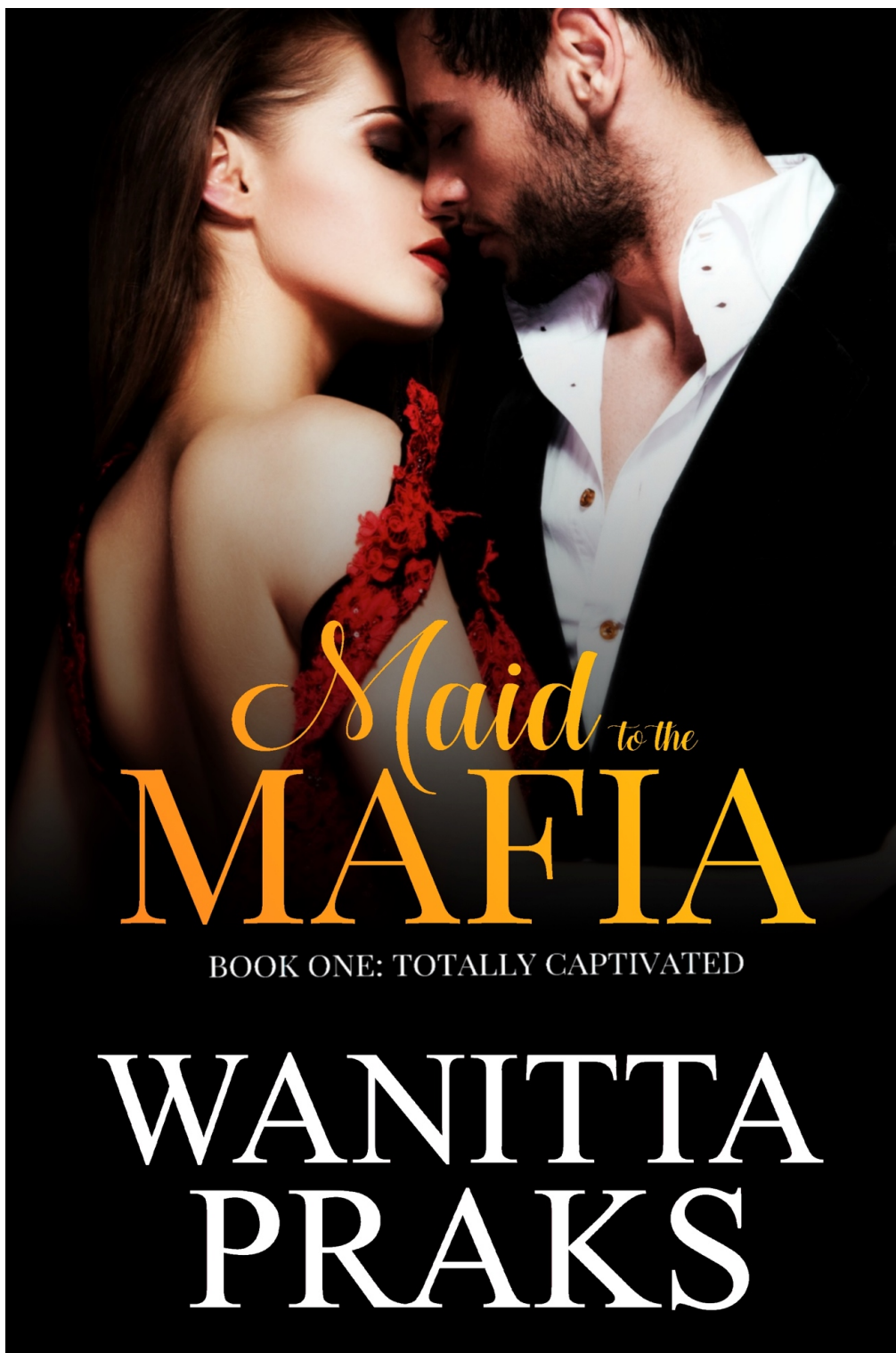




Maid to the
MAFIA

BOOK ONE: TOTALLY CAPTIVATED

**WANITTA
PRAKS**



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Maid to the Mafia Book One

WANITTA PRAKS

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TOTALLY CAPTIVATED
MAID TO THE MAFIA: BOOK ONE



“I’ll do anything. Cooking, cleaning, even making coffee. I’m good at making coffee.”

Upon uttering the word coffee, Jenny Stone, the smart, resilient, and sharp-tongued girl somehow finds herself paying off her father’s debt by working as a maid to the mafia boss, Giovanni Dente, the obsessive-compulsive coffee drinker with movie star good looks.

And this is just the beginning of Jenny’s new life.

Between serving the man his brew at ungodly hours and doing his dirty work, she also has to attend college, ace her exams, and find a way to contact her father and sister who have abandoned her.

But within the intricate web Giovanni binds around her, when it comes time for her to leave, she isn’t sure if she can make it out alive, especially when somewhere along the way, she realizes her heart is totally captivated.

PROLOGUE
14 YEARS AGO

“Hello? Are you hurt?”

The teenaged boy raised his eyes upon hearing a little girl’s voice. He immediately scowled when he saw her gawking at him with curiosity, with half a licorice hanging from her lips. She was a wee thing, no more than five, he estimated, with light-brown hair—a dull, boring color for sure—tied into pigtails.

“Hurt?” He found himself asking.

“Mm.” She nodded furiously. “Are you in pain? You want me to ring the doctor for you or something?”

Pain?

A foreign word for sure. A word that had never been directed at him in his fourteen years of life.

Oh, right. Of course she would ask such a question. He was hunched over, after all, resting himself against the tall American beech tree in this secluded part of the national park, hands clenching his stomach. Not to mention his lips were split and bleeding and his face was cut and bruised from a fight. Any idiot could tell he was in pain and suffering severely.

Oddly enough, the thought of him truly in so much pain that it seared his soul amused him. Amused him enough, in fact, that it made him laugh. He laughed so hard that he started to cry, truly cried in a mixture of anger, frustration, and sorrow. He knew he looked like shit, but what the heck!

“Why are you laughing like that?” the little girl queried in confusion. “Is it so painful that you laugh just to forget about it? The pain? I do that, too, when I’m in pain.” She even nodded, to prove her point.

Oh God! Shit! A mere child who didn’t know him cared about him, whereas his own family hadn’t given a fuck.

When he managed to calm down, he looked at her straight in the eye and said coldly, “You shouldn’t talk to a person like me.” There was sarcasm in his voice that the girl didn’t understand.

She cocked her head to one side, assessing him. “I know I shouldn’t talk to a stranger, but you’re in pain and must be very sick. I’m being a good sama—” She paused, trying to get her word right. “A good samari—”

“Samaritan?” He finished for her.

She nodded furiously. “That’s it. And you look like a good person. You wouldn’t hurt me, would you?”

Hurt her? He’d definitely hurt her if she didn’t get the hell out of his way. It was in his blood after all, to hurt people. To make money that way. That was his family’s ultimate goal, wasn’t it? That’s what his family did. So why not him?

“Look here, little girl,” he began. “I’m a bad guy. You got that? I’m not a good person. So, get out of here!” he growled, hoping to scare her so she would run off and leave him be.

He closed his eyes, fighting hard to breathe. Fuck, one of his ribs must be broken. Even breathing was taking its toll. He felt pain all over, from his split lips to the bruise on his knuckles. It was a fight that was gruesome yet so satisfying. He knew he was slowly turning into the very facade of his family, and bile rose up his throat.

No. No. He didn't want anything to do with them. He hated that he was born in this fucked-up family. An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. No mincing words; just fight and kill. That was his family motto. The Bianchi mafia clan.

Fuck. Wasn't he trying to run away from his own heritage? So, why did he behave like them when a little provocation from his classmate caused him to unleash his inner demon?

God, he needed to flog that nightmare from his mind. He needed to be alone, *wanted* to be alone, so he could wallow in this misery. He didn't need some little girl to console him. But no matter how hard he tried to shove back those memories, it still played bright in his head like that insistent lonely pain in his heart.

They were in this park just hours prior. Four against one. Him against them. The son of a mafia boss against four policemen's sons. The unlawful verses the lawful. Fuck, what a tip of the scales. He'd used his fists to punch them. But they held him back, restraining him and punching him until what remained was a bloody pulp.

"What are you going to do?" He could hear them taunt him. "Just 'cause you're the son of a thug, you think you can hurt me? My old man's in the police force. He's not going to let a thug like you run America."

That was the last straw. He was spurred into action and punched the living daylights out of those four. Yeah, four

against one. But this one won. This one made four of them unconscious. Fuck. What had he become? A monster. Just like his family.

I control my own destiny. I control my own destiny, he chanted to himself, trying to erase that image from his head.

He flinched suddenly when he felt small fingers tracing his hair, patting his head like he needed it. He looked up and met mossy green eyes. Fuck. She still didn't leave him. And her next words almost made tears leak from his eyes.

“Is it sore? Does it hurt a lot?”

What was she referring to? His cut lips, his blue-black eyes, or the pain in his chest?

What a pathetic kid. What did she know about pain? From the look of her pink dress, she looked to be from a normal family, one he'd never experienced. But his heart burned with that insistent threading of her fingers through his hair. And now he felt something else. Warmth, like he wanted her to caress his hair for real, with the love and care that one bestowed on someone you loved.

“Please don't look so sad.” She consoled him, crouching down to sit in front of him. And then she looked up at him with a beaming smile on her face. “Ah. I got it. Wait here. Hold my licorice. I'll be right back.”

She shoved the half-eaten black licorice into his palm and raced across the field. He saw her disappear into one of the cafés lining the streets opposite the national park.

Alone, he closed his eyes again. Good. She was gone. Finally. Which should make him happy, but he wasn't. He opened his eyes and looked at the licorice in his hands. He should really throw it away. She was gone, after all. She

wasn't going to come back. But she'd said she would, and something humane within him still grasped onto that licorice like it was his lifeline.

He gazed up into the sky, feeling the heat on his face. The midafternoon sun really was soothing. Such warmth. Such freedom. When would he feel this free again?

He really should head back home, though. And then tell his family what? That he'd had a fight. Trying to defend what he despised all along, only for his mother to taunt him again.

"A leaf never falls far from its branch. You'd better accept your position and embrace your fate."

A strong coffee scent woke him from those painful memories. He lifted his head and saw the little girl was back. And she was holding a foamy drink in her hand.

"What's this?" he asked, looking at the cup thrust in his face.

"Coffee. For you." She beamed.

"I don't want it." He shifted his gaze to the sky again. Not a second later, the cup was in his face again. "I said I don't want it. I don't drink coffee."

"But I made it for you." Her little voice sounded slightly hurt.

Fuck. He hurt her feelings. "Look, I don't drink coffee. Okay. I don't like coffee."

"How do you know if you've never drunk it?" she asked.

Because my whole fucking family drinks coffee like water. But he didn't tell her that. And clearly, she was starting to irritate him. "Look. I just don't like it, all right. Now leave me alone."

“Can’t you just try it? It’ll make you happy. Try it. You’ll love it. Ma’s café is just across the road from here. I get to make coffee all I want. It’s really nice. She tells me I make good coffee, and when I grow up, she bets I’ll win a barista award. So, you can be the judge. I just know you’ll like it because I put all my love in this cup. I want to see a smile on your face. Please smile for me?”

She wanted to see him smile? What the fuck for? Why?

“Go on. Drink it,” she urged. “I didn’t put any poison in it, like that queen from Snow White with that apple thingy. Once you taste it, you’ll become addicted to it like cocaine. That’s what Ma always tells me. But I don’t know what cocaine is. I think she should compare it to chocolate. Do you like chocolate? I like chocolate. Taste it and see if my coffee tastes like chocolate.”

