it's handled. It's important for me to see what steps are taken -- not violence, not chopping bodies and bagging them, alright? I'll stay in the monitor room to see and listen.

Franco and Carlo are powerless against Francesca's authority and conviction.

INT. THE ATLANTIS CASINO - SECURITY OFFICE - NIGHT

(P.O.V. -- FRANCESCA) Francesca sits alone, eyes on the surveillance monitors. Two young men are tied back to back while Franco and Carlo walk into the room.

FRANCO

(smirking)

So, Rudy and Edgar, nice to meet you boys. I don't know why they tied you up. Did you fight them or something? Hey, guys, untie them and leave us. Now that we're alone, we can start.

EDGAR and RUDY are untied by two casino security guards, who exit without a word. Edgar and Rudy immediately rub their wrists, shaking out the numbness.

EDGAR

(mortified)

I'm really sorry, sir, for this, but Rudy and I were just testing a theory. We weren't trying to cheat or steal your casino's money.

Carlo, in the corner, shifts his weight. Franco takes notice.

RUDY

(terrified)

Yes, sir, Edgar's telling the truth. We're not crooks, we're really good people. We were just having stupid fun. We don't know the dealers, I swear.

FRANCO

(smirking)

Well, looks like we'll be here all night, better get comfortable. What do you think, Carlo, should we break off their fingers one by one? How old are you, Edgar? And you, Rudy? Twenty-six and twenty-five, and this is the first thing you boys wanted to do, on my casino's dime?

Carlo corrects him on Edgar's friend's name, then takes Franco's jacket.

CARLO

(interjecting)

Give me your jacket, boss, I can see you sweating listening to this bullshit. You know why the two of us are dressed up in our best Armani? Because we were having a great time celebrating his daughter's twenty-first birthday, and I got a call and had to interrupt our time with her. Where do you guys live? Where are you from? Are you best friends? Where are your parents, siblings? Where do you work? I want everything I just asked, answer now. Are there any other accomplices? Have you done this before? You'll notice my voice isn't asking you a question. Start talking and don't stop.

Carlo's hands crash onto the table. Edgar and Rudy flinch hard and rush into nervous, tangled explanations.

INT. MONITOR ROOM - NIGHT

Frankie text messages Franco and Carlo.

FRANCESCA

(unconvinced)

Alright, I've seen and heard enough.
Please come in, it's time to stop. Thank you.

Franco and Carlo receive the texts and exit without a word. Edgar and Rudy grab for water and drink too fast, spilling half of it. Edgar pours what's left over his head.

RUDY

(staring)

Really, dude?

EDGAR

(distressed)

Oh, fuck, what did we get ourselves into, Rudy? I'm sorry, brother. I didn't think our hand gestures meant anything, but here we are, they think we're crooks. What a night. We didn't do anything, but if this continues, we're going to need a lawyer.

Next door, Francesca paces. Franco and Carlo enter.

FRANCESCA

(chuckling)

You guys had me going in there. Those two are cute and stupid -- amateurs, at best. Silicon Valley boys, geeks, no strategic move at all. What are we doing about this? Security thought they were card-switching and using hand signals, and that it didn't look related to the game they were playing. It seemed more like they were saying "we're losing too much, let's get out of here, I've got no money left." The floor security needs to be retrained -- they need to learn American Sign Language. I'm looking at this objectively, with common sense. There's no way those two are capable of pulling anything off. Let's hold their IDs and passports, have Mark at the station check into their identities. In the meantime, give them food, water, bathroom breaks, throw them a blanket and a pillow. They can sit there as punishment and think about the hand signals they were making. I don't want a lawsuit thrown at us.

Franco and Carlo don't argue, and comply.

FRANCO

(chuckling)

A pillow, seriously? Okay, this has been entertaining. I gotta admit, that was fun, huh, Carlo.

The three walk out, amused, and give the security team instructions.

FRANCESCA

(smiling)

I'll be here by 7:30 a.m. to follow through on this. I have an idea about what I want for Edgar and Rudy.

FRANCO

(proudly)

Frankie, be careful, don't go soft just because Edgar's a hottie. But in all seriousness, happy birthday, my darling daughter. I'm curious what you've got up your sleeve. Alright, Carlo, you ready to drive me home, buddy?

CARLO
(chuckling)
Yeah, me too. Goodnight, Frankie, drive safely. We'll follow you first, if that's alright with you?

FRANCESCA
(smirking)
Yeah, sure -- if I say no, you'll do it anyway.

INT. THE ATLANTIS CASINO - SECURITY OFFICE - DAY

Francesca strides in wearing ripped jeans, a designer T-shirt, and platform combat boots. The men sit up fast when they see her.

FRANCESCA
(polite smile)
Good morning, guys. Here you go, boys -- this is yours, Mr. Edgar Crawford, and this is yours, Mr. Rudy Blaine. Everything checked out, thank goodness. Are you two staying in this hotel? Great. After you get cleaned up and have breakfast, you're both requested to meet at the executive suite on the forty-fifth floor with the bosses by noon. Any questions?

EDGAR
(snarky, exhausted)
Thank you, and I'm sorry for the havoc we caused. Yes, we're staying here. Free again, Rudy old boy. What time did you say the meeting is? Do you know what it's about? I was gonna sleep in, my back's killing me, but yeah, I guess we'll be there.

When Edgar and Rudy collect themselves, Francesca is already gone.

INT. CASINO EXECUTIVE SUITE OFFICE - DAY

Francesca, dressed in Valentino, stands behind Franco's desk. Franco and Carlo sit at the conference table when the receptionist opens the door. Edgar and Rudy step in, stunned to see the woman who secured their release.

EDGAR

(stunned, smiling)

Alright, this is interesting.

FRANCESCA

(smiling politely)

Thank you for being on time. I want to do a proper introduction. You've met my father, Franco Gugino, executive CEO, and my uncle Carlo Russo, COO and partner. I am Francesca Gugino, executive CEO. Now that's established, I'm sure your minds are racing, so I'll be quick about it. I'm offering you both a real job within my company. I'll start with you, Rudy -- with your programming skills, you'll be head of IT, network and systems administration, software development. How does that sound? Edgar, I need a personal bodyguard. You'll ride with me at all times, accompany me on all my travels and meetings. I need you to keep up your workout routine and add Krav Maga and firearms practice -- I understand you're a good marksman. We'll work out a schedule. I've put together an NDA and confidentiality agreement. If you both agree to the terms, we'll shake on it. Rudy, you'll have a permanent apartment near the casinos. Edgar, you'll stay at my guest house -- that'll be your home. I need you near at all times.

Edgar and Rudy sit in silence and read the contract laid out on the table. Edgar shifts in his chair.

EDGAR

(combing through his hair)

This is incredible, but I don't understand why you're sugarcoating this -- is this because of last night?

RUDY

(suspicious, shocked)

How long is this contract for? And if I don't accept -- is this a trick?

FRANCO

(chuckling)

Rudy, why wouldn't you want this job? Do we look like we run a carnival? It's not a trick, Rudy. You'll have a place to live, you'll be working for a powerful company making ten K a month -- you'll forget you ever wanted to do anything stupid for fun again. That's the freedom I'm giving you men. Plus, we needed an IT guy. Francesca wanted to save you both -- in the old days, me and Carlo, the fingers get cut off. Each contract is for five years.

Edgar thumbs through the pages. Francesca sits beside her father and Carlo.

FRANCESCA

(quietly amused)

Alright, boys, do we have a deal?

EDGAR

(arms crossed)

I'm sorry, I don't know what to say. I know I have a choice to say no, but I'm also excited to do something different with my life.

The clowning Rudy and I did last night landed us an incredible chance to do something special.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

Can I think about it for a few more seconds? What happens in five years, when the contract ends?

Edgar concentrates and closes his eyes.

CARLO

(snoring, chuckling)

Come on, boys, this is easy peasy. And by the way, we're retraining people downstairs, if you know what I mean.

FRANCESCA

(eager, sweating)

Yes, of course, Edgar, but I hope it's not all day. If you two would rather not stay with us, you tell us, or HR. The reason you didn't go through HR is because of what happened last night, and we wanted to give you special attention.

RUDY

(smiling, content)

I'm good with this, and I'm grateful for the opportunity. I won't let you guys down. When do I start?

Rudy looks to Edgar and waits for a response.

EDGAR

(finally smiling)

Sorry for taking my time with this, I'm still shocked from last night. I'm embarrassed to be given this job -- are you sure you want me? I want nothing more than to move forward. Thank you for recognizing my skills and for hiring us. I'll do my best for you, Francesca. So, hell yeah, let's do this.

Francesca stands; the others exchange handshakes. Francesca and Edgar approach each other with visible caution.

FRANCO AND CARLO

(chuckling together)

Congratulations to you both. Welcome to the family. Edgar, you've got the biggest responsibility now.

CARLO

(chuckling)

Wow, kid, you were making us sweat there. You're alright, you'll be fine. Please don't forget to sign your contract, I'll take it down to HR.

EDGAR

(nodding)

Yes, sir, I'm fully aware of the responsibilities in my contract. Thank you

for the opportunity. Wow, this is incredible. Thank you again.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - KITCHEN - DAY

Franco walks into the kitchen. A manila envelope lies on the marble counter. He takes out the destroyed divorce documents.

FRANCO
(disgusted)
Sophia! Sophia! "Never," my ass!

Sophia enters casually, half-dressed in a short silk robe, silk stockings, and stilettos.

