

Erika

By

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EXT. BUSY CONSTRUCTION SITE - MIDDAY

A limousine pulls up alongside the pavement, the radio can be heard playing OPERA MUSIC. CARLOS (55) a formal man, steps out. He is wearing a suit and holding a cane. He approaches ANTONIO (28) who is also wearing a suit.

ANTONIO

Boss, what are you doing here?

CARLOS

Save it, Antonio. Now explain to me why construction's not-

Carlos stops upon seeing something on the far side of the site. It's a tall, old building barely standing.

CARLOS

What the hell is that monstrosity still doing there? All the old buildings should've been torn down!

Carlos starts marching towards the building. They turn the corner and Carlos sees ERIKA (14), a young, mixed-race girl chained to the railings along the outside of the building.

CUE. OPERA BGM

CARLOS

What is this?

ANTONIO

I was gonna call you, Boss. It's some kid from the orphanage. She's chained herself to the railings.

CARLOS

I can see that for myself! Why haven't you moved her already?

ANTONIO

She's swallowed the key! And every time we try to get close she bites!

CARLOS

Give me a break! Are you telling me you're scared of a little girl?

ANTONIO

We've tried everything and trust me, you won't be able to move her.

(CONTINUED)

CARLOS

I think you're forgetting who I am.
Just give me five minutes. "Can't
move her"! You're pathetic!

Erika rises up slowly with an angry expression as Carlos walks up to her, Antonio striding behind in his wake.

ERIKA

Keep away! Stay back!

CARLOS

"Keep away"? This is my land.
You're the one trespassing.

Carlos approaches and puts his hand to her chin, closely examining her face. Erika tries to pull away.

CARLOS

You're not looking good, bambino.
When was the last time you had a
hot meal? Hmm?

ERIKA

Don't touch me!

Carlos leans back and smirks, not taking her seriously.

CARLOS

Girl, do you really think this is
going to help anyone? My advice is
for you to leave now while I'm
feeling charitable, or my boys are
going to cut you loose and escort
you off *my property* by force.

ERIKA

Does it make you feel big making
orphans homeless? You're not even
human, are you? Well, I'm not
scared of you or your boys!

ANTONIO

You should be! Do you know who this
man is? He's not some kindly old
grandpa. This is Carlos Machino.

CARLOS

Don't waste your breath, Antonio.
She's all talk. I'm sure she'll be
gone by the morning.

Carlos and Antonio leave. Erika fiercely watches them go.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE, NIGHT TIME

Erika remains chained to the railings. Carlos and Antonio are sitting in a black car on the edge of the construction site, they're watching Erika from a position she can't see them. They have a listening device so they can hear her.

CARLOS

What's with the face, Antonio?

ANTONIO

I guess I'm just having some doubts about the project, Boss. I mean, I know we're in 'the business' but tearing down an orphanage? This is cartoon supervillain territory.

They notice an elderly nun, BERNADETTE (65), holding a blanket and a warm flask approaching Erika. She's wrapped up warm and the wind is lashing her face.

BERNADETTE

I beg of you, Erika. It's been two days now. You must eat something.

ERIKA

I'll eat when they're gone.

BERNADETTE

You foolish girl. The weather's warning of a massive storm coming. You'll catch your death out here.

Bernadette starts to wrap her in the blanket.

ERIKA

Get off of me! I don't want your help! Just because the rest of you have given up doesn't mean I have to bend over and take it!

BERNADETTE

For pity's sake child, watch your mouth! God is listening!

ERIKA

Well I don't believe in God.

BERNADETTE

Right! This has gone on far enough. You're coming to the shelter with me and the other children.

(CONTINUED)

ERIKA

No I'm not! You can't make me!

BERNADETTE

I know you feel responsible being the eldest, but you're no good to them here.

ERIKA

That's not it! I just want to stick it to those rich arseholes!

BERNADETTE

Oh, I'm at my wits end with you, child. You'll be in my prayers.