She held that black cup of coffee in her small fingers, not pushing him to accept it, but in turn making him feel guilty if he didn’t. He felt miserable, a thousand times worse than when he got into that fight.

“I can’t push you to like it, but you can choose to like it once you’ve tasted it. It’s your choice.”

He reached out his hand and took the coffee cup from her grasp. And he drank it. He’d never tasted anything so bitter, so foul and disgusting. But for that one moment in his life, he felt happy, his heart singing loudly in his chest.

“What’s your name?” he asked, taking another sip, finding he did like the taste after all.

“Jennifer.” She smiled back, sitting next to him, shuffling her body until she was right beside him. Then she took out a

series of bandages from her dress pocket and began to plaster it on his face where the cuts and bruises resided.

He blinked, staring at her large green eyes in front of his face as she proceeded with her work. There were two bandages on his left cheek, three on his forehead, one on his right cheek, and now she was trying to cover the side of his cracked lip as he tried to take another sip of that coffee. He wondered where the heck she got all those bandages from. They were rather bright and colorful, too. His face probably looked like a walking neon light.

“Wow, you have nice black eyes,” she said with delight. “I’ve never seen anyone with black eyes before. It’s like looking into the night sky. Have you been outside at night and looked at the sky? It’s very hard to see in the city, but my ma takes us to the country all the time, and there you can see the stars. They’re so bright against the black sky, like your eyes. I like your eyes. I like you.”

He blinked again and shook his head. Jennifer was talking a mile a minute. He couldn’t comprehend what she was saying.

“I like you,” she repeated, like he didn’t hear her declaration the first time. “Can I be your friend?”

Friend. Another foreign word. No one wanted to be your friend when you’re part of *that* family.

“Well, can I be your friend? Or do you like to be alone? But I mean, who wants to be alone, anyway? Not me. I want to have friends. Don’t you?”

“I don’t know if you want to be my friend, though,” he managed to say at last. “Like I said, I’m not a good person.”

“What did you do? Did you hurt an animal? Ma says if you hurt an animal, you’re a bad person. Humans should never hurt animals. They have feelings, too, you know. They feel the pain. So, did you hurt any animals?”

“No. No, I didn’t hurt any animals.” He wanted to tell her he hurt humans, not animals, but couldn’t get the words out. What happened to those four? Were they still lying there on the ground, unconscious?

“Well, then you’re not a bad person,” she declared. “You’re cool. And I like you. So, let’s be friends. I gotta go now. Ma is waiting for me in the café. Will you come back tomorrow? Meet me here tomorrow, and I’ll share some of my favorite licorice. Did you get to eat some when I gave it to you? They’re so nice. Pa always buys them for me. We’ll meet tomorrow, then. Bye for now.”

And she leaned in to kiss his full plastered cheek. He was so surprised he jumped back and hit his head on a tree branch.

She giggled. “You’re so funny. I want to marry you when I grow up. Do you want to marry me?”

“I…”

She shoved her face right in front of him and all he could make out were those sparkling green pupils, sucking him into that whirlpool, captivating even his cold heart.

“Don’t answer me just yet. I’ll see you tomorrow. Wait for me, okay? I’ll see you tomorrow.” She raced off the field then. But not a minute went by before he saw her midget body galloping toward him again. “I forgot to ask you for your name. What’s your name?”

“Gio. Call me Gio.” His lips stretched into a smile, again, a foreign expression on his face.

“Okay, Gio. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Another peck on his check and then she was gone again.

Gio’s heart smiled for the first time in his fourteen years. Tomorrow, he’d come. To see his new friend Jennifer.

CHAPTER 1
DELIVERY SERVICE

PRESCHOOL DAY

My Sweet Jenny,

Be a dear and deliver this letter for Pa. It's very important that you should deliver this by hand to Mr. Dente. I promise I'll give you more of your favorite licorice when you return. And I won't tell your sister.

Pa will see you soon.

I stared at the white envelope on the table, my heart about to drum out of my chest.

Pa! I wanted to yell at him. I missed my important accounting lecture because of this?

Pa had left a message for me to come home as soon as possible. It was an emergency. That was what the message had said. I'd thought he had an accident or something, so, I was rushing to get here. I didn't know which was my left or right foot as I stumbled and fell, trying to reach home in time. But

what did I find when I got here? A note on the table, beside the white envelope that contained that letter.

What was he thinking? At the rate I was going, I wouldn't even pass the first year of university if Pa kept calling me out to do errands for him like this.

Use the post office for once, Pa. Surely he could just drop this letter off at the post office and be done with it. Why use me?

Then again, why did I bother to ask this silly question? It was because I wasn't good at anything else except for errands like this. I wasn't beautiful, so no one really took a second look at me, unlike my sister Amelia, who was the star of her law school. In fact, I could blend in with the furniture very well. Sometimes, Pa and Amelia couldn't even tell the difference between me and the couch.

Despite all these negative comments about my appearance, though, I'd never been bothered by this. Brown hair with a dusting of freckles on my nose and green catlike eyes, I considered myself to be quite cute.

But back to Pa, though. I wondered where he was right then. I'd definitely give him an earful when I saw him.

I went to search the house. It was empty, no one inside, not Pa or Amelia.

Where had they gone? At this hour, Pa should have been in his office, and Amelia should have been home doing the cooking. She didn't have class in the afternoon, unlike first years, whose schedules were chock full of lectures.

I picked the letter up in my hand, dismissing Pa's absence for now. I examined the address. Upper East Side, Manhattan. It didn't look familiar to me.

Maybe I should put a few stamps on it and slot it in the postbox. That'd save me time. I recalled some stamps stashed away in my backpack somewhere. But Pa did say to deliver this letter by hand. And there was also the case of the licorice. It was tempting me next to the envelope.

“Humph!” I huffed to myself. *Who does he think he is, bribing me with candy? It's not like I'm five years old anymore. I can live without candy. Especially licorice.*



I was now walking along the streets of Islington Hill, chewing the licorice. How could I resist a bribe such as this licorice Pa bought for me? He knew it was my one weakness and he used it to his full advantage. I was surprised my teeth weren't covered with holes yet, what with the amounts of sweets I ate. But then again, my oral hygiene skills were spectacular.

After the initial shock, I took the bus and walked to deliver this letter. I was sure whatever contents were in the envelope, they must be something important. *Maybe Pa doesn't trust the post because it might go missing.* A sense of pride filled my chest.

“All right, Jenny. Let's deliver this letter for Pa and make him proud.”

Cory Mansion, as stated on the address, was part of a well-established suburb in Upper East Side, Manhattan. If it weren't for the naked Adonis statue sitting in front of the huge fountain, with only a loincloth covering his private part, I was sure I'd have missed it altogether.

Adonis really is beautiful, even though he's made out of white marble. But imagine seeing a real live man that looks

like Adonis. He'd be the god of all passion, a person that would totally captivate my heart.

“Ahh,” I sighed. “So beautiful.”

“What business do you have here?”

What? Who? Where? Did someone just speak?

I looked up and saw a camera pointed in my direction.

Oh, the speaker. I stared at the speaker and said, “I’m sorry. I was just admiring the statue.”

“Any other business?”

Swallowing another piece of licorice, I replied, “I’m looking for Cory Mansion. Could you please tell me where it is?”

“This is Cory Mansion.”

“Cor... Cory Mansion!” I almost choked on the licorice. I stared at the immaculate garden with lines of green trees on either side, the fountain housing Adonis.

Wow! This mansion must belong to a millionaire.

And then a fleeting thought rushed through my head. *What business does Pa have with the resident of this multimillion-dollar mansion?*

“What business do you have with us?”

I swallowed the last remaining licorice and composed myself. “I’m here to deliver a letter on behalf of my Pa, Mr. Stone. It’s to be handed to a Mr. Dente. May I see him?”

A few minutes passed before the voice spoke again. “Come in. The gate will open in three seconds. Then walk along the white brick footpath and knock on the door three times. The front door will open.”

What's this? White brick road and knock on the front door three times? What am I, Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz? I have a great sense of direction, thank you very much. I never get lost. But I did what the gate keeper told me to do. I knocked on the door three times. Then I stood back while the door took its time to reveal the inside of the property.

“Wow, what a waste of space,” I muttered when I stepped inside.

The mansion itself was a huge block of ancient buildings that stood right at the center of the property. From outside, it looked beautiful, but on the inside, it was majestic. The whole foyer was the size of our house alone. Except there was hardly any furniture around, unlike our house.

I was a hoarder, so I always managed to get some secondhand books or some sort of junk to decorate our home. But this place was just adorned with a few couches and an armchair. A beautiful chandelier dropped down from the ceiling, and a skylight provided light in the foyer.

I walked toward the lone armchair, almost not noticing a couple of buff-looking men who stood to the side, staring at me through black sunglasses. They almost gave me a fright, standing there like statues. They had their arms behind their backs, looking quite intimidating.

“Hi,” I managed.

The men didn't respond, but just glared back at me. I sat in the chair uncomfortably, wondering what to do. Then something caught my eyes. I advanced toward them and saw they were guns. They looked like the real ones from *007*, the James Bond movie. *I wonder if I can touch it.*

Too late. Before anyone saw me, I held one in my hand. They're heavy and... cold.

I turned the gun around and put my finger near the trigger. They did feel nice to the touch. Maybe I should have become a policewoman and caught all the bad guys instead of working my butt off for an accounting degree. Using this gun, I could have the ultimate power to tame anyone into submission. My evil side lurked, and I felt like Austin Powers, the bad one of course.

"They aren't real, are they?" I asked one of the men in black, out of curiosity.

"They're real," Came his clipped reply.

A shiver ran down my spine. *Okay*. I swallowed and felt my heart racing a bit. I put the gun back in its resting place and went back to sit in my seat like an obedient child.

Where have I landed? Surely this was even weirder than Oz. I only hoped those beautiful guns were used for decoration instead of actually killing people.

I knew I should have listened to my instincts and posted the letter instead. But I couldn't help being tempted by that licorice. Now my only hope was to have Mr. Dente appear fast so I could give him the letter and scam.

Suddenly, two more men walked past me. One came to stand right in front of me and stared down.

"You're the one with the letter?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied promptly.

"Come this way. Boss is ready to see you."

"Boss? Is he Mr. Dente?"

Me and my big mouth. It just wouldn't stop yapping when I was nervous. Then again, I was actually quite excited. I was eager to find out who the millionaire owner of this estate was. Maybe some old man in his sixties.

I was led to another stylish room with more guns out on display.

Is this a gun museum?

One of the men in the black suits walked in first. Then some moments later, I was urged to enter the room.

I walked in bravely; proud that I'd almost completed my task for Pa. As soon as I stepped inside, a man sitting behind the desk caught my attention. And almost knocked the air out of my lungs. The man was almost an exact replica of the Adonis statue outside. My heart pounded and I smiled. But he didn't smile back. It didn't matter, though. I was here to see Mr. Dente anyway, not this young man who barely passed for twenty-five.

"I'm here to see Mr. Dente," I said, before he could say anything.

He still didn't respond, but continued to gaze at me with his midnight eyes. His facial expression twisted as if he'd sucked on a lemon.

"Give me that letter," Adonis finally spoke.

"I'm sorry, but I can only give this to Mr. Dente," I said.

"Give me that letter," he repeated, this time more threatening.

I held the letter against my chest as if it were my lifeline. "But Pa said—"

“Give boss the letter.” One of the men in black trudged forward and snapped at me.

“No!” I snapped back. “Pa said to hand this letter only to Mr. Dente.” I stubbornly stood my ground.