SOPHIA
(sultry)
Yes, Don Gugino, dear husband. I'm here, please lower your voice. I had a hard time sleeping over this, seeing those documents -- I went rogue and stabbed it with a pen.

Sophia walks toward Franco with a slow, seductive sway. Franco stands with his arms folded, alert to both her presence and her state of mind.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(attempting to seduce)
You cannot blame me, my love, I need you and you need me. You'll miss all of this. I'm always ready for you, Franco.

Sophia steps in close, reaching for his hand, guiding it between her legs. He turns his head, refusing the kiss.

FRANCO
(repulsed)
No -- not this time. You disgust me, and our relationship was never love. It was a convenience for my father -- he got sick, and I did him a favor. Every day he was tormented seeing you like this, knowing he could never have you. He begged me to marry you, give you a home and a place in my family. And what did you do? You disrespected me and kept living your lies.

I know everything. Sign the paper and be free.

Franco rips his hand free, puts distance between them, and washes his hands at the sink.

SOPHIA
(mortified, sniffing)
You're an asshole. Sei uno stronzo! You can forget about me signing the divorce papers -- you're stuck with me. Call it a punishment.

Sophia regains her composure and leaves the kitchen. Franco snatches up the documents, heads to his office, and shreds what's left.

EXT. HENDERSON EXECUTIVE AIRPORT - DAY

(P.O.V. -- HIROMI) Hiromi watches a Gulfstream G650 land. She descends the steps with Hiroshi, a tall, handsome sixteen-year-old, as Takahashi guides them toward a private corridor for VIP customs and immigration clearance. Once cleared, they're ushered into a limo heading to the Marquis Casino Hotel.

INT. THE MARQUIS - PENTHOUSE SUITE - DAY

Franco and Francesca wait for Hiromi and Hiroshi in their two-bedroom suite. A knock, and the door flies open. Takahashi's bellman escorts him to his suite.

FRANCO
(excited)
Whoa, hello, everyone! Wow, you're almost my height, Hiroshi-san. Come here, let me look at you. Can I give you a hug? A bear hug! Hi, my son, I've missed you so much. Thank you for the hug. Alright, I want you to meet Francesca, your sister -- we call her Frankie.

Franco leans in, kisses Hiromi, and wraps his arms around her.

HIROSHI
(smiling politely)

Yes, Father. Frankie and I often talk on WhatsApp and video. I'm aware of my place on this side of the family. Okaasan raised and educated me to be happy, and to prepare for a position alongside my sister with you, Father. Thank you for everything.

Hiroshi bows his head. Francesca and Hiromi share a cordial exchange. The bellman waits in the background for directions.

FRANCESCA

(smiling)

Ah, yes -- Ms. Sakamoto's in the primary, and Hiroshi, you're in that suite. I believe Mr. Takahashi's already taken care of.

BELLMAN

(courteous)

Yes, Ms. Francesca, he has -- he's across from here.

They sit, relaxed and content. Francesca gets to her feet.

FRANCESCA

(overjoyed)

Are you ready, brother? Unless you're too tired for a drive into town -- we could do this tomorrow?

HIROSHI

(thrilled)

Hai! I mean, yeah! Wait, let me get my camera. I'm not tired, I slept ten hours already, no way I'm staying in my room! Chotto matte kudasai ne.

HIROMI

(smiling)

Hiroshi-san, yukkuri shite kudasai. I told him to please slow down. Frankie, happy belated twenty-first birthday -- we have a gift for you when you come back tonight. And thank you for taking him out, a sixteen-year-old is very restless.

FRANCO
(anxious)
Yes, that's nice, Hiromi, dear. Frankie,
make sure Edgar and your driver keep an
eye out. Capisce?

Francesca is about to retort when Hiroshi strides in.

HIROSHI
(high on adrenaline)
Okay, let's go, itoshi imoto! I'm so
excited to show my friends. I know,
Mother, I'm cautious, I can't announce
where I am. Got it!

Francesca bolts to open the door, beating Hiroshi to it,
and comes face to face with Edgar.

EDGAR
(startled)
Whoa, slow down, bucko! You two almost
gave me a heart attack.

FRANCESCA
(laughing hysterically)
Alright, old man, didn't mean to scare
your tighty-whities. Behind me is my
brother Hiroshi. Can we pass now?

EDGAR
(muttering)
Oh, yeah, of course. I'm young and fit and
fearless, ha ha, very funny. Not an old
man at all. Tighty-whities, really?

HIROSHI
(puzzled, chuckling)
Nan desu ka? What did he say? He's very
handsome, ne? Kare wa totemo handsome da.
I'll teach you much Nihongo, big sister,
okay? I have to get a girlfriend here,
okay -- I'll say it to Edgar.

INT. THE MARQUIS - EXECUTIVE SUITE - DAY

HIROMI
(yawning)

Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't sleep well on the flight. I feel trouble is coming, but I don't want to speak ill of anything. I've missed you, my darling.

Hiromi moves closer to Franco. He stands in front of her and takes her hands.

FRANCO
(whispering)
Come here, baby, are you too tired to make love? I've missed you more than you know.

They kiss, hungry, urgent. Franco scoops her up, kicks the suite door open, then slams it shut behind him.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - PEW - DAY

Three veiled women kneel before the Virgin Mary. Prayer complete, they rise and move back to their bench.

PAOLA
(smirking)
What's on your mind, Sophia? What have you decided? Or is it already done? Once you do this, there's no coming back. Do you understand?

SOPHIA
(sinister)
Yes, I have. It's the only way. I will not give him the divorce he desperately needs so he can marry that Yakuza whore. I won't give him the satisfaction of casting me aside. It's the right thing for me to do.

Rapheala glares at the two women as they plot their scheme, a cold chill running down her spine.

RAPHEALA
(apprehensive)
What do you mean? Just sign the divorce, you'll be wealthy and free. There's no love between you and Franco -- or is there? If there was, I've never seen it. It's one-sided, Sophia. What's your strategic move here? Whatever it is, you're just going to end up with a broken

heart. Don't toy with Franco, you'll have Carlo and Francesca against you.

Paola and Sophia go silent.

SOPHIA
(staring incredulously)
You're right, Rapheala, but I've grown bigger balls, and I'll take the risk and do what's necessary. And I appreciate your candor.

Rapheala stands; the other two follow.

EXT. RAPHEALA'S CAR - DAY

Rapheala stares out the window, a dark expression haunting her face.

RAPHEALA
(muttering to herself)
This is going to get bad... argh, what the hell, Sophia.

INT. RAPHEALA'S BEDROOM - DAY

She takes out a backup Android, orders an Uber, quickly packs, and clears the lockbox of documents, cash, jewelry, and her passport.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sophia sits alone at the dining room table, drinking a glass of red wine.

SOPHIA
(looking ominous)
For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy law. This is my solemn vow. Our vows, Franco. Till death do us part...

FLASHBACK.

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - WEDDING DAY

Franco and Sophia face each other at the altar. Carlo and Luigi look on.

FRANCO
(forced smile)
With this ring, I take you, Sophia, to be
my lawful wife, to have and to hold from
this day forward...

Five years later, he arrives with a six-year-old Francesca.

SOPHIA
(hostile)
And who is this, Franco? Why is she here?
I don't want a child here in my home. Oh,
I see -- is this your whore's daughter?
And now you want me to care for her? No.
No way.

Francesca clings to Franco, avoiding Sophia's cold,
disapproving stare.

FRANCO
(shouting)
Carlo! Please take Frankie to her room, or
the kitchen, she must be hungry by now.

Carlo moves fast, taking Francesca away from the scene.
Franco steps into Sophia's space, the air between them
tight with tension.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
(threatening)
This is our home, and now Francesca's. Her
mother died this morning. You give her
some kindness, that's all I ask. She's a
child, she has no fault in this. If you
try to harm her, touch a hair on her head
-- that's my child, and I will throw you
back where you came from so fast you won't
have time to pack. Do you understand me?

Sophia turns on her heels and leaves without a word.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
(narrating)
My stepmother was no angel. Sophia was
unforgiving, vicious, and vengeful. She

wanted her own child with Franco, but couldn't. She tried liking me, but could only see Stella in me. One day I was brushing my hair when she was walking around with the housekeeper. She saw me struggling, then grabbed the hairbrush from my hand, and every stroke was painful and uncomfortable. She yanked harshly at the tangles and muttered under her breath that my mother's blond hair was starting to come in. I said stop it, I don't need your help. She kept punishing me. I screamed, and she covered my mouth, and I couldn't breathe. I bit down on her hand, and she slapped my face. I kicked her in the groin. I ran to my room and locked it. I heard muffled yelling, then a slap. Since that day, my father and Uncle Carlo protected me. My food was always cooked by Poppa or Uncle Carlo. They would even take me out to eat with them at the casinos. Sophia didn't want to help raise me. She wanted me gone.

INT. PAOLA'S HOME - PRESENT DAY

Paola sits upright against the headboard, lights a cigarette, and grabs her Android.

PAOLA
(unnerving)
Hey, wake up. Time to get moving, on your feet, hurry up. I need to make a call. Grab your stuff and get out, take that envelope with you. Shut the door.

The naked girl scrambles to her feet, grabs her envelope, and shuts the door.

PAOLA (CONT'D)
(smirking)
What did you find out? Where's Rapheala? She wasn't in last night, and no one's seen her since Sunday. I hadn't thought that far, Sophia. Do you think someone took her? It's not like her to just disappear without telling us. Ah, shit, Sophia. All these years, I don't have a

clue about that spineless bitch. If she comes back, she has nothing, the club will close. She betrayed us. Fucking hell.