Bernadette puts the warm flask on the ground beside Erika's feet. She leaves. Carlos is still watching in the car.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE, DAY

Erika is still chained to the railings, looking quite fatigued. She notices Carlos approaching her.

CARLOS

Still here then?

ERIKA

Fuck you.

Carlos crouches down in front of Erika so he's at her level.

CARLOS

I understand why you're doing this. And I have to say, I respect your commitment to those kids.

ERIKA

Shut up! You don't understand!

CARLOS

I understand this is only going to end one way. So I'm giving you a final warning. My opera house is going to be built, on schedule, no matter what. Always look out for number one. That's my motto.

ERIKA

I guess that's at least one thing we have in common.

Erika leans forward as far as she can towards Carlos's face.

(CONTINUED)

ERIKA

Do your worst.

Carlos becomes frustrated, gritting his teeth and turning red. He stands up and pulls out a check book and a pen.

CARLOS

Alright then. How much do you want?
Name your price.

Erika suddenly starts laughing hysterically to herself.

ERIKA

You think money will make me go
away?! You're such a stereotypical
gangster! You're pathetic!

CARLOS

Then what the hell do you want?!
What do you want from me, demon?!

Carlos puts the check book away, goes up to her and grabs the top of her head by her hair.

CARLOS

Why are you doing this to me?!

ERIKA

Because I've got nothing to lose.
Whereas I can make your life Hell.

Carlos brings his other hand back to slap her, but he manages to stop himself. Erika doesn't flinch or winch the whole time. Carlos lets her go. He storms off.

CARLOS

This isn't over! It's not over
until the fat lady sings!

The second Carlos is out of sight Erika immediately starts panting and trembling, clearly terrified. Sweat running down her face. We stay with her for a good few seconds.

INT. INSIDE THE ABANDONED ORPHANAGE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM

Bernadette is clearing things out of a child's bedroom and putting them into a cardboard box. Carlos appears in the doorway behind her. She appears to sense him and turns.

BERNADETTE

I know I'm not meant to be in here.

(CONTINUED)

CARLOS

It's fine, Sister. It's not like this building's going anywhere soon, not if that brat has her way.

Bernadette resumes boxing items.

BERNADETTE

I presume you're referring to Erika. She's a law unto herself, that one.

CARLOS

I know. I saw you trying to talk some sense into her last night.

BERNADETTE

This orphanage is the only home she's ever known. I know it's not always been perfect, but it's better than living on the streets.

CARLOS

Let me cut to the chase. I thought you'd have a much better chance of getting through to her than me. A woman of the cloth. You could put the fear of God into her.

BERNADETTE

Erika is more than just an inconvenience. She's a vulnerable young girl who had her life torn apart thanks to reprobates like you and your family. God forgive me.

CARLOS

Reprobates like me? What exactly are you trying to imply, Sister?

BERNADETTE

You'll not intimidate me, unholy one. I've dealt with your kind before, so has she. It was criminals like you that took Erika's parents from her when they refused to pay protection money.

Carlos looks shocked.

BERNADETTE

So don't go acting like you're the victim here, "Mr. Machino".

(CONTINUED)

Carlos looks over at a painting on the wall behind Bernadette. It's of the orphanage. It's signed "Erika" in the corner. Carlos looks around and sees several other indications that this is Erika's room, such as clothes similar to what she's wearing. Turns to Bernadette.

CARLOS

This orphanage is going down... if
it is the last thing I do.

Bernadette watches him like a hawk as he walks out the room.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE, DAY

Carlos is approaching the railings behind the orphanage. Antonio is holding a loaf of bread up to Erika's mouth.

ANTONIO

Please. Eat it.

ERIKA

No! Get away from me!

CARLOS

Antonio!

Antonio freezes with fear and turns to him.

CARLOS

I said I'm dealing with it. Or have
you lost respect for me?

ANTONIO

What? No Boss. No.

CARLOS

Then get lost before I make an
example out of you! Go on! Get!

Antonio leaves. Carlos turns to Erika.

CARLOS

Sorry about Antonio. He's always
been weak.

ERIKA

I don't need handouts.