I’ve no idea why I did that. It wasn’t like I was going to win a battle with these men anyway, but still, I wanted to make Pa proud.

“I *am* Giovanni Dente,” Adonis bit back from behind his desk.

I almost swallowed my own tongue. Giovanni Dente was this young man whom I had admired. *What does Pa have to do with this young man?*

I gave Giovanni the letter and smiled up at him again. “Why didn’t you say so in the first place? We could have avoided this whole confusion.”

He gave me a spiteful look and read the letter.

I didn’t know what to do with myself. He was busy reading. It wasn’t like I could talk to him when his eyes were skimming across the page, his lips pulled tight. I busied myself with the display of more guns on the wall cabinet.

Gee, I seriously think this place is a gun museum.

Slap!

The sound of a fist meeting a table alerted me, and I shifted my attention to Adonis. His eyes were burning fire.

What’s gotten him all fired up? Could it be—

“You’re very brave.” Giovanni still held my gaze, and then he started rubbing his lips.

“Well, I am brave,” I told him, eyes transfixed on those lips.

I was the one who had to carry a beehive filled with bees when I was only twelve years old. No one in my class could do that. They were scared they would get stung. I got stung too, but I was named the bravest girl in my class. Plus, I could ride a unicycle. Even though it was only for two minutes, I still considered that brave.

“Tsk!” He snarled at me and removed his fingers from those lips. That kind of woke me up, too. “Are you brave or stupid?”

Now wait a minute here. Was he trying to hit my sensitive spot? No amount of godlike beauty could get me to look at him in the same gentle way as that Adonis statue, if he was going to start tossing negative comments like this.

“Excuse me?” I stated, chest thrust forward to show I wasn’t intimidated by him. “I am brave, and I’m clearly not stupid.”

“Then tell me.”

His voice suddenly sent a shocking tremble to my heart. *What’s this? Why is my heart beating so madly? Why does it seem I’ve heard that voice somewhere before?*

“If you’re not stupid, then why have you entered a mafia den all alone?”

Upon hearing that, all I could do was stupidly stammer back in disbelief, “Ma-ma-mafia den?”

CHAPTER 2
BRAINS BEFORE BEAUTY

“Mafia den...” I was still muttering to myself. I really was in the mafia’s den. I couldn’t believe this. I was going to die for sure. Worse yet, what did Pa have to do with all this? I looked at the man named Giovanni Dente, my Adonis in real life. “Are you sure you’re not jesting with me?”

Giovanni gave me a glare that could even kill a corpse.

“Do you think boss is joking?” one of the men said. “What do you think this place is? Disney Land?”

“What’s your name?” Giovanni asked, drawing everyone’s attention back to him.

I felt proud of myself suddenly, forgetting all about my circumstances. I was only eighteen, turning nineteen in three months and one day, but I’d achieved so much in life.

“My name is Jenny. I’m a first-year student at Brooklyn College. I study accounting. I’m very good at—”

“You’re ugly.” Giovanni dropped his line, making my jaw drop to the floor.

“Excuse me!” I huffed. “I may be plain, but I’m not *ugly*.”

Giovanni dismissed me with a wave. “Take the girl away. I can’t even bed her with my eyes closed. She talks too much.”

“You galoot,” I snapped.

Sure, I looked like I’d gone through a twister just to get here, not to mention running home after getting that fake message. My appearance right now was no match to a princess. In fact, I was no different from a beggar, what with my wild platted hair in a jumbled mess. But I was so not ugly. I did have some beautiful points too, like my freckles, for example. They were beautiful and I was proud of them. So, how dare that Adonis mafia boss degrade my appearance like this? I’d give him a piece of my mind.

“Give me a million dollars, and I still wouldn’t bed you. In fact, even if you were the last man on this earth, I still wouldn’t bed you. And hear this. Even if you were the last remaining man on this earth, and the fate of all humanity depended on us, I still wouldn’t—”

“SHUT UP!” he barked. “Say one more word and I’ll cut out your tongue and feed it to Beasty.”

I wanted to blast another earful at him, but I was scared he might really cut out my tongue. I didn’t know about these mafia people. They looked scary, acted scary, and behaved in a scary way, especially that big boss. I didn’t want to have to find out if they were going to act on their threats or not. It was best if I kept quiet. But then my curiosity to know what was in that letter got the better of me.

“Can I ask what my pa wrote in the letter?” I tweeted out.

He glared at me again and then threw me the letter. I felt so mad. I really wanted to bash his handsome face. But what stopped me was that one single phrase in the letter that caught my attention when it landed on the floor.

...my daughter as collateral, in exchange for my debt...

“Debt! Collateral! Pa, you...” I went into full outrage mode. I screamed. I yelled. I cursed.

What was Pa thinking? Using me as collateral in exchange for his debt? So, that’s what it was all about. He wanted to trade me for his debt, his plain daughter.

I continued to yell and berate him. Even if he wasn’t here to hear it, at least I felt better. I was about to release another throng of words when Giovanni stopped my outrage.

“GOD, you’re so bloody annoying,” he shouted. He massaged his temple, then fired a demand at the man beside him. “Bobby, take her away. Her screeching is hurting my ears.”

The man named Bobby cowered in fear. “Yes, boss.” And then he scratched his head. “Where to, boss?”

Giovanni almost lost his temper. He glared at his underling. “Do I have to spell out every single instruction? Use your brain for once. Go shoot her or throw her over a bridge or something. Just get her out of my sight.”

“Come this way.” Bobby dragged me until I almost lost my footing.

“Hey, take it slow, pal,” I yelled, pain shooting up my leg. Then I turned to the big boss. “Look! How much does my dad owe you? Maybe we could work something out.”

“What are you suggesting? If you want to trade your body, then I prefer to sleep with a pig.”

“I’m not trading my body, you galoot,” I yelled, firing back at him for comparing me to swine. “I’m proposing I pay for you via my excellent service.”

Giovanni, that hot mafia man, assessed me for a second longer, and then he signaled his underling again. “Take her away.”

“What?” I shrieked. No sooner had that word left my mouth, I was dragged out the door again.

I dug my foot on the floor to stop Bobby from dragging me forward. “Where are you taking me?” I pushed back and escaped his hold.

“To the bridge,” Bobby said.

“No! You can’t throw me over the bridge,” I shrieked again. My voice echoed around the large foyer as I fought with Bobby to let me go. But he was as tough as a nail, sticking to my skin like a barnacle to a rock.

“Okay, then, I’ll shoot you right here.”

“No!” Both Giovanni and I chorused out at the same time.

I turned to stare at Giovanni in surprise. Did I have the wrong impression of this man? Had he decided to change his mind about killing me? Maybe he did have a kind bone in his body.

I smiled at him. He ignored me and said to Bobby, “If you want to kill her, take it outside. I just got the carpet replaced. It’s such a hassle to organize for a new one.”

What?

I was so freaked out of my bones. Did he really mean to kill me? That answered my question from before. Those guns

on display out in the hallway, they weren't merely for decoration.

"You can't shoot me either. Not here nor outside," I hurriedly objected. And then I revealed my last playing card. I yelled with my eyes closed, "I'm an asset to you."

Giovanni smirked. "How are you an asset to me?"

Time to play the technical brain game. I squared my shoulders and looked up into his eyes. *If I can't lie through my teeth then I'm a monkey's uncle.*

"Let's think about this for a minute," I said, like I was a major philosophy professor and he the student.

"I don't have time," he retorted, his face darkening a shade.

"Okay, for a second, then," I said in a rush. God, I was a puddle of gooey mess. My feet were about to give way. "Just give me a second to explain myself."

"Your second's up. Bobby, take her outside."

"Wait!" I halted him, putting up my hands. "Stop being so impatient and let me explain. If you kill me now, how are you going to know my pa's location?"

He paused.

I smirked.

I finally had him in the palm of my hand. I knew I was the smart one. There was no doubt about it now. Only a smart girl like me could get out of this situation alive.

"I know he'll contact me sooner or later." I continued, gaining confidence when the big boss still stood listening. "So,

don't you think you should keep me alive, just so Pa can contact me?"

He stared at me for a minute too long. I only prayed to God he would relent.

"Bobby, take her outside. And finish her quick."

"What? Why?" I asked in panic. "Didn't I just say Pa's going to contact me? If you finish me off now, how are you supposed—"

"If I want to know where your old man's gone to, I have my own methods. I don't need to keep your annoying mouth here. So annoying. Bobby. Take her."

"Yes, boss."

Crap, I'm in deep shit. No, wait. This is worse than shit. I'm in deep pooh.

"You can't. You just can't. I said I'm willing to do anything. I'll be your maid, clean your room, cook you food. I'm good at cooking."

"I've got plenty of maids. I don't need another one. Go, get out." He tossed me to the side like I was piece of garbage, but I clung to his leg for dear life. I wasn't going to die yet. I hadn't even been kissed yet, let alone had a boyfriend. Even if it was just for a minute or two minutes or two hours, I was willing to grasp his pants so I could stay alive.

I didn't want to die. I knew I didn't want to, but Giovanni was stronger as he lifted me and pushed me off him. But one thing he didn't know about me was I was resilient. No amount of struggling and tugging could peel me off his pants. I stuck to him like glue.

“I’ll do anything,” I cried and begged; just to extend my life. “Cooking, cleaning, even making coffee. I’m the best at making coffee.”

There was a pause and his body went still. *Have I got his attention?*

“Good coffee?” It was Bobby who spoke. He must have had enough of my wailing and strangling his boss’ pants. “If boss wants coffee, he would’ve—”

“Hush!”

That came from Giovanni. Bobby stopped his blabbering. I let Giovanni’s pants go and looked up at his towering figure.

“You sure you make really good coffee?” Giovanni asked.

I nodded and stood. “Of course.” I boosted myself. “I won the barista award for two years in a row. I worked in a café my whole life. Of course I know how to make coffee. And once you’ve tasted it, you’ll become addicted to it like cocaine. Not that I ever tried cocaine of course. That’s just for comparison.”

“Hmm,” Giovanni said, staring at me while tracing his lips. “The coffee sounds tempting.” Then he turned to Bobby. “Test her. If her coffee tastes good, then keep her and let her be in charge of the coffee making.”

CHAPTER 3
THE TRACT

I was sweating like a pig. God, I hoped I didn't smell. Girls who smell didn't attract guys. That much I knew. Not that I wanted to attract any of the men here. But I really couldn't help myself with all this sweating. I'd never been so nervous in my entire life. Standing there with their murderous watchful eyes as I prepped the coffee machine and ground the coffee beans were Bobby and Heath, the two men in black I saw earlier, and Jonny and Finnie, the other two who appeared just now.

What's with their names? They don't sound mafia-ish at all.

Although I wasn't intimidated by them in the least, I was actually talking about that big boss Giovanni. Him and his stares, they were freaking me out.

Big stature, big name, and big ego. And did I mention big ass too, figuratively speaking, of course. But seriously, what a waste of a handsome face. Such nice eyes and lips, yet with the face he was making now, I bet none of the girls would want to look at him. That included me. I wondered if he had a girlfriend, though.

Crap! Why am I thinking these thoughts now?

I hurriedly tamped the coffee and inserted it into the slot, then let the machine do its magic. Not knowing where to turn my eyes, I accidentally glanced in Giovanni's direction and saw him tracing his lower lip.

Damn! What's with him and his fingers always running along his lips? Does he know that action causes my heart to palpitate?

Flicking back to the coffee machine, I watched as the color changed from a golden dark brown to light gold. I took the purified coffee and poured milk into it. I couldn't help but impress him with my coffee art. It was a swan, my favorite bird.