INT. GREENWOOD VILLAGE, COLORADO - DAY

Rapheala, in a hoodie, makes breakfast in an empty, modest two-story, ivy-covered house.

RAPHEALA

(muttering to herself)

Oh, God, I did it. I'm away from those fuckers. Okay, stop shaking, Rapheala, you did good. No one knows where you are, no one. Should I call Frankie or Carlo? No, no, don't do that -- when it's time.

Rapheala freezes at a loud knock, grabs her Glock, checks the security feed, then tucks the pistol into the back of her jeans.

RAPHEALA (CONT'D)

(relieved)

Great, we have furniture. Just a minute. Okay, Ralph, stay behind me. You never know.

Rapheala opens the door. Movers and designers flood in. She's left Las Vegas behind for a new life. A new name.

INT. FRANCESCA'S HOME - OFFICE - DAY

From her desk, Francesca watches over her open laptop as her teenage brother and Edgar play a rough game of water basketball in the pool. Her phone vibrates; she answers.

FRANCO (V.O.)

(concerned)

Hey, Frankie, how are you? Is everything alright with your brother? What time's dinner, and you're not cooking, are you? Their scheduled flight is at ten p.m., and did you hear anything about Rapheala going missing?

FRANCESCA

(chuckling)

Hi, Poppa, what's the matter, I hear something in your voice. Yeah, be here by six, no, no, me cooking? Yeah, right, unless you want omelets, that I can do. I've got Alberto's cousin cooking for us with two sous chefs. Matter of fact, they're in the kitchen going insane right now.

Francesca drifts to the window, stealing a glance as Edgar and Hiroshi climb out of the pool.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

(surprised)

What? What do you mean she's gone missing -- dead? Kidnapped? I've really just been focusing on what's in front of me. Hiroshi's a handful, and a very funny kid, I love him, he's a truly awesome young man, and Edgar's doing a great job. Where'd you hear this from?

FRANCO (V.O.)

(concerned)

Carlo's informant, who goes in as a patron at her club, saw Paola pacing back and forth, overheard her yelling at somebody when he made his way to the restroom. Rapheala's been missing for several weeks. The club was closed for two weeks, then reopened today under new management. Makes me wonder what Rapheala's really been up to. I called Mark to look into it -- he got back to me and Carlo, and the new owners are X Incorporated. Rapheala held very little investment and apparently relinquished her control and rights before she disappeared.

FRANCESCA

(deeply sighing)

Wow, Poppa, I hope she'll try to reach out to one of us. I mean, it's not really our concern anymore, but I've always secretly liked her. It's a lot to take in. I hope for her sake there was no malice involved. When I was a kid she always showed me affection. Alright, thanks for the heads-

up, see you at dinner. I better go check
on Hell's kitchen and the swimmers
outside.

She lingers by the window, phone in hand, eyes fixed on
Edgar, unreadable.

EXT. PATIO AND SWIMMING POOL - DAY

HIROSHI

(smiling, waving)

Hey, wave to my sister, she's looking at
us. Edgar, do you like my sister? Do you
think she's hot, and pretty, and smart? Do
we look similar?

EDGAR

(lightly chuckling)

Whoa, dude, you're being funny, so many
questions. Ah, she's my boss, alright --
and yes, she is. And right now I can't
look at her because I'm on the clock,
making sure you're fine. Please dry off,
big guy, and go back inside. I'll get
ready too, and change for dinner.

He texts Francesca.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Hi, just got Hiroshi out of the pool.
He'll be in soon, after his interrogation,
lol. I'll be back as soon as possible,
just need to get ready for dinner. I can
just order in, don't want to intrude on
your family time.

Francesca texts back.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

(smirking)

Absolutely not, no food deliveries. You're
welcome to sit and eat with us at all
times, Edgar. It's in your contract. Hehe.

Edgar turns his attention back to Hiroshi.

HIROSHI

(interjecting, chuckling)
When I leave, you'll take care of my
sister very well, alright? She's important
to me. You must protect her from bad
people, Edgar-san, okay?

Edgar hangs back, polite, and listens.

EDGAR
(composed, smiling)
Yes, of course, Hiroshi-san, I will
protect your sister, always.

HIROSHI (CONT'D)
She's special, a kind woman, and I respect
her. Please don't worry. Go get ready.

Hiroshi bows to Edgar and strides back into the house.

HIROSHI
(shouting back)
Hey! Edgar-san, you didn't answer my
question! See ya, man.

Edgar waves playfully.

EXT. HENDERSON EXECUTIVE AIRPORT - NIGHT

A blacked-out Range Rover cuts through traffic, Carlo at
the wheel, Takahashi in the passenger seat. In the back,
Hiromi and Franco hold hands, quiet. Takahashi calls the
jet captain.

TAKAHASHI
(speaking in Japanese)
Maiku senchō, kaku no ko ni chikazuite
imasu. Arigatōgozaimasu.

TRANSLATION: Captain Mike, we're nearing the hangar. Thank
you.

The Porsche Cayenne follows close behind. They arrive to
find Captain Mike and the flight crew lined up.

HIROSHI
(eyes moist)
Father, I will miss you. Thank you for
having us, it was the best three-month
vacation. Everything was wonderful,

spending quality time together. Please call me every day, I like listening to your voice, it's so cool. I'll see you soon. Don't worry, I'll take care of Mother always.

FRANCO

(smiling)

Thank you, my sweet son. I'm never too far away, we're always just a phone call away. See you later. Get rested, school's back in session in a few days. I love you, son, and you are so cool.

Hiroshi turns to Francesca and Edgar.

HIROSHI

Sister, I'm grateful to have you in my life, you truly inspire me. Thank you for taking care of me. Please practice your Nihongo, we'll talk when I arrive in Tokyo. Edgar, remember what I said, alright?

FRANCESCA

(whispering)

I love you, brother, take care of your mom. Focus on what's in front of you and the room you're in. Always know where the exit is. Talk to you later, bye.

Edgar gives Hiroshi a hundred-dollar casino chip.

EDGAR

(fist bumps, winks)

For luck, and a reminder of your family. Yeah, see ya later, buddy.

EDGAR (CONT'D)

(cool smile)

No worries, take care of yourself and your mom, buddy. Hey, study hard.

Final goodbyes pass through Franco's family. Off to the side, Edgar and Carlo lean against the cars outside the hangar.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - KITCHEN - DAY

One month later. Franco grabs two bottles of water, turns, and shuts the fridge. Sophia is right in front of him. He jolts.

SOPHIA

(greeting pleasantly)

Buongiorno, Franco, sorry I scared you. Your ears are covered -- are you getting ready to ride out? The sun's not even up yet, but you're a rooster after all. Should I join you and watch the sunrise together, like the old days? The weather will be cooler today. I can make you breakfast first, or have you already eaten?

Franco turns around to return the pleasantries.

FRANCO

(chuckling)

Yes, I've already eaten. Thanks for the offer. Do you even own a pair of tennis shoes nowadays, or workout clothes? Since when did you get interested in riding a bicycle again, it's been years, you know?

Sophia keeps her distance from Franco.

SOPHIA

(coyly smiling)

I can begin today. I have clothes and I have tennis shoes. I've learned many things in my life, Franco, I still know how to ride a bicycle. Maybe today isn't the day, no? I've wanted to apologize for the things that didn't go well in this marriage. I've been thinking of letting you go. It's the right thing to do, after all. Have a nice day.

Franco watches silently as she moves to leave the kitchen.

FRANCO

(taken aback, softer)

Hey, Sophia, thank you for the apology -- yeah, me too, alright? I had my part of the responsibility in it.

SOPHIA
(coldly)
Yes, Franco, you had much responsibility
in it.

Franco closes the distance; Sophia pulls back and keeps walking.

EXT. RED ROCK CANYON - BIKE TRAIL - DAY

Sophia's rental Jeep Cherokee sits in a secluded turnout. She waits below as Franco descends the private trail he carved out himself.

(P.O.V. -- FRANCO) Franco makes his way down his bike route, composed, muttering under his breath.

FRANCO
(shocked, braking hard)
God, thank you for everything -- the hell
-- is she doing here, whoa...

A split second too late, Franco slams the brake. The bike skids out beneath him.

SOPHIA
(waving her arms in the air)
Franco! Franco! Stop, stop!

Franco rushes to his feet, swiping dust off his bike jacket.

FRANCO
(breathing heavily)
For Christ's sake, Sophia, what the hell
are you doing up here? I could have run
you over!

Sophia hurries to him, quick and direct.

SOPHIA
(teary-eyed)
Franco, I just wanted to see you one more
time and say goodbye. I knew you'd be
coming through here, so I waited. See, I
do have workout clothes.

Franco softens his tone, giving way as Sophia approaches. He drops his guard. Sophia fires twice at close range --

the bullets rip through his light vest. He drops at her feet.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
(breathing hard, whispering)
This is my sweet revenge. And your
precious Hiromi will never have you.
Never!

Sophia breaks away, bolts for the rental Jeep. Franco lies barely alive in the dirt.

(P.O.V. -- FRANCO) Vision dimming, colors draining, a strained, hollow wheeze. He murmurs for Stella, for his parents. His hand finds the phone in his pocket. By voice command: "Francesca... Carlo... 911..." Unseen to him, the phone has already detected the hard fall and initiates an emergency call.

FRANCO
(breathing in agony)
Alright, Stella, I can't join you just
yet, baby. Argh, help me, God, please.
Poppa, Momma, please... I...

FRANCO (CONT'D)
(low, crying out)
Hey, Siri...

