

The Billionaire's Secret Son

by Alison Reid



Rafael picked up the envelope. The paper felt heavy between his fingers. Something about it felt deliberate. Calculated. As if the sender knew exactly what they were doing.

“You can go,” he said.

Clara nodded and quietly closed the door behind her. Rafael turned the envelope over. The seal had been pressed firmly into the paper. He slid a letter opener beneath the edge and cut it open. A single sheet of paper slid out.

Rafael unfolded it. His eyes moved over the first line. Then the second. And suddenly the air in the room seemed to shift. His jaw tightened.

Slowly, Rafael lowered himself into the chair behind his desk.

To Rafael De Luca,

If you are reading this letter, it means one thing.

My daughter has filed for divorce.

I arranged for this letter to be delivered only under those circumstances.

Six years ago, when Gabriella told me she was pregnant with your child,

I made a decision that altered the course of both your lives.

At the time, I believed it was the correct one.

You were young. Ambitious, certainly—but ambition is cheap when a man has neither wealth nor influence to support it.

I built my empire from nothing. I know better than most how unforgiving the world can be to a man without power. And I refused to watch my daughter throw her future away on someone I believed would never amount to anything.

So, I intervened. I told you the child she carried was not yours.

I ensured that when you confronted her, you saw exactly what I intended you to see.

You left. Which was precisely the outcome I desired.

Shortly afterward, I forced my daughter to marry Daniel Carter. I made it clear that if she refused, she would be cut off completely.

She did attempt to leave. She believed she could support herself and raise the child alone.

Unfortunately for Gabriella, I possess a great deal of influence in this city. I made certain no one would employ her.

Faced with the prospect of poverty and a newborn child, she eventually returned.

Daniel Carter seemed a practical solution at the time. He was useful. Ambitious, obedient, and willing to accept the terms I offered him. But I misjudged him. He is a weak man. And weak men eventually reveal themselves.

For some time now I have known that Daniel has been unfaithful to my daughter. A man who betrays his wife will betray anything else when it suits him.

Which is why I made certain arrangements before my death.

You see, Rafael, the boy Gabriella carried all those years ago was always yours.

My grandson. Dominic.

I will not insult you with an apology. I did what I believed necessary to protect my daughter and my legacy. But circumstances have changed. If Gabriella has finally chosen to free herself from Daniel Carter, then the truth should no longer remain buried.

She never betrayed you. The child is your son. And he is also the future of everything I built.

Daniel Carter has made it abundantly clear over the past six years that he despises the boy. He is not a man capable of protecting what belongs to Dominic.

You are.

Which is why this letter now finds its way to you.

Protect my grandson's inheritance. Protect his legacy.

—Victor Hartley.

The letter trembled slightly in Rafael's hand. Not from weakness. From anger. Victor Hartley. Even dead, the man still had the power to reach into Rafael's life. The words burned into his mind.

She never betrayed you.

The child is your son.

Rafael's hand went still.

His son.

For a moment the world seemed to tilt. He read the letter again. And again. Each time the words struck harder. Pregnant. With his child. A low, disbelieving laugh escaped him. Six years.

Six years he had believed Gabriella Hartley had betrayed him. Six years he had convinced himself walking away had been the only choice. Six years believing the child she carried belonged to another man.

His fingers tightened around the paper. Victor Hartley had lied. Deliberately. Carefully. Destroyed two lives with a single calculated deception.

Rafael pushed back from the desk and stood abruptly. The chair scraped across the floor. He walked to the window, the letter still clenched in his hand. The city stretched endlessly below. But Rafael didn't see it.

His mind was somewhere else.

A rainy night. Standing outside Gabriella's apartment. Seeing her through the window in another man's arms—exactly as Victor Hartley had warned him. He hadn't confronted her. Hadn't demanded an explanation. He had simply walked away. Disappeared.

Left the woman he loved—*his pregnant girlfriend*—alone with the very man he had promised to protect her from.

The realisation twisted in his chest. And suddenly another thought struck him.

Dominic.

The name echoed in his mind.

My grandson.

No.

His son.

Rafael closed his eyes briefly. Somewhere in this city... his son existed. A boy he had never seen. Never held. Never even known about. Because Victor Hartley had decided Rafael De Luca wasn't good enough.

A slow, dangerous calm settled over him. Victor Hartley might have stolen six years. But he wasn't stealing another day. Rafael folded the letter carefully. Then he reached for the phone.

“Clara.”

“Yes, Mr. De Luca?”

“Find Gabriella Hartley.”

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