I squeezed my lips into a megawatt smile and was about to present the whole cup to him when—

Oh hell, how did my coffee end up on Giovanni's pants? And why was there a dark stain on his groin area? What on earth did I do?

There was a growl from Giovanni like a beast had been unleashed from his chest, followed by the rushing of feet. I was in a flustered state, too. Apparently, in my nervous state, my knees had buckled and I'd thrown the entire cup of coffee at Giovanni.

Believe me. Although all that glaring really freaked me out, I didn't have any intention of burning his groin area with my scalding hot coffee. I hoped his little sperm still worked. Poor thing if he couldn't reproduce. No cute, captivating babies.

I grabbed a towel Bobby got from somewhere and threw it onto Giovanni's private area, then smacked my hand on it,

grinding it, rubbing it to remove all that excess liquid, but he only jumped up off the couch like he'd caught on fire.

What's his problem? I was just trying to help.

So, I did help. I followed him, knees on the floor, hands busy rubbing that area clean, until he pushed me off.

“The fuck are you doing, you stupid girl? Get off me,” he growled and shook his legs free of my grasp.

Only then did I realize what I'd done. I was vigorously cleaning his private area. I shyly retracted my hands and gave him pleading puppy eyes.

I'm dead. I am so dead right now.

He stormed out the door.

Oh, shit! Did I piss him off that much?

I trembled, awaiting the verdict. The whole room was cloaked in silence. I didn't dare move. It was Finnie who broke the silent.

“Since you're here and don't have much time left to live, make us some coffee.”

What? I didn't expect that. But no, I was a smart girl. I wasn't going to question them. I had a plan up my sleeve.

One after another, I made what they ordered. By the time they were sipping their drinks, I felt ecstatic. Perhaps if I were to continue to distract them, they'd forget what I'd done to that big boss and let me live.

I smiled at my possible future. But that smile died a sudden death when Giovanni reappeared with a new set of clothing, and oh my lord, did it made me drool. Hotness overload.

Which gym does he use? Let me sign up, too.

Giovanni was wearing slacks, a comfortable grey, and a black turtleneck with a light suit jacket. *This guy sure knows how to dress himself.* I didn't dare look him in the eyes, though.

"Let's taste that coffee, then," he said coldly.

Again, that was pretty unexpected. Maybe these mafia people were kind after all.

I nodded like a shaggy dog and proceeded to give him a second cup. This time I made sure to walk slowly. And I mean really slow just so I wouldn't spill a single drop.

"Do you want me to wait until the next century to drink that?"

I glanced up and walked a bit faster. Squeezing my lips into a tight smile, I presented him with my best work, again, another swan.

He blew the beverage gently.

I was hypnotized. *Those lips, they're really something.*

He took a sip. I held my breath. Then he put it down.

That's it. He's not going to drink anymore. Am I going to die now?

"You can all go now."

Is Giovanni talking to me?

Apparently not. He was addressing his underlings.

"I said you can all go now."

They weren't listening. They were blissfully sipping their coffee.

“The fuck is wrong with you all? Get out. Go do your jobs.” He slammed his fist on the wooden desk.

The guys immediately returned to earth and scurried off. One minute I was surrounded by four hunky dudes, and now I was left all alone with the beast, fending for myself.

It's all right, Jenny. You're smart. You can handle this.

“Sit.” He gestured when we were all alone.

I gracefully sat on the nearest couch, like a gentle-bred lady. Except my bottom didn't even get to touch the soft cushion before he barked at me again.

“Not on the couch. On the floor.”

Sadistic, bossy brute, I cursed inside my head. But not wanting to die, I obeyed.

“This is your contract—”

“Contract?” I shot up, interrupting him. “Does that mean I don't die?”

“If you interrupt me again, you will. Do I make myself clear?”

I didn't respond.

“I said do I make myself clear?” Giovanni's eye twitched. He glared at me, and a second later my eyes were filled with his face. He was exactly one inch from my eyes.

“I said do I make myself clear?” he repeated once more, each syllable coming out loud and clear; echoing around the room and into my ears, resonating into my heart.

“Clear as the sun on a cloudless day.” I swallowed, nodding.

“Now be a good servant and sit back down.”

I mumbled another curse under my breath and sat on the floor again.

Giovanni went to sit on the nearest couch and folded his legs like the big boss he was. He tossed a glare at me and proceeded to outline my role.

“You are my servant, Jay. And most importantly, you will be my coffee machine. Whenever I want one, you will make one for me. You must be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”

“Excuse me!” I shot up from the floor again and stood my ground.

Giovanni was a little startled at my sudden movement. He blinked a few times, but then he composed himself again. *That Adonis statue. That’s what I’m going to nickname him from now on.*

“But wouldn’t that be going against employee rights? You can’t demand me to make you coffee twenty-four hours a day. I need to go to school. I need to sleep.”

“Unless you want me to cut your body up into little pieces and grind it in the coffee machine, then I require my coffee twenty-four-seven. Which do you choose? Being the coffee bean or making the coffee?”

I swallowed again. That was an easy choice. I didn’t need to think. I grinned and flashed him my best smile. “I’m happy to be your servant and your coffee machine. Just call me anytime. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.”

“Very good.” He was about to turn away when I intercepted him, jumping right in his path.

“Can I ask how much Pa owes you? So I know how long I’m supposed to be in service to you.”

“Three million.”

Upon hearing his answer, my eyes rolled back and I crumpled into a dead lump on the couch.



“You’re useless. Utterly useless. Why are you still sleeping? Get up.”

I was already wide awake from his yelling, but I didn’t listen to him. I was still mulling over the notion of why Pa had abandoned me.

Three million dollars. What in the eggshell did he do with all that money? And why must I be the collateral? I have to go to school, too. Doesn’t he know that? And where has Amelia gone to? Ahh. I can’t wait to find him. When I do, I’ll give him an earful for sure.

“I said get up. Don’t pretend to faint,” he growled, and in the next second, a cushion smacked me right in the face.

Bastard!

I got up slowly and followed Giovanni as he took me around the mansion, explaining what kind of jobs I’d have to do during my stay as a maid here. Although, most of the time, I just stood admiring his tall, lean form.

Hotness overload. Totally captivating. This guy really was the epitome of perfection. From where I stood, he looked to be about six feet one. Such a tall man. I was so jealous. I looked like a midget standing next to him with my five-foot-two status.

Finally, after touring the whole house, or should I say mansion, he decided to take me to see his bedroom, since it would be my duty to clean his room. And his bedroom was

huge. It was the size of our whole house. And when I saw his bed, I gaped.

Is this how rich people live? With a king-size bed fit for a... well, king?

I paced around the bed, mesmerized, feeling the soft fabric between my fingers. *Oh, it's pure silk. What a rich bastard. I want to sleep on this bed, too.*

"Oh, boss, your bed feels so nice." I rubbed my palm on his pillowcase. In all my life, I'd never touched material this rich before.

I hadn't a clue how Giovanni saw me at that moment. I was enjoying my fantasy of sleeping on that bed too much, and I didn't realize I messed up his bed sheets until a soft cough startled me.

"Ah, boss, I'm so sorry. I messed up your bed. I'll tidy it." I flipped out.

But Giovanni still didn't say a word. He just observed me as if I were an object on display. He looked as if he were lost in another world altogether.

"Ah, boss." I waved my hand in front of his face to check his response.

"What?" he shouted, freaking the soul out of me.

"You're staring at me," I muttered.

Giovanni blinked, then shook his head. "Let's go to your bedroom."

My bedroom. Finally. My legs are about to cave in already. The first thing I'm going to do is jump on the bed and rest my feet.

“This is your room.” Giovanni led me to a—

What the hell is this? Why is he opening the door to the hallway closet?

“We’re in a closet,” I said stupidly, looking around the tiny room with a small cot on the far wall. “Why are we in a closet?”

“It’s your bedroom.”

I was gob smacked.

“Come on. I’m an award-winning barista. I deserve better than to live in a closet,” I argued.

“You’re a coffee machine and my maid. You’re staying in the closet.”

“I don’t think I can get used to this. Can’t I live in a normal room?” I bargained, tilting my head back to give him my puppy dog pleading eyes.

“No. Get used to it.” He blinked, then shook his head again. “You’ll be living here until every last cent is paid.” And then he strode across the room like a male model on a catwalk, slamming the door so it rattled on its hinges.

Why must he always be so dramatic when he enters and exits the room? Tsk. That Adonis with few words. Just wait. I’d make him such delicious coffee that he wouldn’t be able to drink another coffee again. And then when he was so sucked in, I’d bargain for my freedom.

Ha-ha. I grinned an evil smile. I couldn’t wait for that day.

CHAPTER 4
CHESSBOARD AND BUSINESS-OVERLOAD

Giovanni felt his heart go into palpitations. It was weird. His heart never palpitated for anyone or anything. Not since that time twelve years ago when his heart had smiled that once at the taste of that bitter coffee. He smiled at that pleasant thought. A sudden image of Jenny with pleading green puppy dog eyes just moments before robbed his senses, and he could see her in his mind's eye.

Fuck. His heart flip-flopped again. It must be that instant coffee. Too much wasn't good. He needed the real stuff. Where was that midget girl when he needed her?

"Bobby," he barked, his expression growing darker when his right-hand man didn't appear in that instant. "The fuck're you hiding, Bobby? Get here right now or I'll chop your balls off."

"Ah, boss. Coming." Bobby came scurrying into the room with hands shielding his private parts. "You need me, boss?"

"Where the fuck were you when I called?" he growled at his underling.

"I was working, boss. You know that collection report you were telling me about. We missed one, a man from downtown. We need to collect money from him today if we want to meet our quota."

“You’ve been drinking coffee, haven’t you?” He snarled, not listening to a single word his underling was saying.

Bobby blinked at him. “How do you—”

Thwack!

“Ow, boss! Why’d you hit me on the head?” Bobby yelped, rubbing his already throbbing skull.

“You think I’m an idiot. I can smell it across the room. How many cups did Jay make for you?”

“Two, boss.”

“She only made me one,” he muttered under his breath, suppressing the desire to show his jealousy. “And I didn’t even get to finish it before it turned cold. Where is she? Tell her I demand a flat white on my desk now.”

“Ah, boss, that might be a bit difficult,” Bobby pointed out timidly.

“Why?” he roared.

“Because she’s cleaning the bathroom.”

“Which bathroom?”

“Our bathroom.”

“Fuck!” Giovanni swore. If that girl was cleaning that bathroom, there was no way he’d allow her anywhere near him. His underlings’ bathroom was even worse than dog shit. It was the one place he never dared venture to. And for good reason, since he considered himself a clean freak. “Fine. I’ll wait. But when she’s done and all cleaned up, tell her I want my flat white.”

“Yes, boss.”

“And make sure to tell her to wash her hands thoroughly. I don’t want any germs from you all,” he added, just in case Bobby forgot. His right-hand man tended to forget the small details, which really peeved him big time.

“On it, boss. I’ll tell her right now.”

Giovanni sank into the cushy chair as his underling disappeared out the door. He let that small disappointment sag out of his shoulders and turned to more pressing matters, like the money Jay’s father owed him.

Three million dollars.

Stupid old man. He never should’ve loaned him that money. Now look where it got him. A plain midget girl he couldn’t even bed in exchange for the measly three million.

How long would his daughter stay under his charge to pay his debt? Three million wasn’t a lot to him, but to someone like the Stones, who hadn’t a couple of dollars to rub together, it was a big deal.

Giovanni admitted he didn’t like the old man’s daughter. On first sight, she’d disturbed his peace of mind like no other. The way she spoke, loud and rude, not even caring he was a mafia boss, really pissed him off. If it weren’t for her coffee skills, she would have been gone by now. Yet he couldn’t stop staring at her then or thinking about her now. There was something about her that he couldn’t quite put his finger on. She looked so familiar somehow, like...