EXT. RED ROCK CANYON - BIKE TRAIL

Edgar drives, clean and controlled. Frankie, teary-eyed, holds on in silence. They arrive to chaos -- sirens, fire trucks, ambulances, police cars. They park nearby and sprint.

FRANCESCA
(shocked, in turmoil)
Hey! I'm Francesca Gugini, listen, listen,
I want my father airlifted to UMC Trauma
Center, it's our hospital, we can't take a
chance on the road. I'll let the hospital
know now, have the surgeons standing by.
Edgar! Edgar, call Carlo, please.

EDGAR
(taking her in his arms)

Yes, I've got you, Frankie, I already called him, he's pulling all the resources and he's on his way to UMC. Who did this? Never mind -- please, go hold his hand. Keep talking to him. Tell him how much you love him. Come on, I'm here, I'm here.

Inside the ambulance, Franco is pale and still. EMTs press hard to stop the bleeding, IV fluids in his arm. Francesca grips his hand.

FRANCESCA

(controlled, emotional)

Poppa, listen to me, Poppa, you hang in there, I know you can hear me. Hold my hand, feel my love and my warmth. Please, please don't leave me. You're going in the helicopter, okay? I'll see you when you open your eyes. I love you, Poppa.

The medical heliport techs safely and rapidly transport Franco. Francesca and Edgar are escorted by patrol cars toward the University Medical Center.

INT. UMC TRAUMA - EMERGENCY - DAY

The ER doors open wide. Franco's gurney rushes through the chaos, his family close behind, surgeons already standing by.

CARLO

(angry, frustrated)

Fred, Sal, both of you guard outside that door when he comes out of this. I'll be in his room at all times. Nobody gets in unless it's Francesca. I mean no one, I don't care if it's his wife Sophia. No one.

FRANCESCA

(breathing heavily)

Uncle Carlo, did you get to see him before they took him in? It's bad, Uncle Carlo, isn't it -- who did this? Oh God, here comes Sophia.

SOPHIA

(hysterical)

Where is he, I want to see him! Please, let me -- who did this? Why was he alone, Carlo! Oh God, are they working on him now? Please tell me!

FRANCESCA

(outraged)

Shut up! I can't think with you and your hysteria. That's my father in there, my flesh and blood, not yours -- so shut up, or I'll have you thrown out.

Francesca walks away from the scene and cries privately.

EDGAR

(serious, comforting)

Hey, here, take mine, it's clean, go ahead, blow your nose. Listen, Frankie, your Poppa's going to make it out of this. There's no way.

FRANCESCA

(emotional)

And if he doesn't...

Eight hours later, the surgeons come out to brief Francesca and Carlo privately. Seeing Sophia approach, they continue with the report.

DR. DAVIS

(clearing his throat)

Franco was shot at close range. We removed one bullet inches from his heart -- it hit the sternum, anteriorly, which stopped it from puncturing his heart. The other bullet went through his colon and out his back. He had luck on his side. He's a strong, healthy man. Right now we're in a waiting game -- he had internal bleeding and lost a lot of blood. We medically induced a coma to give his body and vital organs time to heal. This was a very close call. Franco has a DNR, should we come to that.

DR. STANLEY

(empathetic, concerned)

I'm sorry, Francesca. Please know we're doing everything in our power to bring him to a full recovery. He's in critical condition -- expected recovery is six months to a year. He's not out of the woods yet. Franco is high-profile, and we're being bombarded by the media. What do you want us to say? Okay, good, we understand. Your father owns more than half of this hospital, and we want to keep his integrity protected. Thank you both, I'm sorry this happened.

CARLO

(eyes moist)

Thank you, doctors. Yes, say as little as possible, we want this wrapped tight until we investigate and find the asshole who did this.

Sophia walks to the waiting room and collapses onto the sofa.

SOPHIA

(masquerading, weeping)

Oh, Franco... why?

Francesca watches Sophia across the crowded ER. Edgar stays inconspicuous in the background. Francesca follows her stepmother.

FRANCESCA

(disheveled)

Sophia, when did you last see Poppa? Did he say anything to you? What was his mood like?

Sophia looks up, her eyes clear, giving nothing away.

SOPHIA

(stoic)

Yes, I did see your Poppa very early this morning, when I went into the kitchen at five a.m. I was surprised to see him standing there in front of the refrigerator, in his riding outfit. We had a nice moment, I asked if he wanted company to watch the sunrise, but he made

fun of me, asking if I even owned tennis shoes. I offered to make him breakfast since he hasn't been home much. We apologized to each other, and that's how it ended between us. Now this -- I have so much to do, no? Oh, Franco...

Francesca studies Sophia before answering.

FRANCESCA

(smirking, bewildered)

What do you mean, you have much to do? You have no position in my father's company. I turned twenty-one a few weeks ago, I am Franco's successor, I am the executive CEO, head of my father's real estate companies and casino businesses. So you don't have to worry about any of it, we'll work out the logistics of your share. You don't exactly have a marriage either -- as a matter of fact, you were served with divorce papers, and you refused to sign them. You don't hold the cards, Sophia, not one. Save your theatrics for your audience.

SOPHIA

(scoffing)

You're wrong, Francesca. I am Franco's wife, and I am still legally a Gugino. If my husband doesn't pull through this -- God forbid -- I have an obligation to step in. And that's the logistic I'll focus on.

Francesca glares down at Sophia, absorbing the weight of her words.

INT. FRANCO'S ICU ROOM - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Francesca and Carlo stand beside DETECTIVE NORMAN SMITH and OFFICER MARK ALLEN.

DETECTIVE NORMAN

(smirking)

Yeah, we just got Sophia's statement. Who else knew his bike route? He was confident enough to go riding alone at that hour -- did Franco have any trouble lately? This

was deliberate, attempted murder. Your father isn't safe as long as he's breathing. We're posting police officers on this floor. Tire marks show a car was parked near where he was shot -- not on the main road. They had to walk half a mile to that spot, didn't want to risk being seen near the victim with a car.

CARLO

(angry)

No, he had no trouble, just the usual casino business. Franco's been happy and content, stays quiet, helps everybody. He contributes to the fire departments, the police departments, the schools, hospitals, churches, the university, etc. So you boys need to go catch the assholes who did this, or I will.

INT. FRANCESCA'S ESTATE - HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Francesca and Hiromi on WhatsApp video.

HIROMI

(voice breaking)

I'll fly in tomorrow night and stay low-profile, but I am his partner. Will you receive us at the hospital, please? It would be easier if you and Edgar could escort me in, Takahashi will be with me. There's no sense to any of this -- Franco's a good man, we owe no debts to anyone, so I don't understand who could want him dead, Frankie. This is such turmoil.

FRANCESCA

(exhausted)

Say less, Hiromi-san, I've already planned for that. Sophia is the problem, she can cause significant chaos. She said if Poppa doesn't make it, she'll step in -- I told her she doesn't need to be concerned, I have someone trailing her every move. Hey, I got a text from an unknown number, I thought it was you, but there's no contact name. It says it's urgent, that they need

to speak to me. Anyway, I'm concerned about Hiroshi -- does he know about Poppa getting shot?

HIROMI

(soft)

Be careful and cautious. I had to tell Hiroshi -- otherwise, if he saw or heard from the media, I'd be a bad mother for not being honest. He has a mature nature, I raised him on a strong foundation, we can't keep him in the dark. He's very upset and wants to come with me, but I can't allow that. He's anxious and will call you, I'm sure of it. Thank you, Frankie, I'll see you tomorrow night.

INT. FRANCESCA'S ESTATE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Francesca on the intercom for Edgar.

FRANCESCA

(soft)

Hey, can you come to the kitchen? I want to speak to you. Sorry if you were already asleep.

Edgar enters the kitchen, limping.

EDGAR

(concerned)

Hey, is everything alright? I came as soon as I could, but I stubbed my toe on something. Listen, Frankie, I don't think living in the guest house is useful anymore -- I've been meaning to talk to you about it. If there was an emergency, I'm too far away.

FRANCESCA

(grimacing)

Alright, choose whichever room you want, I'm sorry. Are your toes okay, is it bad? Let me take a look after we talk. I called you in because Hiromi and Takahashi are flying in tomorrow evening -- I gave a specific order that there has to be someone in the room with Poppa at all

times when Uncle Carlo has to be relieved.
And -- I keep getting a text from a number
I don't have saved. Here, look at this,
it's freaking me out a little.

Edgar moves closer and takes the phone to read.

EDGAR
(grinning)
Hmm. I can have Rudy check into it. Do you
want to text back now? If you don't mind,
can I pour myself a drink? Do you want
one? I can't sleep, I was gonna watch a
movie or something.

Francesca nods absently, her eyes staying on the screen as
she quickly starts typing back to the mysterious message.

FRANCESCA
(voicing her text)
Who is this? And what do you want to tell
me?

A quick reply comes back.

RAPHEALA (O.S.)
(trembling hands)
Frankie, please listen, don't let anyone
know who this is. Swear.

FRANCESCA
(shocked, unsettled)
What the fuck, Rapheala, where the hell
are you? What do you want to talk to me
about?

Edgar leans in, hovering near Francesca's phone.

RAPHEALA (O.S.)
(hands still shaky)
Frankie, I'm sorry for everything, I got
pushed around by those two and couldn't
take it anymore, so I moved away. But
before that, I was with them, and it
wasn't clear then, but they were plotting
something. Especially that Sicilian -- I
believe she was the one who shot your
Poppa. I want to see Carlo, explain

everything to him too. Please, Frankie, I beg you, I'm telling the truth. I'm using a burner phone because I'm afraid.