CARLOS

Of course you don't. A tough kid
like you. You've had to grow up
quickly, given the circumstances.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CARLOS (cont'd)
The old nun told me. About your
parents. It must've been hard.

ERIKA
She had no right telling you that!

CARLOS
I saw your paintings. They're good.
Is that what you want to be?

ERIKA
You've been in my room? What are
you, some kind of pervert? Did you
go through my underwear draw as
well, you dirty old pedo?

Carlos crouches down so he's at her level again.

CARLOS
I've been treating you like a kid.
I was wrong. I'm not the big bad
wolf you think I am. This project-

Pulls some blueprints from his coat and opens them up.

CARLOS
This project is gonna bring a lot
of revenue to the area. It's gonna
be great for local businesses. You
and me, we might go about things
wrong sometimes but ultimately we
want the same things. Peace.
Community. Love.

Erika looks coldly into his eyes.

ERIKA
You'll say anything, won't you?

Carlos's face drops.

ERIKA
It's actually really entertaining,
watching you desperately trying to
convince yourself you're not the
villain here. That making children
homeless is okay. But I see right
through you. We're nothing alike.

Carlos is looking desperate. He wracks his brain trying to
think of a new angle to take.

(CONTINUED)

CARLOS

R-Right! Listen you little bitch,
you better start begging or you'll
be joining Mommy and Daddy dearest
a lot sooner than you think!

Carlos comes in close and grabs her by the neck.

CARLOS

It was my boys that killed them! So
I have no qualms if I have to
finish off their kid too!

Erika suddenly spits in Carlos's face. Carlos is so taken
aback he staggers backwards and almost falls over. He
composes him and wipes the spit.

CARLOS

You've just made your last mistake,
puttana. I've tried to be
reasonable, but you can go ahead
and die out here for all care.

Carlos pulls the blanket off Erika and throws it away before
kicking the flask across the site.

CARLOS

Who would miss you anyway?

Carlos walks to his car, clearly rattled. Erika watches him.

INT. CARLOS'S BEDROOM, NIGHT TIME

A storm rages outside. Carlos tossing and turning in bed. We
see a nightmare he's having about Erika and the orphanage.

Quick flashes of images from previous scenes and Carlos's
childhood. Several pieces of key dialogue between Carlos and
Erika are played, overlapping each other. Some voices are
new. The sequence continues as Carlos climbs out of bed,
appearing to sleepwalk. He walks down hallways and rummages
through his desk to look at old childhood photos.

NUN(V.O.)

I'm sorry Carlos, we can't afford
your singing lessons anymore.

PRIEST(V.O.)

Carlos, if you continue down this
path of wickedness you may one day
lose all sense of humanity.

Carlos stops to look out of one of his windows.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE, MORNING

Carlos is walking up to the construction site in the rain and wind. He looks very determined. He turns the corner to the railings, only to find the blanket covering Erika.

CARLOS

Alright! You can have it! Keep your fucking precious orphanage! I don't even care anymore! I'm done! You win! Faneto!

Erika doesn't reply.

CARLOS

What? Gloating in victory? I should've known you'd rub salt into the wounds. Answer me, girl!

Carlos pulls the blanket off to find Erika's lifeless body hanging from the rails. Carlos stares at her in disbelief. Drops his cane. There is emphasis on it hitting the ground.

END. OPERA BGM

INT. INSIDE THE ABANDONED ORPHANAGE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM

Carlos is staring at Erika's painting as Bernadette enters the room carrying a box. She's briefly taken back upon seeing him, but then proceeds to pack up Erika's stuff.

BERNADETTE

What are you doing here?

Carlos reaches inside his coat and pulls out a large wad of money. Bernadette looks at the money, then resumes packing.

BERNADETTE

Hmph! Keep your blood money.

CARLOS

Please take it. Don't cut off your nose to spite your face.

Bernadette ignores him. Carlos puts the money on the floor.

CARLOS

Just promise me you'll try to make this place better... than it was.

Carlos turns to leave the room, but stops before he exits to look at Erika's painting one last time.