Fuck! He needed to stop this before his head exploded.

Giovanni strode to his bedroom on the second floor and stripped off his clothes, a snake shedding its skin, taking off one article of clothing at a time and scattering them all over the floor. He did say he was a clean freak, but that didn’t mean

he had to pick up after himself. He had many servants around, especially that new one he couldn't get out of his mind.

Ah, fuck. There he went again. Thinking about her. He needed to stop this. It must be the fucking weather. Too fucking hot for spring. It was frying his brains. He needed to cool down. And fast. First a shower. Then coffee. In that order.

Once completely naked, he walked to the ensuite bathroom and opened the door...



The clock on the wall read 3:00 p.m. That meant I'd been here for more than four hours. And in that time, I'd been doing the following: serving coffee, cleaning, and doing a mountain of laundry accumulated by five grown men. And the list just went on.

And here Adonis said he didn't need a maid. Slap my ass. What a liar. My hands were already numb from mopping the floor. Thankfully, the last job on the list was to clean the bathroom.

I cringed. *How many bathrooms are in this mansion? Two?* I doubted it. More like twenty. But no matter, I went in with renewed strength. This was my last job, after all, before I got to rest my feet.

"Man up, Jenny. You can do this. Don't give up." I pumped myself up for the full task ahead.

It was only cleaning the bathroom. No big deal. I cleaned the bathroom all the time at home anyway. A quick spray here, a simple wipe there, then voilà, all done. I was even faster than Amelia painting her nails.

That was my initial thought anyway. Until I opened the door and a whiff of what smelled like rotten eggs and a three

month-old fart bomb blasted me right in the face.

“Ooeew. What a stink bomb!” I was so not prepared for that.

I stood surveying the site, pinching my nose. From the look of the tub, a herd of elephants had taken a dump in it.

“Just you wait, Adonis,” I muttered under my breath, scrubbing the tub until it shone and sparkled. “I’ll clean this tub until you can see your face in it. And then you’ll reduce my life sentence.”

I worked hard and fast cleaning that bathroom. Sweat and grime poured off my body in buckets. And if only one droplet of sweat equated to one dollar, I was sure I’d be a millionaire just like Adonis. Then I’d have enough money to pay back Pa’s debt. Right?

In your dreams, Jenny. I rolled my eyes. From the look of things, I’d have to spend at least two more lifetimes working as a mafia’s maid in order to pay off his debt. For a poor college student like me, I guessed I’d been condemned to this hellhole of a stink bomb for a lot longer.

Well, at least another ten minutes anyway. I chuckled. I was almost finished. I did a jiggy dance at this thought.

Ah. Sometimes I amazed myself at how quick and adaptable I was to new living environments. *Is that why Pa left me behind with the sharks instead of taking me with him?* This thought suddenly depressed me.

What the hell, Jenny? Get your head together. This is no time to mull over this problem. Right now, let’s clean this bathroom so it’s all spic and span, then have a shower and get into clean clothes.

God, I stunk. Just like a skunk. No, wait, not like any normal skunk. I was the queen of all skunks.

Oh, how pathetic. I was losing my mind. I seriously needed a shower. Or a bath. And fast. And then food. In that order.

I inched my way upstairs, back to my adorable, oh-so-cozy closet bedroom. Not!

Stripping myself of my soiled clothes, I donned a towel that I found in the back of my bedroom and made a mad race across the long hallway, eager to find a bathroom fit for the skunk queen from Brooklyn.

And then I stopped.

Oh crap! I didn't recall sighting any bathroom along the Giovanni tour. Now what was I going to do? I needed to find a shower. Fast. I was literally naked beneath this towel. I couldn't go parading around in my skimpy towel to search for a bath. What happened if that mafia guy saw me? No, that wouldn't do at all.

Well, I could always go back down to the guys' bathroom. I know where that was. But the probability of seeing more people would be higher if I showered there.

Oh, what to do? From the sheer size of this mansion— no, I should say museum—it'd take me more than half a day just to find one.

Just then, a proverbial lightbulb lit above my head. *Adonis's bathroom. Brilliant, Jenny.* I remembered where that was. Next to my closet bedroom. I didn't have to walk far at all. We were literally next-door neighbors.

I grinned like the Cheshire cat. *Ah. It's only going to be for a minute. I'll just hop in the shower. Five minutes, max. I'm*

sure he wouldn't mind.

I clutched my towel more securely around myself, then inched closer to Giovanni's bedroom door. I opened it gently and quietly, slowly peeking between that small gap to check whether Adonis was in.

Good. He wasn't in there. That being said, though, I hadn't seen him since this morning.

Humph. I shrugged. Probably out and about doing whatever mafia stuff he did. Threatening people and criminal activities, I bet. Not my problem and none of my concern if he got caught by the law. All the better for me for getting out of this debt earlier. But I hadn't time to think about him right now. I had more important issues to deal with. Like getting myself clean.

Dashing to the bathroom through Adonis's bedroom, I once again found myself in awe of the sheer size of his bed. I couldn't help but jump on it for a good bounce.

Oh golly, it felt so damned good on my bottom. But before anyone caught me, I jumped back up, giving the sheets an extra tight tug before making my way to the bathroom.

If the guys' bathroom downstairs was a dump for the zoo animals, then Adonis's bathroom must be a dump for—

Oh my Lord, I take back that thought. Is this guy a clean freak or what? All the shampoo, deodorant, cologne, basically all the necessary items that make a guy's charm ooze with pheromones were laid out like artwork on the shelf.

Clean. Too clean. This bathroom was literally plucked from the top housing magazine. I could literally see my face on every reflective surface, including the huge wall mirror attached to one side of the room.

I looked at myself. *Hmm*. I really didn't look half bad at all. My light-brown hair still stuck out on all ends. But nothing a little hairbrush couldn't fix. Sun-kissed freckles still scattered my nose, highlighting them even further against my ivory-pale skin. My eyes were still green. No, green is such a boring color. Emerald or jade would be more suited to describe my irises. My lips were red, full, and plump. I didn't need to waste money on Botox. I had natural beauty. And although I stood at five feet two, I considered myself model material. I was slim, with the right amount of curves in all the right places.

“Oh, Jenny. You're so hot. Definitely model material.” I contorted myself this way and that against the stylish shower stall, giggling and laughing at myself while viewing my own reflection in the tall mirror.

Why was that mafia boss saying he couldn't sleep with me? Comparing me to a pig. Gosh, he was just too blind to see my real beauty.

Well, just my luck, then. I was going to use his bathroom as revenge.

Not waiting another second, I dropped my towel in eager anticipation. Turning on the hot shower, I slipped in, forgetting about my towel on the floor.

Oh my, this is pure heaven. Happiness right there in the shower. The water back home would run and stop, like there was a clot in the showerhead. Here, the spray came at just the right pressure, making my skin tingle in delight.

I closed my eyes, feeling the weight of grime and stress draining off me.

And saw Adonis in the mirror.

Holy cow. Too much of his pheromones in the air, and now I was reacting to him by daydreaming of him in the shower?

I blinked my eyes open, yet he was still there, his perfectly formed body on full display for me. I splashed water on my face and even scrubbed my eyes until I was all sore, but...

Oh, crap. I was definitely not dreaming. Adonis was really there in his bedroom, stripping off his clothes slowly. I plastered my face against the glass, watching as he unbuttoned his shirt, like he was slowly unwrapping a Christmas present. Each article he took off made my eyes bulge even farther out of their sockets. Perfect chest, perfect abs, and perfect...

Ah? What's that on his chest? A dragon tattoo? That dragon looked familiar. Now where had I seen it before?

Who cares. Right now, what I wanted to see was...

Holy cow. He's taking off his pants.

Turn around. Turn around. I want to see your—

Giovanni did turn around, resulting in my heart going into arrhythmic mode. I had to remind myself to calm down and breathe.

I felt something dripping down my chin. Oh, my gosh! I was drooling. I wiped my saliva and continued to stare at him, mesmerized and entranced at his beauty. He was seriously Adonis. Even down there.

So hot. So captivating. Hotness overload!

And then he had to walk into the bathroom, putting me into panic attack mode. I seized and shook in the shower.

Oh golly, golly. I'm naked. I'm naked.

I managed to shut off the shower nozzle in time, fluffing around the stall like a featherless chicken about to take flight, now only realizing I'd left my towel outside. I couldn't possibly open the shower door now. And I could already hear his footsteps approaching the bathroom.

Luckily, this shower was very high-tech. It had one of those technology thingybobs, whereby I could just push a button and the glass wall frosted up. And that was what I did. My once translucent glass wall was now opaque. I couldn't see a damned thing. Now I had to rely on my hearing alone.

I pressed my ear to the wall, not hearing anything. Had he gone back to his bedroom again? I opened the shower door slowly to check and—

Noo! Giovanni was coming back into the bathroom. My arms reacted faster than my brain, jerking the door shut quickly enough that it slammed into my nose. Now my nose was like Rudolph the reindeer, except this was no happy reindeer; this was pure misery times ten. I had to clamp my mouth shut to stop my banshee scream from escaping my lips.

Giovanni must have heard my wee tweet, because his footsteps approached the shower stall faster than lightning and he started rattling the door. I freaked out and jumped to tug at the door handle myself, closing it in time—before he could pull it open. Now both of us were playing a game of tug-of-war, with Giovanni trying to pull open the door while I was trying my best to keep it closed.

He was strong, but I was adamant. He might have the strength of a full-grown man with testosterone, which whipped at my senses and made me drool, but no way was I letting him open that door. I was naked. Who knew? He might even want to sleep with me after seeing my sexy body. I was a virgin,

thank you very much. And I was very happy to stay that way. Until I found the guy I loved. And this mafia boss—nope, not the one for me.

Giovanni rattled the door again. I still didn't let go.

“Fuck. Bobby, did you accidentally lock my shower stall again,” he yelled to his underling. “I told you not to use my bathroom, you ass.”

I shivered under my naked skin. Not because I was cold. Oh no. Because I was so freaked out. I could feel his anger radiating off him in just his voice alone. I knew he'd kill me if he knew I was showering in his bathroom. No amount of coffee skill could save me now. So, I hung tight with my plan. *Hold on to that door handle for dear life.*

I heard receding footsteps. I knew he must have gone to bark at Bobby.

I didn't think further. I quickly yanked myself out of the shower stall, grabbed my towel off the floor, thanking the Lord on the way for giving me this golden opportunity to escape, and then ran for my life, almost reaching the sanctuary of my closet bedroom when—

“Jay!”

Holy crap! Giovanni called my name. I clutched the flimsy material against myself, making sure my beautiful twin assets wouldn't peek out from beneath the towel, and then turned around to face the mafia boss.

I cringed when I saw him. He was a pure devil from hell, out to carve out my thumping heart. Black hair, black pupils, and hot tanned skin. He was also wearing a black bathrobe just to complete the whole dark, devil-may-care look, which suited me just fine, since I didn't want to experience another episode

of being a drooling idiot. Now, if he were to appear in the nude, I was sure I wouldn't just dribble saliva; I would dribble blood from my nose, too.

I smiled at him timidly, staring up at his tall stature. "Hi, boss. Fancy seeing you in the hallway. What are you—"

"Where were you?" He cut me off frostily, eyes glaring down at me with black flames.

"Down the hallway, boss. Just had a shower. As you can see right here." I indicated my oh-so-wet body, drenched like a drowned mouse, with only a measly towel covering me.