Francesca stares at her phone, then looks up at Edgar, bewildered.

FRANCESCA

(tense)

Hey, take it easy. I'll share this with Carlo quietly when I can trust that this is really you. You could be playing me, trying to get information about my father. Or maybe Rapheala's really dead and you're trying to con me. Just call me, dammit. Do you have WhatsApp? We can video call, or call me from that burner phone.

(P.O.V. -- RAPHEALA) She sits motionless on the couch, calling Frankie, her trembling hands tight around the phone.

RAPHEALA (O.S.)

(trembling, crying)

Hello, Frankie, it's me, Raphe. I swear on my son Antonio, my angel, and on my mother Teresa, I am Rapheala -- can't you tell from my voice? I used to buy you beautiful headbands for your hair, and pretty bras and underwear -- who else would know that? Please believe me, it was Sophia, she's the only one who knew Franco's bike trail. They used to picnic after he came down from that canyon, she used to boast about what they did on those picnic days. Frankie, she's a scorned woman -- I have no proof, but I'm sure that's exactly what she wanted to do.

Francesca and Edgar hold their silence, listening carefully.

RAPHEALA (CONT'D)

We were at church, the last Sunday I spent with them. Paola asked what was on her mind, what she was going to do. I thought they meant the divorce papers -- I told her to sign it and be free, she has plenty

of money anyway. But she only got angrier, cold, and mocked me to grow some balls. So I did. And I feel incredible, healthier, and like I'll live longer. Think about what I'm telling you, Frankie. Thank you for taking my call. Please be safe. I hope someday we can meet again. God bless you. Goodbye, my dear Francesca.

Francesca's head drops. She wipes at her tears while Edgar stands close; she leans against him.

FRANCESCA

(crying, tense)

Oh my God... how are we going to prove this, Edgar? Rapheala's voice -- it was authentic, raw, truthful. I don't know what to think, but it makes sense.

EDGAR

(comforting)

We can't, not tonight. It'll reveal itself as it unfolds. Come with me. But I suggest you say something about this to Carlo -- he'd want to know, Frankie.

INT. FRANCESCA'S ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Edgar picks a movie on Netflix while Francesca slowly falls asleep next to him.

EDGAR

(smiling, whispering)

Some date you are. Alright, guess I'll just watch this by myself -- as long as you're next to me.

Edgar wakes to his own snore, turns off the TV, turns to see Francesca asleep beside him, and carefully covers her with a blanket.

INT. FRANCESCA'S ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Francesca wakes to the smell of brewed coffee. Edgar walks in carrying a breakfast tray.

EDGAR

(smiling)

Hey, Frankie, good morning. How'd you sleep? I'm guilty, I fell asleep next to you. I checked in with Carlo, Franco's fine. I've been thinking about what Rapheala told us, but it's only her word. Can you find out if Detective Norman and Mike took a statement from Paola?

FRANCESCA

(sipping her coffee)

Oh, wow, Edgar, this is so good, you'll have to show me how to work that espresso machine. Thank you for this lovely breakfast -- you can cook too. You're going to make some girl happy one day.

EDGAR

(chuckling)

Thanks, it's really simple, Francesca, sure, I'll show you. I learned to cook at an early age, to survive.

Francesca digs into the omelet with a huge bite.

FRANCESCA

(smacking her lips)

Oh, man, how kind of you, I didn't realize how hungry I was. Yeah, it's only her word. I need extra energy today, feel like I lost a whole day. What do you think, if Rapheala's suspicion is right -- Sophia has to be brought to justice. Rapheala's voice wasn't rehearsed, it was natural. I can always tell when people are lying, that instinct I've had since I was a kid.

Francesca lowers her plate to the coffee table, then suddenly springs to her feet.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

(eyes wide)

Today's Sunday, she'll be at church. Drive me to the main house, but let's park at my secret spot by the side gate, no one can see from that angle. I need to get Poppa's toiletries anyway.

EDGAR

(serious)
How can we be sure Sophia's not there?
Yeah, I wouldn't sweep this under the rug
either, you know what I mean? She sounds
desperate for you to trust her, Francesca.
Alright, let's forge ahead.

FRANCESCA
(smirking)
Edgar, if she is, who cares -- I'm going
to my father's room to grab his doppel bag.
Not hers. And you're escorting me.

EXT. GUGINO ESTATE - SIDE GATE - DAY

Francesca enters the code. Sophia's perfume lingers in the
air. Edgar follows cautiously.

FRANCESCA
(anxious)
It's never easy being here, in this house.
I had an unusual childhood, I'll be quick.
The housekeeper isn't here today either,
but stay alert, we don't want to run into
anybody.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - DAY

Francesca exits Franco's primary bedroom, his doppel bag in
hand. She spots a faint smudge of dirt on the carpet.

FRANCESCA
(getting down on all fours)
Hmm... Martha didn't do a good job.

Francesca rises and steps into Sophia's bedroom. She opens
the closet and freezes inside the massive space.

(P.O.V.) Her mind flashes to Sophia's words: "He asked me
if I owned a pair of sneakers." Francesca spots the
sneakers hidden in the corner. She pulls down one of
Sophia's shirts and uses it to inspect them.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)
(exhaling, sighing)
Oh, fuck...

Francesca restores everything to its place and hurries out.

FRANCESCA
(whispering)
Edgar, let's go -- Uncle Carlo just
texted, he's waiting, said Sophia wants to
visit Franco today. Good timing to get
this out of the way, and for us to escort
Hiromi in tonight.

Edgar pauses, gently touches her arm.

EDGAR
(questioning)
Hey, what's the matter, I can feel
something's troubling you. What took you
so long? Did you get what you wanted?

Francesca says nothing until they leave the Gugini
residence.

EXT. GUGINI ESTATE - SIDE GATE - DAY

FRANCESCA
(shrugging)
I feel totally gutted about what happened
to my father. I found something. What if
he doesn't make it, Edgar? I'm not as
prepared as I thought I'd be. Sophia's
threatening that she'll step in -- can she
even do that?

EDGAR
(smiling)
Do you want to tell me what you found?
You're the smartest and bravest woman I
know. You've been groomed by Franco since
you were a kid, don't let Sophia rattle
you. What you can do is sit with your
attorney, bring Carlo, and go through
everything. Maybe she's got something on
Franco -- his infidelity, the two
illegitimate children. Nevada's a no-fault
divorce state, so it can't be that. Let's
go.

Edgar opens the car door; she gets in.

INT. CAR - DAY

FRANCESCA
(chuckling)
How do you know so much about divorces?
Yeah -- Rapheala's suspicion might be
true.

EDGAR
(tensing up)
Okay -- and what are you going to do about
it? Talk to Carlo and Hiromi. You can
trust me too, remember, I have your back.
I'm an undergraduate in law, but my
passion changed -- and look where that got
me.

FRANCESCA
(chuckling)
Ha, very funny. I'd say you did very well
-- you have no mortgage, live for free in
a beautiful house, drive expensive cars,
and get paid handsomely. Nice company too.

Edgar drives with ease and steals a glance in her
direction.

EDGAR
(laughing wholeheartedly)
Touche, Miss Francesca. Hey, I'm not
complaining.

EXT. HOSPITAL BUILDING - NIGHT

(P.O.V.) The hospital buzzes with reporters and cops. The
reporters are kept out of the lobby until Hiromi and
Takahashi approach, all eyes on her.

TAKAHASHI
(grunting at a man)
Move, don't come near, or I will hit you
with your own microphone.

The reporter halts and backs away.

HIROMI
(softly)
Takahashi-san, honto ni kowai desu ne.
Piranha kara sukutte kurete arigatō.

TRANSLATION: You're so scary, Takahashi-san, thank you for saving me from the piranhas.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - NIGHT

Francesca and Edgar wait in the lobby, standing behind the security guards.

FRANCESCA
(authoritative)
Let them through, please, they're with us.
Quickly, let them through, thanks.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S ROOM - EVENING

Carlo and Francesca clear out, giving Hiromi privacy. Franco lies beneath the ventilator, fully dependent on respiratory support.

HIROMI
(weeping, eyes streaming)
Oh, my love, who did this to you? We were just together, how could you go out alone, my darling? Please come back to us. I will kill whoever did this to you, Franco, I swear it.

Francesca and Carlo re-enter.

FRANCESCA
(small smile)
Hiromi-san, are you okay? I know it's hard to see him this way, with all these machines keeping him alive. Tomorrow the doctors are going to gradually reduce the medication, allowing Poppa's brain activity and consciousness to slowly return. If you want, we'll be here by ten a.m. You can also just rest, I'll understand, I'll call you immediately. Listen, this doesn't mean Poppa's out of danger. We have to prepare for either outcome.

HIROMI
(nodding)
I'll rest for a bit. I don't want a scene with Sophia, though I don't care. You and

Carlo, if you need anything at all, I'm here for a while -- I don't like leaving Hiroshi alone with his nanny and security. I think in this case he needs to be here, next to his father. I have my hands full with Akira's daughter, who wants a war with me over my position as head of the family and the businesses. Her name is Tami Sakamoto -- the true heir from Akira's concubine, a rotten seed, dangerous, no scruples. I fully understand the state Franco is in. I'll stay with him tomorrow, and every day until he opens his eyes.

Francesca stays rooted in place, waiting for something to happen.

CARLO

(exasperated)

What are you saying, Hiromi -- that Franco's son could be in danger from a lunatic conspiring to take you down? Son of a bitch.

FRANCESCA

(sighing deeply)

Will my brother be safe? You should have brought him here already -- Edgar and I could go get him. Once he's here he can stay with me, I can make sure he finishes his education. I know this is a lot to handle, but he could get caught in the middle of your war with Tami. She might try to kidnap him, use him as leverage. This is absolutely crazy, Hiromi-san. He means the world to us too.

Hiromi keeps her eyes locked on Francesca, unblinking.

HIROMI

(voice breaking)

Frankie, no, I know -- I wanted to speak to Franco about what's happening on my side, get his opinion, but now this terrible tragedy. This is why I'm telling the three of you in this room. He is safe, he has an open first-class flight booked

with Japan Airlines if I need him to fly out immediately. No one knows where he is. Hiroshi is a teenager, but he downplays it, he'll be okay. We made this plan together, not with anyone else -- not even Takahashi-san.

FRANCESCA

(deep sigh)

Then please let me call him now. I'll WhatsApp him, we can all see him, okay?

Edgar comes closer. Hiromi agrees and gives Francesca permission to call her brother.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

(anxious)

Hey, brother, good morning, sorry to wake you so early. Listen very carefully -- please get to the airport this morning, your mother's here with us, and Poppa. She's told us everything, see, everyone's here. Give me your itinerary. Are you okay? Please be safe, go now. Edgar and I will pick you up. Love you, brother. We'll see you in eleven hours.

Hiroshi answers on WhatsApp and sees his family.

HIROSHI

(tense, emotional)

I'm awake now, I understand, I'm prepared, I'll be on my way to Narita. I'll grab an iced coffee at the VIP lounge and have a small breakfast. Please move closer to Father. Hey, Poppa, I'll be there soon, you and Edgar picking me up, okay, don't worry so much. Okay, Mother, Carlo, hey Edgar... bye everyone, see you all soon. Yes, I'll be safe, thank you, sister.

INT. PAOLA'S HOME - DAY

(P.O.V.) Paola's naked body is thrown into the bathtub, her face and body brutally beaten, blood clouding the water.

PAOLA

(gasping in agony)

Help, help, please stop, please help me...

Her cries go unanswered as the attack continues offscreen, her voice fading.

EXT. GUGINO ESTATE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Sophia checks her Android and calls Paola.

SOPHIA

(angry)

Paola, this is the fifth time I'm calling,
and texting -- where the hell are you?
Don't you abandon me now, I need to talk
to you!

Sophia sits in silence, then her phone rings.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Hello! About time. What -- who is this?
Slow down, I can't understand you. You
what? What do you mean, dead? Oh, fuck!
Call the police, and don't tell them you
called me first, do you understand me? Or
I will find you. Yes, okay, good. Now call
the police!

Sophia snatches the pillow at her side.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

(angry, self-absorbed)

Aaaargh! What am I supposed to do with all
this shit!

She presses her face into the pillow and lets the rage
spill.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S ROOM - DAY

Sophia exits the elevator and walks to Franco's ICU room.

CARLO

(concerned, wary)

Sophia, what is it? You look distraught.
Say something, will ya?

Sophia stays rigid, then theatrically breaks down.

SOPHIA

(sobbing)

I'm sorry I canceled coming here yesterday. Oh, God, Carlo, didn't you hear? It's Paola -- she was found beaten to death in her home. All my friends are gone, now my husband. Oh, Carlo, what am I going to do, I'm alone, I need protection. What happened here, why did they take away the ventilator? He can't breathe! Who did this, and why wasn't I called, I'm his wife!

CARLO

(scoffing)

Keep your voice down, and don't start, Sophia -- the surgeons only speak to Francesca, she's the next of kin. Try to put this into perspective. Franco is trying to come back, so will you shut up now. He's being carefully monitored, they even reduced the medication so he can start to gain consciousness. It's been two weeks, it's a risk, but he needs to fight his way home. I'm sorry about Paola. Hire two bodyguards, you've got the money, plenty of it.

Sophia's face is unreadable. Then she storms out.

EXT. HARRY REID INTL. AIRPORT - DAY

Francesca and Edgar await Hiroshi's arrival.

FRANCESCA

(anxious)

Strange, feels awkward waiting for Hiroshi to come out of this terminal -- all his life he's flown in the private jet. I can't wait to hear about his experience.

EDGAR

(chuckling)

Yeah, I bet. So he's never flown like a regular person before? Never mind, that was a lame question.

FRANCESCA

(smiling)
No, not a lame question. It's because they didn't want to alarm anyone, and it was also to throw Akira's daughter's attention off him. And at the time, Hiromi thought it was a good idea.

The arrival doors open, crowds surge out with their baggage. Hiroshi emerges last, striding through with a large Louis Vuitton bag and Sennheiser headphones over his head.

HIROSHI
(unhappy)
Hey! Thanks for coming to get me, that was way too much waiting in line, Frankie. Never want to do that again -- but nice, beautiful stewardess though.

EDGAR
(chuckling)
I'll take your luggage, you can walk with your sister. Whoa, dude, those are super cool headphones. Totemo takai desu ne. O-nedan wa ikura desu ka?

HIROSHI
(cooling off, chuckling)
Edgar-san, very cool Nihongo, dude, you've been studying. Frankie, you must too. I'll get you a pair for your birthday, so we could be twinning...

(P.O.V. -- FRANCESCA) Francesca watches Edgar, drawn to his knowledge and charm, impossible to ignore.

FRANCESCA
(smiling)
Very impressive, Edgar-san, that you make time for everything.

EDGAR
(winking)
Ah, you like? Thank you so much.

FRANCESCA
(tender, warm)
I like. Don't forget I admitted to that.

EDGAR
(chuckling)
Oh, I won't -- especially when you kick me
around in Krav Maga.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S ROOM - DAY

Hiroshi enters the ICU and pulls Hiromi into an embrace.

HIROSHI
(emotional)
Okaasan, honto ni gomen nasai. Oh, Father,
how could this happen? I'm so sorry, I'm
not grown up enough to have protected you
from this. Oh, Father, please, please wake
up. Mother, please wake him up, this is a
mistake, he shouldn't be like this.

Hiromi calms him down.

HIROMI
(comforting)
Shhh, shh, please calm down, Hiroshi-san.
I'm sorry you have to see your father this
way. I know how you feel, please don't
cry, okay? He needs all of us to stay
strong, okay? He'll come back to us, I
promise. The doctors say he's recovering,
he's breathing on his own, he's healing.
Soon he'll open his eyes.

Francesca, Carlo, and Edgar stay rooted in place.

CARLO
(smiling, moist-eyed)
Edgar, can you take Hiroshi-san to the
cafe downstairs, or the cafeteria, it's
open till midnight? I need to speak to the
ladies.

EDGAR
(cheerful)
Sure, sounds fun, let's go, my man. There
are real slot machines at the cafe, and
delicious food.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S ICU ROOM - NIGHT

Francesca and Hiromi's faces wear a tight expression.

CARLO

(uneasy, suspicious)

I got a visit from Sophia earlier this morning, distraught, asking for protection. I gather you two haven't seen the news -- Paola was found dead in her house today. It's just beginning to surface, and I'm already getting calls from detectives, probing me, giving me a bad headache.

FRANCESCA

(troubled, wary)

Sophia must be terrified. Was there anything else?

CARLO

(smirking)

Nope, she was whining about being alone, that everyone betrayed her. Asked me for protection, I said no. We're not getting involved in a war she and Paola created with the cartels. They brought this on themselves, it's on their pockets, not ours. Then before she stormed out, she wanted to know why Franco's surgeons didn't include her about the ventilator being removed. The audacity of that woman.

HIROMI

(interested)

Did she say how Paola was killed? Only because there could be a message in it. Was there? What forensic experts would find is just science to them -- for us it's a different code, in our line of work.

(P.O.V. -- FRANCESCA AND CARLO) In the same instant, Francesca and Carlo realize why Hiromi belongs in Franco's class -- she reads the room, measures the threat, and never blinks.

FRANCESCA

(outsmarting)

Well, I know we've all been focused on Poppa, but I still have to run the casinos, and thank God for Edgar -- he and Mark at the station have become buddies. What I know, Hiromi, is that she was brutally beaten with a baseball bat until all her bones were broken, her face disfigured. The report says they dumped her in the tub. She suffered through the torment, the excruciating pain they inflicted. And not only that -- they raped her with objects.

HIROMI

(grimacing)

It was the cartels, for sure. I'm sorry they tormented Paola. Those people will get their karma for raping a woman while they were killing her, defenseless, already dead. Sick, and reprehensible -- no code of ethics.

CARLO

(uncomfortable grin)

I agree, those assholes will get their karma. Paola was a good kid when I first knew her. She was a tough broad, she just got sloppy.

FRANCESCA

(contemplating)

Yeah, I finally found out who's been sending me those messages.

Carlo and Hiromi hold their gaze on Francesca.

CARLO

(sneering)

Frankie -- who? Say it already. What have you been keeping from me?

FRANCESCA

(smug)

Wait, wait, don't get your undies twisted, Uncle Carlo. I had my reasons for waiting until I saw fit to share it. I didn't have all the details figured out. Now I do, okay?