But why, oh why, did I mention I had a shower? Giovanni stared me up and down, his eyes eating up every inch of my skin, making my whole body heat in a foreign way. I felt something warm and hot constricting at the pit of my belly.

"Boss, stop staring at me like that. You're making me nervous."

"Nervous? What reason do you have to be nervous? You're as flat as a chessboard." He indicated my breasts with his eyes.

I held the towel to cover up my beautiful assets. "Stop making fun of my breasts."

"Do I look like I'm laughing?" His eyes roamed my body up and down again. "You really have no breasts, chessboard. How old are you?"

"Eighteen, when you declared me your coffee machine," I snapped, face going red with anger, humiliation, and something else. *Crap, my heart is going into palpitation mode again.*

“Undeveloped child. Get dressed and come downstairs. I want my flat white after my shower. And make that quick, chessboard.” He shook his head and then walked off.

Chessboard. Undeveloped child. I wanted to bonk him on the head, but luckily, he’d already gone. And thankfully, I was able to escape to my closet with no further disruption. But by the time I got there, I was struggling for breath.

Holy Lord, help me. That encounter with Adonis almost caused me to have a heart attack. Never again would I share the same bathroom as that Greek god.

CHAPTER 5
FIRST BUNCHY JOB

As soon as I got downstairs, I was hit with a bunch of requests from all four corners.

“Jenny, tall black!” Jonny. Very demanding.

“Jenny, hot chocolate! And make that swan on it too. I like it.” Bobby. Very whiny.

“Jenny, a short black.” Heath. I didn’t know much about him.

“Jenny, long black please.” Finnie. Very polite.

I was about to deliver their orders when Gio’s husky voice travelled to my ears, alerting me to full active mode.

I turned toward him by instinct and almost drooled again. What was up with this mafia boss? Was he trying to show off his full spring collection in his wardrobe? This dude was really playing with a maiden’s heart here. And didn’t he just have a shower this morning when I accidentally dumped my scalding coffee on him?

“What the fuck are all of you doing?” Giovanni yelled at his underlings. “Get your bloody asses on the street and start collecting money.”

“Yes, boss.” They all scurried off their chairs, flipping over backward trying to reach the door.

I stood there staring at the chaos. *What just happened?*

Giovanni glared at me when I didn't move. "Jay, you go, too."

"What?" I blurted.

Did I hear that right? Giovanni wanted me to go with those guys to do mafia jobs. Was he kidding me? This was only my first day as his maid. Surely threatening and hurting people were jobs only reserved for the male species. A soft delicate creature like me couldn't even hurt a fly, let alone a human being.

So, I put forth my good reasoning. "But I'm a woman."

"You're an apparatus, equipment in this household, like this chair or table here," he barked, shutting me up. "Now get moving and make me some money."

"What am I supposed to be doing?"

"Follow them and you'll find out," he hissed in my face.

Was he still mad at me from this afternoon? Heck! Did he find out I'd used his bathroom? I had to be careful next time.

"Jay!"

"What?"

"Get going. Or do you want me to whack your butt?"

Whacking? Would I be punished if I defied his orders? Gee, this guy was a sadistic brute. There was no way I was staying around to find out. My gluteus maximus was very sensitive tissue. So I raced outside like the devil—aka Giovanni Dente—was chasing my tail.

As soon as I caught up to the guys outside, they were already sliding into the black van. I hauled myself into the van

before it took off, only to come face to face with a crying man.

“Why are you crying? You know boss doesn’t like us showing our feminine side,” Finnie said, consoling the crying Bobby who was sobbing like a child.

“I can’t help it. Why... why do I have to be called Bobby? It’s so... so not manly,” Bobby explained between hiccups.

I didn’t know what the commotion was about, but I cleared my throat anyway, alerting them to my presence. They all glared at me. I wasn’t the least bit intimidated. If I were to stay in Cory Mansion as maid, then at least I should get on their good side. Who knew? My time here might be more enjoyable if I were to become their friend. Always look on the positive side of everything, I say.

“Bobby. It’s Bobby, isn’t it?” I asked, using my soothing voice. But I still couldn’t believe I was about to console the very man who’d tried to throw me off the bridge just this morning, though. “It’s okay, Bobby. I think you have a cute name. We can call you Bob for short, if you like. What do you think, guys?”

“Nooo,” Bobby wailed, shaking his head like a little baby.

“Okay, how about Bobby Baby, then,” I suggested again.

Oh crap! I think I touched a sensitive spot. Bobby wailed even louder.

“I don’t want to be called Bobby Baby,” he sobbed.

I hushed him up. “The big boss might reprimand us again if you don’t stop crying, you know?”

And what do you know? Just when I mentioned him, the devil arrived.

“What the fuck are you sorry asses crying about?” he yelled through the car window. “Didn’t I say to get your asses on the street and collect the money?”

“Sorry, boss. We’ll be on our way now,” they all said in unison, seat belts sliding into place.

“Crazy bastard,” I muttered under my breath, putting my seat belt on properly as well.

“Jay!”

Crap. Did he hear me?

“Yes, boss.” I immediately twirled around in my seat to face him.

“You stay behind. I just remembered you didn’t make me my flat white.”

“You can drink the guys’ coffees. They didn’t get to drink theirs yet. On the kitchen island.”

“I already did. But I still want my flat white.”

“Ah, sorry boss, but I have to help Bobby and the guys collect the money first.” I made my excuse.

I didn’t want to stay in this huge mansion all by myself with Giovanni. The episode of the naked Adonis flinging his thingaling in the bathroom was still fresh in my mind. Not to mention he might smack my butt as he threatened just minutes ago. Whacking and smacking, that just wasn’t my thing.

“Will be back to cook you dinner by six, so I won’t be too long.”

“Jay, wait. You have—”

I didn’t wait for him to finish. I slammed the door shut in his face, and Finnie slammed his foot on the accelerator,

driving me away from the Greek god.



My first dirty job and I was stuck between two macho men in a black van. I couldn't believe my life had degraded to this level. Not that I was rich before, but this was just beyond my imagination. If I told my friends I was actually living with a mafia clan, would they believe me? I shook the thought out of my head and concentrated on the task at hand.

We were now parked in one of the secluded, highly prized neighborhoods, sitting in the van, observing the building, we—Bobby, Heath, Finnie, Jonny and myself—were supposed to collect the money from. Heath, who'd hardly spit a word out since this morning, finally said his first word to me. "That's some courage you showed when you said that to big boss right there."

I cracked my neck, staring at him. Heath was even taller than Giovanni. I estimated him to be about six feet six. *Maybe I should rename him Bigfoot.*

"You really think I'm all that courageous." I eyed him with questionable doubt.

"No, Jay. I think you're just some stupid girl who's about to get her butt kicked for real if you behave with that attitude again. Boss doesn't take it too kindly when someone shuts the door in his face when he's talking to you. That's disrespectful."

"Well, I say he's being disrespectful for always shouting and swearing at us like some mad person. Lunatic. That's what he is. Always using that F-word. F this. F that. Don't you guys hate it when he swears at you all the time?"

“That’s just the boss’ way of saying he cares for us,” Bobby explained.

“That’s some weird way to show his love,” I muttered. Although I didn’t want to say this out loud, I thought this whole mafia clan belonged in a mental institution, the boss and his underlings. Even his hot body and face wouldn’t help save his life. “I say if he ever swears at me again, I’ll... I’ll...”

“You’ll what?” Heath asked, challenging me.

“I’ll... I’ll... Hey, look, there’s a hot woman over there.”

Heath and Bobby were like any normal men. With the mention of a hot woman, their eyes swirled around like a camera lens.

“Where? I don’t see a hot woman.” Bobby pouted when none appeared.

“Oh, you missed her.” I lied. At least I didn’t have to answer Heath’s question after distracting them like that.

Back to the subject of Giovanni, I asked them some more. “Hey, at least I’m bound to him because of my Pa’s debt. If I leave, he’ll...” I made a zipping sound and a cutting gesture across my neck. “You know what I mean. But you guys. What are you in it for?”

“He saved my life. I’m bound to serve him forever. It’s my promise to him,” Bobby said, expressing his sparkling sincerity in his eyes.

Is Bobby gay? Does he have a crush on that mafia boss? Ooh, I ship gay couples. They do look hot together.

“All right, enough of this sappy talk. Let’s get to work.” Heath shut us all up, including my fantasizing thoughts.

Heath and Bobby broke in the door like cops on the raid and burst into the room. A man near the corner who was sitting playing cards rushed out the back way, but Heath was really fast. He grabbed the guy by the collar and stopped him.

The man struggled, but Heath was stronger. He pinned the guy to the wall.

Heath didn't say anything. It was Bobby who spoke. "Where's the money?"

"What money? I ain't got any."

Heath strangled the guy tighter, and Bobby punched the wall. I thought he must have bad aim, but no, that must have been his way of intimidating the guy. Although, I bet the only one in pain would be him and his knuckles.

But I was wrong. The guy did cower in fear. "I say I ain't got any money. Just look around ya. I ain't got no money."

I looked around the apartment. This guy was obviously lying. He was living in such a high-maintenance building. Someone had to pay for it.

"You said you don't have any money," Bobby voiced my thoughts. "Then what's with the iPad and flat screen?"

"They're rented." The man shook like he was about to pee in his pants.

"Rented?" Bobby's harsh words made the man's legs crumble even farther.

"Aye. Rented. I just want to show off to me friends that I live in the fast lane."

"Well, now it's time to live in the slow lane. Give us the money." Bobby threatened by punching his fist into the wall again.

“But I ain’t got none.”

“You give us the money, Grandpa, or I’ll cut you into thin slices of bacon and fry you up. Add a poached egg, too, and you’re all ready for breakfast. Have you ever heard of it, eggs benedict?”

“No. I’m vegan.”

“It’s an English breakfast. Now, do you want to be that eggs benedict?”

“No.”

“Then give us the money.”

Gee, was this the same guy that just cried on my shoulder a moment ago. He was threatening to turn this guy into breakfast.

Although, that did do the trick. The guy was shaking in his boots. He crumbled like the Berlin wall and instantly went to retrieve the cash from under his mattress.

It was a quick exchange. Once the guys collected the money, they all retreated to the black van. My feet wouldn’t move as I stood rooted to the floor. I stared at the collapsed form of the vegan man.

“I’m sorry. Try to make the repayment next time instead of spending money impressing your friends.” I tried to console him before Bobby called me back to the car. And then off we went again, collecting more badass money.

I was starting to think this mafia clan was actually a debt collection company. But then again, what did I know of mafias and their activities? It had only been my first day as maid for the mafia boss.

Suddenly, my nose twitched. This usually indicated something interesting would happen in the near future. Although, I had absolutely no idea what that could be. But I didn't have to wait long to find out. It came faster than I could say the word *whack*.

CHAPTER 6
SERVING THE GODS UNBLESSED HOURS

This was still my first day on the job, and I was still working. Apparently, that mafia boss really was true to his word. He planned to use me to the bones. Straight from collecting money, I was immediately ordered to cook them dinner. I couldn't even get a glass of water to quench my parched throat. I was tossed into the kitchen and expected to cook a five-course meal fit for the king of the mafia.

He thinks I can't live up to his expectations. Well, he's wrong. I was the master chef in our household. Forcing me to cook something like a roast, that was my specialty.

At exactly 6:00 p.m. sharp, as promised, I served them dinner. Roast pork with crackling that could break your teeth and an abundance of roasted vegetables. The smell of my food was so succulent even I was salivating.

One thing I found out while working here, even though it had only been one day, was this clan, boss and underlings, ate together like a family, which I thought was a bit strange. *Where's Giovanni's family? Is he an only child?*

What the heck? This issue didn't concern me one bit. I was all too eager to launch forward with my fork and fill my belly with delicious food.