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

So, listen -- Rapheala was using a burner phone when she messaged me. Rapheala is very scared and alone. She completely relocated and changed her name -- she'd been planning this escape for several months. Do you remember when Poppa banished her with Paola? She said she played along, spoke up so they wouldn't suspect she was a rat. She was never involved with the cartels, never met anyone -- Sophia and Paola only dealt with whoever, privately, and used her just to cover for the club. I believe her. When I went to Poppa's room at the house to grab his dopp bag, I saw a small smudge of dirt on the hallway carpet. I got curious, so I went inside Sophia's closet -- and guess what I found. Her sneakers, the ones Poppa thought she didn't own. It matched the dirt. She tried to clean them in a hurry, but the residue was still there, hidden away in a corner. Rapheala said she was bullied and abused for being meek, for not having any balls. Before she left, she was with them at the church they go to. Sophia was very angry and scorned about the divorce papers. Paola asked what she was going to do, and whatever it is, she can't turn back from it. Sophia said she would not grant him a divorce, would never step aside so Franco could marry his "Yakuza whore." Rapheala told her to sign it and be free, that Franco didn't love her anyway, to move on with her life. Sophia ridiculed her for that. She didn't know exactly what they were plotting, but then she saw it on the news.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)

Rapheala swore on her son Antonio's grave and her mother Teresa that it was Sophia who did this to Poppa. She said Sophia would wait for him down the hill after he'd biked four miles -- Sophia bragged about it, would whisper to them in church what they'd done, behind the bushes. She

knew exactly where Poppa would be. It was premeditated. She was the only one who knew that trail. I'm sorry, Hiromi.

Carlo and Hiromi freeze, their faces unreadable. Hiromi's eyes go stone cold.

CARLO

(clearing his throat)

Where is Rapheala now, Frankie? I need to know the truth, face to face.

The room falls silent -- the beeping of the monitor the only thing alive.

FRANCESCA

(shrugging)

I honestly don't know, but she wanted me to convey everything to you. She wants to see you. You two had a thing before, that I didn't know about? Because she wants to make this right. Edgar asked Rudy to see if he could trace it, but it's impossible now, she only uses WhatsApp. Do you have WhatsApp, Uncle Carlo -- hey, are you listening?

Carlo stands, spaced out.

HIROMI

(infuriated)

I need to get some air, I'll walk around the hospital. I'll tell Takahashi to follow. I need to think clearly about all of this. But I think, Frankie, you're right about Rapheala. I believe her too.

Hiromi's face saddens.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)

(narrating)

I am grateful for Uncle Carlo and his protection all these years. He's old school, hard to read, hard to know his past -- but he's my second father, my father's blood brother, faithful to the core. But now I have a responsibility to protect my family's legacy, my brother,

and Hiromi. She's been my father's equal,
his anchor. I see that now. Maybe that's
why Poppa's heart mended when he earned
her love. My family is complicated, with
many complexities that still loom over us.

Hiromi steps back into the ICU room. She holds Franco's
hand. Hiroshi is fast asleep.

FRANCESCA

(sighing)

I'll take Hiroshi home to my house now.
Edgar, wake him up, we'll go. Call me for
anything, Carlo. Hiromi, I'll get you some
tea.

HIROMI

(tenderly)

I'm back, darling. Won't you please open
your eyes now? Nurse, fresh towels and a
washing basin with water, and something
for his lips, thank you. That would be
great, Frankie. Edgar-san, you've become a
friend, thank you.

EDGAR

(chuckling)

Thanks for saying that, Hiromi-san, yeah,
he's a special young man.

Alone with Franco, Hiromi gently washes his face. With
careful fingers, she applies balm to his dry lips,
murmuring under her breath.

FRANCO

(faint whisper, REM)

Hiromi, my love, you're here. It was
Sophia...

Hiromi jolts up in surprise.

HIROMI

(tears pouring)

Yes, my love, I'm here. I'm here, shhh,
please don't speak so soon. I know,
Franco. And Frankie knows. Shhh... it's
wonderful to see your eyes looking at me.

Franco fights hard to focus through the fog. He gently squeezes Hiromi's hand.

Hiromi sends a group text: "Your Poppa is awake! Hurry, come back, he wants to see you all!"

Carlo bursts out of the elevator, spilling tea across the floor. Another elevator opens; Francesca and Hiroshi rush out, Edgar sprinting behind them, blocking the nurses.

CARLO
(cursing)
Ah, shit, this fucking tea, ouch! Ah, to hell with it.

He dumps the cups in the trash. In the room, the doctors are already there.

DR. DAVIS
(looking into Franco's eyes)
Welcome back, Franco. Do you know what happened to you? How many fingers am I holding up? Do you recognize everyone in the room -- slowly, say their names. Ah, well done, good job, sir.

DR. STANLEY
(smiling casually)
Now he'll be in rehab to regain strength in his muscles and his back. His sternum will take time to heal, it's a big bone, so no hugging. We'll move him to a bigger room tonight -- you're graduating out of the ICU into a VIP room. Yeah! Okay, I can answer any concerns.

CARLO
(chuckling)
When can he take a shower? Will he still have wrapping around his chest? What kind of food can he eat?

The concerns are clarified. The ICU team readies Franco for the move to an undisclosed private room. Franco's family walks behind, following.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - NIGHT

A spacious, beautifully appointed room, reclining sofas arranged for Franco's family. Outside, security remains on high alert.

EDGAR

(whispering)

Hey, Frankie, I'll stretch out in the waiting room with my blanket, just across, not far. I'd feel better in front of this door, and so would Takahashi-san.

FRANCESCA

(whispering back)

Okay, are you sure, and you'll sleep some, okay? Bye, goodnight.

EDGAR

(winking at her)

Yes, I'll sleep some. You try too.
Goodnight.

A snore breaks out from Carlo. Hiroshi reclines with his headset, fast asleep next to Hiromi. Francesca sits close to Franco's bed.

FRANCO

(whispering)

Frankie, Frankie, psst, are you awake?
Come closer, honey, I need to speak to you.

FRANCESCA

(waking, tears)

Hey, Poppa, what is it, are you okay?
Should I get Dr. Stanley? Poppa, I'm so happy I can hear your voice and see you again. Thank you for fighting so hard to come back to us -- to me.

FRANCO

(hoarse)

No, no, I'm okay. Frankie, listen -- do not do anything about Sophia. She will get what's coming to her. I don't want you to avenge me, do you understand? Do not go near her. Run our casinos like you always have. Be better than me. Protect your

brother, listen to Hiromi and Carlo if you need guidance.

FRANCESCA

(defiant)

So you know about it, huh? I don't need anyone's guidance, just yours and God's. What about Rapheala, you know about her too? Yeah, well, she ran away, escaped, God knows where, but she contacted me on a burner phone after she saw you in the news. She had evidence about Sophia's demeanor the last time the three of them met at their church. Sophia and Paola were plotting something. And I also found Sophia's sneakers hiding in the corner of her closet -- she left a faint trail in the hallway carpet.

Franco holds his gaze on Francesca.

FRANCO

(concerned)

Fucking hell, I should have cut the snake's head off a long time ago. She's a conniving, devious bitch, I didn't see it coming. Do not go near her, I don't know what cartel she's involved with. I want you and Carlo to go into the vault and take everything concerning what Paola had for the streets. Load up a truck, designate an area out of town for it. We'll do this after Sophia's been dealt with. I want them to know we're not playing their games -- the last snake's head will be cut off. We'll gain their respect. They can't fuck with us Guginos. We want peace.

FRANCESCA

(endearing smile)

Alright, I hear you, but I can't promise unforeseen circumstances regarding Sophia. What do I do about Rapheala? Did she and Uncle Carlo have something?

FRANCO

(nodding)

Yeah, it was complicated. If I'd known Rapheala was being abused and undermined, I wouldn't have been so harsh. She didn't have the balls to speak up then, I get it -- Paola and Sophia were two peas in a pod, she was probably scared. Anyway, listen to what I said, okay? Now come here and give your old man a kiss. Goodnight, Frankie. Oh, one more thing -- leave Rapheala to Carlo, she knows how to reach him. Focus on the job, kid...

Francesca returns to her sofa and closes her eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - DAY

FRANCESCA

(waking to noise)

Ahhh, wow, I overslept. Oh, I need coffee. Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Uncle Carlo. Where's Hiromi and Hiroshi? And Poppa? I hope Edgar took them to the penthouse to freshen up and have a proper breakfast.

CARLO

(smiling)

Here's your coffee, madam. You made a wise choice with Edgar, we're all in love with him. Your Poppa's getting X-rayed, then therapy. I understand you two had a long talk through my snoring about the plan. Are you ready, Frankie? This has to be done soon, Sophia doesn't know where we are in the hospital. Next Sunday, when she comes back from church, is the date. Here, have some of my bacon, I'll order more from the cafeteria. Now that we know for sure who it was, I released the guys, sent them back to work and their families. Franco wants to sell the Gugino estate, doesn't want to live there after this. We'll build another home for your Poppa and Hiromi, if she stays. Hiroshi should live here, near you, by the lakes. Now let's go over the vault plan -- I've put Roberto on renting an unmarked van, no problem.

Francesca is mid-bite on bacon when Franco slowly enters with his male nurse.

FRANCO

(walking, chuckling)

I feel a little nauseous about all of it. She wasn't all bad in the beginning, alright. Johnny, tuck me back in, I'm already tired. What'd I miss? Hey, Johnny, please close the door behind you, thanks, buddy.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - DAY

Franco stays quiet until the door closes.

FRANCO

(exhausted, crying)

Hey, Carlo, did you go over the vault? Yeah, okay. I don't want any of you avenging me, I'm working on it. She's got to go, and I'll do it my way. She was my responsibility. Frankie, stay away from her. Carlo, you hear me, you know she's fearless. I don't want to talk about this when Hiromi gets back with Hiroshi. I just want to enjoy this moment with you two. I've been living in hell and darkness since she shot me. Where did I go? My body was here, but where did my soul go? I can't remember, oh God, where was I? It was so dark, I was alone and lost... floating, just floating.