We were all dishing up my succulent homemade meal when I looked up at the boss and muttered, “Gio, could you pass me the bowl of peas?”

Everyone at the dining table dropped their cutlery. Giovanni glared at me in a cutthroat manner.

Did I say something wrong? Am I not supposed to ask him? But the bowl of peas is right in front of him.

“You’re my servant, Jay. Never ever use my name,” Giovanni said coldly, his tone giving off another layer of ice.

“Okay,” I answered, nodding, not really taking the whole “ice glare” seriously. “But what happens on the off chance I forget?”

“Then it’s simple.” He laid his knife and fork on the table and looked directly at me, his hot lips in a thin, straight line. “I’ll just cut out your tongue.”

I gaped and stuttered, “But... but... if you cut out my tongue, how do we communicate? What happens if you want a flat white and I make you a short black instead?”

Giovanni clenched his jaws and his eye ticked, which meant he was pissed off. I smirked. I loved riling him up. Especially with what happened in the bathroom before. This could be my form of revenge on him. Hee-hee.

“Sorry, boss, you can go back to eating your dinner.” I dismissed him. I was about to dish up my second course since the first one didn’t do an ounce to fill my ravenous belly, when I was yanked out of my chair and somehow found myself on his lap, my head facing the floor and my bottom facing up.

Oh no, what’s he doing? And then...

Whack!

There was a collective gasp from everyone. I forced back my tears.

Giovanni smacked my bottom. This mafia boss smacked my bottom. So, he didn't lie after all. He was capable of smacking me.

Was this why my nose had been twitching nonstop? Was this it?

Tears welled from my eyes. I forced them back and glared at him. No way would I give him the luxury of seeing me cry.

“Never, ever talk back to me, Jay. You have no right to use my name. I'm your master and you're my servant. Remember, you're a coffee machine.”

“But you call me Jay.” I got off his lap and yelled at him. Oh my, was I angry. Like really mad. I gave him my own interpretation of his stupid notion. “My name is *Jenny*, not Jay. So, shouldn't I have the right to call you Gio instead of boss all the time?”

Giovanni stood to his full height, dwarfing me. He started poking his finger on my forehead as he made his declaration. “I'm your owner, Jay.” *Poke*. “I can call you whatever I like.” *Poke*. “You, on the other hand, must call me boss at all times.”

“Agh,” I squealed, slapping his finger off my forehead. I stood up higher, almost on tiptoe, and squared my shoulders, determined to give him my own version of the death glare, except it didn't do me an ounce of good. Giovanni wasn't even intimidated. Plus, I had to look up at him, which made me the one at a disadvantage since I was shorter than he is, by so many inches.

“That's right, *boss*.” I emphasized the word boss just to let him know I was pissed with him. “I'm a coffee machine. And

you know what? You're not getting any coffee tonight until you apologize, and that's the end of our conversation. If you feel the need to apologize, I'll be in my closet." I then stormed to my assigned room.

"I think you made the coffee machine angry," I heard Bobby say just before I got out of earshot.

Once I got to my room, I yelled a thousand curses at him, enough to sting even his dead ancestors' ears.

I couldn't believe this. Getting spanked for calling him by his name? What's so special about the name Gio anyway? Did he have a lover who called him by that name and now she was gone, so he was wounded?

Agh. Stupid idiot. You nincompoop.

I rubbed at my butt. *My poor gluteus maximus. Now it stings. I'll have to sleep on my stomach.*

I slumped on my cot and thought about my dire situation. When would I ever get out of this hellhole? And how would I survive if he kept using me like this? I had college to attend, plus midterm exams coming up. I needed to study. If I worked twenty-four hours, around the clock like this, would I pass?

The thought really depressed me. I wished Pa would have thought about me for a bit before he took off like a thief and left me behind.

But then again, I actually had a roof over my head. I tried to smile and look on the bright side. At least I wouldn't have to go homeless. Maybe Pa and Amelia were lying in the gutter somewhere right now. This thought didn't sit well with me either.

A good two hours had passed. It was well past midnight. My eyes started drooping. Guess there wouldn't be any

apology coming from that mafia boss tonight. Then again, I was his servant. He did have a point. And at least he was kind enough not to kill me. I had a full day of classes planned tomorrow. I knew I'd better get some sleep. Wouldn't want to appear in class with panda eyes.

I closed my eyes and fell asleep. Only for a second, though, before a disturbing knock jolted me awake. I jerked my eyes open, in turn flipping on my cellphone to check the time. 3:00 a.m. *Who on earth is waking me at three in the morning? And didn't I just fall asleep, like a second ago?*

I pressed the pillows to my ears, trying hard to ignore that insistent knocking. Only for a good second. Suddenly, the door to my closet room burst open, revealing the silhouette of that Adonis in his human form.

"What do you want?" I burrowed my head into the pillow farther, knowing immediately it was the devil out to disturb my peaceful sleep.

It was only two small words from him, but I knew by morning, I'd have panda eyes for sure.

"My coffee."

"I'll make it in three hours. Go back to sleep." I waved him off.

"Make my coffee. Now!" he growled, threw a pillow, which landed nicely and correctly on my forehead, and then slammed the door to my room, so hard even my soul was now shaking.

"Ugh," I moaned, and drummed my head against the pillow three times. "I'll poison you, Gio. I'll definitely poison you with my coffee so you can't think of anyone but me. Then you'll give me some sleep."

I whimpered as I padded out of my bed, half yawning, and made my way to the kitchen, prepping the machine and making Giovanni his ultimate flat white. Once done, I staggered in a zigzag to his office, once again half-yawning and talking to myself just to keep from dropping off.

“Morning, boss. You’re an early riser,” I commented, walking into his office and delivering his coffee to his desk.

I couldn’t help admiring Giovanni’s appearance at this time of night, or should I say morning? He looked so fresh, with his sleek black hair and suit and tie, sitting there behind his desk, conquering the world; compared to me, who was like a dead fish, gasping with no oxygen, what with my persistent yawning.

“I haven’t been to sleep yet,” he answered, making my head swing in his direction so fast I almost strained a neck muscle.

“What? Really, but it’s three in the morning. Aren’t you tired? I’m so tired right now.”

“And you’re yapping nonstop.” He glared at me from under his hooded black lashes, probably annoyed at my talkative behavior again.

“That’s me sleep talking,” I explained cheerfully, finding myself somewhere comfortable to sit. When I found the only available chair was the one positioned in front of his desk, I sat there and watched as he took a sip of his coffee.

I couldn’t divert my eyes from his lips. *I wonder what they taste like.* Not knowing what I was doing and through some unexplained phenomenal force, my face inched forward until I was literally staring at him right in front of his face.

“Your eyes are really black, like the night sky outside. I’ve never seen eyes like that before,” I commented, gazing at his jet-black pupils, somehow feeling a familiar ache in my heart.

Giovanni froze. He flicked his eyes to me and brought his face even closer to mine. From this distance, I had a clear view of his irises, which were now almost like a deep blue, swirling and mucky. I swallowed, struck by something odd and feeling somewhat hazy. Then he did something really peculiar. He grabbed my chin and tilted it from left to right, as if assessing my face for something. I blinked, cutting off the tense atmosphere.

Yikes! Did I drool in my sleep? That’s awful.

I wiped at my mouth, dislodging his fingers from my chin. I checked for any signs of wetness, but there were none. I heaved a sigh of relief. Thank God I didn’t drool.

Giovanni shook his head in confusion, the once intense raven irises now clear once more. “Did you think you drooled?” he had to ask, embarrassing me even further.

“What? Of course not.” Two peachy blossoms were already branded on my cheeks. “I just don’t like anyone touching my chin. That’s all. A soft and delicate girl like me doesn’t drool when she sleeps.”

“I thought people who sleep talk have their eyes closed. Your eyes are open.” He dismissed me and took another sip of his flat white.

“Haven’t you heard of people sleep talking while their eyes are open? I’m one of them.”

The atmosphere was once again lightened. When I saw him sipping the coffee like he had all the time in the world, I ended up making small talk.

“So, are you going to stay up all night and write threatening letters to people who don’t pay you... like that vegan man? I tell you. He has tons of cash stashed under his mattress. Good thing Bobby threatened to make him into breakfast. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have gotten your money at all. So, is this what mafias do? You go and collect money from people. So, you’re like some sort of money lending company, except with higher interest rates, right? Right?”

Giovanni glowered at me, shutting my nonsense right up. “Who gave you permission to talk? Your job is done. Go back to sleep.”

What? How could he wake me up in the middle of the night for a cup of coffee and demand I go back to sleep when I was fully awake. My eyes were as large as cans of sauce already.

“Fine. I’ll go,” I said, grumpily standing up.

“Jay, wait.” He caught my wrist, stopping me. A slight zap shot up my arm at his touch.

I looked at him. His eyes locked with mine. Something like an electric current passed between us again. I quickly jerked my hand away.

“What is it, bo-boss?” I stuttered, suddenly becoming aware of his body too close to mine. We were literally breathing the same air, his body wedged against mine.

Giovanni didn’t look at me. He just said the following, with his eyes fixed intently on my face. “Stay. Keep me company. Until I finish my coffee.”

I buckled back on the seat; my legs could no longer hold my weight. This time I didn’t talk. My heart was already doing all the talking, thumping like crazy in my chest. We just sat

together in silence. I sat watching him sipping that steaming cup of flat white. After a while, my heart calmed and I couldn't suppress the yawn from escaping my lips.

Giovanni quietly looked up at me and announced, "Go to sleep, Jay. You're making my office unattractive."

I stood from my spot, sending him a scolding look.

Seriously, this mafia boss. He has pissed me right off. First he wants me to stay. Now he wants me to go. I just want to... I want to...



Giovanni caught Jenny in time before she toppled over backward in her sleep.

Am I demanding too much from her on her first day of work? He questioned himself as he carried the delicate girl in his arms to her bedroom. He pushed open the door with his foot and walked slowly to the little cot on the far side of the small room. He laid her gently, folding the blankets back to cover her up. Then he straightened himself and asked what the fuck he'd just done.

He'd just carried a servant girl and deposited her into her bedroom like a bride on her wedding night. This girl did something to him he didn't like. It must be that constant yapping of hers.

Giovanni took a deep breath and let out a sigh. He couldn't help but move his face closer, examining her features, like he had moments before, touching her chin before she jerked from his fingers. She definitely looked like someone he knew, this distant memory of his, which had been compartmentalized at the back of his skull somewhere.

Giovanni growled at himself and ran his fingers through his hair, a habit that tended to show up when he was frustrated with himself. He admitted she was beautiful in a way he couldn't explain. It was like her beauty was too natural, yet, like a plant that continued to grow, she glowed with each passing second he stood in her presence.

She didn't need powder or makeup to make her beautiful. She was different, unlike his other women. And what he was itching to do at that moment really pissed him off. His fingers were already reaching out and touching her scattered freckles and those soft, smooth cheeks that always seemed to glow peachy whenever he looked at her; especially when he came to see her with the skimpy towel wrapped around her thin body.

He admitted he had a hard-on right in that instant, a fact he tried so hard to conceal and tone down with a long, cold shower. He was even denying that feeling right now, as he stared at that skinny girl lying in bed like a half-dead goldfish.

Giovanni jerked his hand back and cursed himself again.
Have I gone out of my fucking mind?

But there was no denying that something inside him moved when he touched her. He wasn't sure what. And he wasn't looking forward to finding it out either. But he knew he'd have to, and soon, too, since he'd be stuck living with this particular maid of his for a long, long time.