Francesca and Carlo hold Franco's hands as he speaks through his fear.

FRANCESCA

(crying)

Oh, Poppa, you're here with us now. You were never alone, not for a moment -- when you were in the coma, Uncle Carlo and I would take turns, or Hiromi. You were in a coma so you could heal, not move around in agony. Your soul was still here, okay, I promise.

Carlo dabs his eyes with his handkerchief.

CARLO
(reassuring)
Franco, it's alright to let it out, it was traumatic. But you know what -- you came back stronger, and clearer. That's all that matters. We're a family. You're protected, my friend, my brother.

Franco falls asleep.

FRANCESCA
(wiping her eyes)
He's been through so much, Uncle Carlo. I think we've got to wait until Poppa's further along in recovery -- he's going through trauma mentally and emotionally. He needs to see a psychiatrist, I think that's a good idea, I'll speak to his doctors.

EXT. GUGINO ESTATE - NIGHT

(P.O.V.) A dark Lexus slows along the estate. The masked driver surveys the perimeter. In the back, a gloved hand steadies a pair of binoculars, watching.

INT. CLUB X - NIGHT

Sophia leans back behind the oversized desk, phone to her ear, in control.

SOPHIA
(shouting)
What the hell are you saying? Don't blame me for the lost merchandise, that was Paola's. I owe you nothing. As a matter of fact, I lost two hundred grand on a no-delivery, I need my money back. Who killed my partner Mateo? Why are you asking about Franco? I haven't seen him, haven't been to the hospital, I don't give a damn if he's dying anyway, they're keeping him closely guarded.

Sophia pours herself a drink, eyes locked on the monitor, then grabs her phone and calls Carlo.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

(rubbing her temples)
Hey, Carlo, how's Franco doing? Thought I'd call, since no one includes me in anything, not even my stepdaughter. Sorry I haven't been able to visit again, there's so much security at the hospital, every time they see me a reporter shoves a mic in my face. He's awake? Has he said anything, does he remember what happened? Oh, I see, I'll agree with the doctors, he shouldn't be rushed to remember, it'll overstimulate his brain. Did they say if he'll get his memory back? When's he getting released -- when he does, I'll get the house ready, cook all his favorite food. Yeah, ciao, Carlo.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Franco, in earshot, hears Sophia's phone call.

CARLO
(clicking off speaker)
Well, boss, you heard it all. She'll get the house ready for you. And make sure you don't overuse your brain trying to remember, my ass. What a crazy bitch.

FRANCO
(sad)
I truly feel sorry for her. Let her come visit me one last time, make sure she's alone with us, then leave and give her a private moment. I'll play along. Set it up.

EXT. GREENWOOD, COLORADO - PRIVATE SCHOOL - DAY

Nine first-graders sit painting with a teacher's aide in a small classroom. Rapheala sits at the front, watching her pupils.

RAPHEALA
(sweetly)
Harry, David, are you both finished with your paintings? I see a lot of giggling over there -- if you're done, you can go wash your hands, please.

Rapheala circulates, murmuring encouragement, lifting each wet painting and hanging it neatly with decorative pins.

RAPHEALA (CONT'D)

(cheerful)

Okay, boys and girls, don't forget to give your parents your invitation cards, put them in your backpacks. Thank you, Elizabeth, for coming in today. Have a good weekend. Children, say thank you to Miss Elizabeth. Our art show collection is going to be great. Let's line up.

INT. RAPHEALA'S HOME - EVENING

Rapheala huddles under a blanket, lost in the fire's glow, until her phone vibrates.

CARLO (O.S.)

(smiling)

Hello, sweetheart, how was your day, Miss Angelia? What did you do at school today? Hey, listen, Raphe, when it's safe, I want you to come home, here, okay, to me? Franco and I and Frankie discussed it -- you earned your place in this family forever. You never have to live alone anymore. When you're ready, you can call me. I want to hear your sexy voice again, Raphe. I miss you.

RAPHEALA

(teary-eyed)

Oh, Carlo, you know how long I waited to hear that? I don't know, Carlo, I'm terrified, and I have my traumas. Yes, I miss you too, darling, you're the only man in my heart. I'm sorry we separated so long ago, but I never stopped loving or caring about you. It was just too much, that hard life, it distracted us and we let it destroy us. I wish you could come here, it's peaceful and beautiful, Carlo. At night I get lonely, but when morning comes I'm happy, and oh, Carlo, the children are wonderful, my first-graders, they fill my heart. How's Franco really doing? And are you taking good care of

yourself? Well, I better say goodnight,
I'm crying now.

CARLO (O.S.)

(emotional)

Yeah, Raphe, it's all my fault, we should have gotten married, had kids of our own, a little boy or girl. I'm sorry I made you cry, Raphe, you know what I mean? Our lives then were dangerous and full of drama, but we could change that -- we're not getting any younger, we need each other's companionship. I never stopped loving you either. You're very brave and courageous, and I'm very proud of what you've become. The children must be crazy about you, Miss Angelia, I love it. Keep safe, good night, kisses.

INT. THE ATLANTIS CASINO OFFICE - NIGHT

(P.O.V. -- FRANCESCA) Inside the vault, Francesca takes it in -- her father's collections, fine art, Stella's furs, glittering jewelry, cash, pistols, ammo, confiscated drugs.

FRANCESCA

(sighing, texting)

Hey, I'm standing in here now, yes, of course I'm alone, Uncle Carlo. Edgar's outside the office door waiting for me. What time are you getting here to load up? I want to be done before sunrise. Have you set the unmarked van pickup and drop-off? Are you going with them? No, I'd prefer you take a different unmarked car and hang back to watch from a distance. I'm sending Edgar with you on this -- he's your driver, and he'll have his eagle eye out in case anything goes wrong. The unmarked van and the driver you hired -- what's the instruction? No, not a good idea, the cartels will waste them, don't you watch any movies, Uncle Carlo? Yeah, I figured. Change the plan -- one driver follows the van. Once they reach the designated location, the van driver leaves and drives away with the tailing car. Make sure this

happens exactly as I've instructed. I'll wait for you. See you soon, good luck.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Hiromi and Hiroshi remain on the sofa, watching over Franco.

CARLO
(winking at Franco)
Yeah, duty calls at the Atlantis, gotta bounce. You kids behave while I step out, alright. Be back for breakfast. Goodnight, ladies and gents.

EXT. AN ALLEY - NIGHT

Carlo and Edgar load two heavy suitcases into an unmarked van. Carlo hands Chico an envelope labeled "Hot Chiles."

CARLO
(serious)
Now make sure you leave this on the passenger seat and get out fast with Roberto -- we'll be watching. Thank you, Chico, good luck.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - DAWN

Hiroshi is fast asleep. Hiromi stands, watching over Franco.

HIROMI
(gently kissing Franco)
My love, I'll go now. Please keep our boy safe. I'll call you after I land. Watashi wa kokoro kara anata o aishite imasu.

FRANCO
(kissing her open palms)
I will. Be safe, my darling, please be careful, take care of your health. Get back soon. E ti amo con tutto il mio cuore.

She bends down to gently kiss Hiroshi's forehead.

(P.O.V. -- FRANCO) Hiromi's silhouette fades into the doorway. Franco follows her with misty eyes, giving nothing away.

EXT. GUGINO ESTATE - SIDE GATE - DAY

A pair of boots makes its way toward the music streaming out of the kitchen window.

INT. GUGINO ESTATE - KITCHEN - SUNDAY

SOPHIA
(busy, humming with the opera)
La la la... argh! Oh, no... no!

The assailant stands above Sophia, pistol aimed at her chest, and shoots her dead.

EXT. HENDERSON EXECUTIVE AIRPORT - DAY

Hiromi and Takahashi step onto the jet. At the window, Hiromi gazes out behind dark sunglasses.

HIROMI
(casually smiling)
Mica-chan, can you make me scrambled eggs with caviar, strawberries on the side, and a glass of champagne and orange juice. And ask Takahashi-san if he needs anything. Thank you, Ms. Mica.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRANCO'S VIP ROOM - DAY

Francesca and Hiroshi share breakfast with their father, quiet and composed.

CARLO
(chuckling)
Hey, good morning, everybody. Did you save anything for me?

Carlo locks eyes with Franco and Francesca.

CARLO (CONT'D)
(dusting off his hands)
All done. Now I want breakfast. Oh, Edgar went to the flower shop.

FRANCESCA

(worried, then softening)
Hey, Uncle Carlo -- where's Edgar? The
flower shop, what for? Oh, that's so
sweet.

Edgar walks in with a large bouquet of flowers.

EDGAR
(cheerful)
Aren't these beautiful? I thought all of
us needed to embrace this beauty, let's
put it right there. Hiroshi-san, bijin san
desu ne?

HIROSHI
(chuckling)
Okay. Hana ka, imoto ka?

TRANSLATION: Is that for the flowers, or for my sister?

Edgar and Hiroshi laugh at their shared secret.

FRANCESCA (V.O.)
(narrating)
This is what my family was like -- the
depths of our love for each other,
compassion, struggles, respect for those
who respected us. And it did not end here.
The saga continues with Hiromi's war with
her stepdaughter, Tami Sakamoto. Franco,
my father; Uncle Carlo; Rapheala; Edgar;
and I; and the coming of age for Hiroshi
Sakamoto-Gugino.

THE END

FADE OUT.