CHAPTER 7
CURSE OF THE  COFFEE MACHINE

“Jenny, a short black.”

“Jenny, long black please.”

“Jenny, I want hot chocolate.”

“Jenny, hot water.”

Another day, same old routine. I should’ve been used to it by now, since it’d almost been a week since I came to live in this mansion, occupied by the Adonis mafia boss and his underlings, but there were still some days I was surprised out of my wits. Luckily, today wasn’t one of them.

Before going to class, I had to make sure all their drinks were made; otherwise there would be boo-hoo-hoo for the rest of the day, mainly from Bobby and Giovanni, complaining they couldn’t work until they had my magic potion, aka, my coffee.

But anyway, I felt so refreshed today. I’d finished all my chores and now was sitting contentedly in the lecture hall, writing down notes on Professor Henry’s lesson.

His voice boomed and boomed; I was sure half the student population must have gone deaf already. But I didn’t care about this. I was in my own world. I hardly had days when I

could relax easily. So, I was taking it all in, enjoying the time I had left before that devil mafia boss interrupted me again.

Last week, when he called me at three in the morning just to make him one small cup of flat white, I'd ended up with panda eyes the size of golf balls. I had to wear sunglasses the whole day. Thankfully, my friend Crispin didn't see me in that attire.

Speaking of Crispin, he was pleasantly sitting beside me, jotting down notes, too. I wasn't even sure when he'd arrived. He seemed to just appear in my peripheral, sometimes.

"Jenny," he called.

I swirled around to face him, giving him my lazy smile.

Crispin had brown hair, hazel eyes, and wore glasses. His face was full of freckles, unlike mine, with only small amounts on my nose and cheeks. Crispin was tall, though. Standing at my full height, I only reached his shoulders. He was handsome in a cool, conservative way. I always teased him about not having a girlfriend hanging around his neck. He always teased me about not having a boyfriend, too.

"Mmm, what is it?" I asked, seeing that frown again. These last few weeks, Crispin seemed to always appear before me with a frown. "You're frowning again. Stop. It makes you look old. And you know girls in college don't like guys who're wrinkled." I pressed my thumb on this forehead to smooth it.

"Why are you so happy today, Jenny?" he asked instead, ignoring my advice and removing my thumb from his forehead, only to grasp it between his fingers. "And where were you Friday? I called over at your house, but it was locked up. I tried calling your phone, but you didn't pick up, either."

I cringed and thought back on my sad, sorry life. I didn't have the heart to tell him my house had been put into foreclosure. Giovanni had taken possession of it and wouldn't let me live there. I had to stay at his mansion in my closet room until the three million had been paid off.

"I moved," I told him cheerfully, extracting my thumb from his grasp. "Somewhere closer to the university. Sorry for not telling you. It was hectic with the move."

"You should have called me. I could have come over to help." Crispin held an expression that clearly showed he was hurt.

"Ah, so sorry. Don't be upset." I hurriedly pacified him. "It was a very quick decision. I didn't mean to let it slide. I just forgot, that's all. I was going to, seriously."

"You don't have to look all flustered." He chuckled. "I was only teasing. Haven't we been friends since high school? You should know how I feel about you."

"Yeah, of course I do," I said, somehow agreeing anyway when I hadn't a clue what he was on about. Was there a double meaning to his statement? I didn't get him at all sometimes.

"So, give me your new address." Crispin touched my arm, smiling now, sliding his iPhone across the bench to me. "I'll visit you sometime."

What? No. No. I couldn't give him that mafia boss' address. He'd kill me. Also, I couldn't let Crispin know I was up and over my eyeballs in Pa's debt. So, I lied.

"What? No. No, I don't think it's a good idea."

"Is it your dad? I know he doesn't like you hanging out with me."

“No, of course not.”

“Then your sister, Amelia.”

I shook my head. “No. Not Pa. Not Amelia. They don’t live with me.”

“Where are they now? You mean to tell me you live alone?” A startled look crossed his face.

“Oh, no. I don’t live alone.” I tried to pacify him. “You see, I’m boarding. Pa and Amelia...” *I’m so sorry, Crispin, but I have to lie to you.* “They moved, too. But since they live so far from the university, I thought I’d board somewhere closer, since I have longer to study compared to Amelia.”

“So, give me your address, then. I’ll keep you company.”

“No. It’s my landlord, you see. I live with him. He won’t be too happy if I give his address to some stranger,” I whispered, turning back just in time to see Professor Henry pointing to the balance sheet again.

“I’m your friend, Jenny, not some stranger.” He turned me around to face him again. “I’m sure the old geezer won’t mind.”

I almost laughed when Crispin called Giovanni an old geezer. Even I’d thought he was an old man in the beginning. If only Crispin could see Giovanni now, I was sure he would choke on his words.

“Not to me, Crispin, but to him you are.” I pointed out, trying to keep a straight face.

“Look. I just want to know if you’re living in a safe neighborhood. You don’t know, Jenny. There are thugs around everywhere. You have to be careful where you live. And who

you live with.” Crispin laid his big palm on top of mine, grasping mine gently.

“I know, Crispin.” I smiled at him, patting his hand gently like a good friend would. “But don’t worry. I’m safe. How about if you want to see me, just text me? I’ll meet you in town.”

“Yeah. That’ll be cool.” He smiled stiffly.

“Yeah. Cool.” I smiled, moving my hand away.

I turned back to Prof. Henry’s lecture, but I noticed Crispin was still staring at my face. “What is it? Something on my face. Coffee?”

“Yeah. Coffee again. Just a bit here.” He removed the grounds off my cheek. His fingers seemed to linger a bit too long on my temple.

“Are there heaps?” I asked, wondering what was taking him so long.

“Yeah. You like to make coffee, don’t you?” He gave me his dazzling smile, his thumb and fingers busy brushing my cheek.

“Don’t you find Professor Henry boring.” I leaned into him, whispering into his ear, while he was busy with his task.

Crispin chuckled and moved his face closer, until we were literally staring into each other’s eyes and I could count the number of freckles on his face. “No. I like it. I get to sit next to you. We hardly get to sit next to each other these days.”

I blinked. “Done?”

“Yeah.” He pulled back reluctantly.

I repositioned myself as well. Resting my elbow on the bench and head in my palm, I gazed up at him and explained my reasoning. “Well, I find him boring. But I need the credit.”

“If you want to, I could tutor you.” Crispin’s eyes popped with enthusiasm.

I giggled and shook my head. “No need. I’m sure with a bit of time to study, I’ll breeze through the exams. Say...” I turned our conversation to more interesting matter. “Want to have lunch at this new Korean restaurant that just opened up across the street? I have another class to attend, but we could meet—”

Buzz. Buzz.

Crap! My phone vibrated in my jeans pocket. I gestured for Crispin to give me a second and flipped my phone on. My eyeballs almost popped out.

Boss: Jay, I want my coffee. Get here in 10 minutes or else...

Giovanni, you ass! How dare you interrupt my tranquil time when I’m busy studying? Oh, I was so tempted to tell him off. So I did.

Jenny: Get here in 10 min or else what?

“Jenny, who texted you?”

“Ah?” I looked up to see Crispin’s face in my personal space again. And just when I was about to respond, I accidentally brushed my nose across his cheek. His face blushed raspberry.

“Oh, gosh. I’m so sorry. Didn’t mean to bash my nose into you like that.”

“It’s all right,” he managed with a croaky voice. “But who texted you?”

“Oh!” I turned back to check the text again, just in case that devil mafia boss was only playing a joke on me. But this was no joke. “Sorry, it’s my landlord.”

“What does he want?”

My attention flipped to Crispin again, and already I saw the wrinkles on his forehead. *Crispin must be going through some stressful episode in his life*, I thought. “Said he needs to talk to me about my boarding at his—”

Just then, another text message came through.

Boss: *Or else you’ll live to regret the day you didn’t serve me coffee. Get here now. 10 minutes!*

Sheesh! How did he find the time to even type in the exclamation mark? I was already struggling to write proper sentences in text form.

“Can’t he wait?” Crispin interrupted my train of thought. “You’re in class. Tell him to wait until you finish for the day.”

I shifted in my seat uncomfortably. “I can’t. I have to go now. I’ll see you tomorrow. ’Kay?”

With that said, I slipped out the back door of the lecture hall and raced to my bike, parked a good five-minute walk from the building.

That sprint to my bike cost me two minutes. Eight minutes to go. Through some calculations, I deduced the quickest route to get to Cory Mansion was through Central Park. And my God, I cycled like I was a competitor in the Tour de France.

This is my curse. Pure and simple. I’m cursed to be the maid and coffee machine for that mafia boss.

By the time I got to Cory Mansion, I was already huffing, puffing, and, dare I say, on the verge of collapsing. But I raced to Giovanni's office and slammed the door open, only to find him lying on his couch.

I staggered toward him. "Boss..." I puffed, my tongue wagging out like a dog after a good sprint. "I'm here. I made it."

He didn't reply. I walked closer to see why he was so damned rude. When I got near him, I almost beat his head with my fist.

He called me to rush over within ten minutes, and when I arrived, he was sleeping! I couldn't believe this. I marched forward and was about to take my revenge on him when I was struck by his beauty.

Wow. He's really handsome up close. So, I ended up squatting and observing his face instead.

Long black lashes, beautiful bow-shaped lips, strong jawbones, and well-defined eyebrows—this man was just too perfect. Seriously, such perfection should only exist in paintings.

I couldn't help trying to push his buttons. What happened if I aggravated him like that time during dinner?

Oh, once I got an idea in my head, I couldn't get it out until I put it to action.

So, I did. My finger inched forward until it was almost at his forehead, and then I applied pressure, poking him. And suddenly... he opened his eyes.

CHAPTER 8
DREAMS OF YOU

“Gio, you came.” Jennifer’s face brightened as soon as she saw him.

“Yeah. I came.” Giovanni smiled, shifting to sit beside her against that tall beech tree.

He didn’t know why he came, though. He should have stayed home, but it was so bothersome. There was too much commotion, too many headaches to deal with. Right here, underneath this beech tree, was where he felt most at ease. And also being with his new little friend, Jennifer.

He sometimes questioned why he preferred her company over other people his own age. Jennifer was nine years his junior, but the age difference was of no importance. He found when he hung out with her, he could be himself.

“Licorice?” she asked, handing him some black ones.

“Thanks.” He took it from her and started chewing. “Not bad.”

“Coffee?” she asked again, handing him a small foamy cup.

“What have you got for me this time?” He shifted toward her, fingers peeling under the lid for a little sniff.

She slapped him on the hand and scolded, “No peeking. It’s a surprise.”

Giovanni laughed. “Come on. I don’t like surprises. Tell me.”

“Flat white.” She grinned, handing him the foamy beverage again.

“How do you know all these coffee names?” he queried, stretching his long legs. For a kid who was still in primary school, she sure knew a lot about coffee making.

“My ma owns a café,” she answered enthusiastically. “She said I can’t drink coffee just yet, but I can practice making them, since I’ll own it when I grow older. Do you like it?”

Jennifer was a robust child. She was also very considerate, always bringing him gifts. Namely coffee. But Giovanni sometimes thought he was just a test subject for her coffee-making skills.

Giovanni took a sip and nodded, giving his honest opinion. “Yeah. You’re improving.”

“You really think so?” She was literally beaming.

“Yeah.”

“So... will you marry me, then?”

Giovanni almost choked on his flat white. So, she was still at it. Here he’d almost forgotten about that weird comment from her. He’d thought it was just a childish thing.

“I...” How could he respond to that? Her eyes were liquid green, begging for the answer. And to his surprise, he did answer her. “How about I make you my lover instead... when you grow up, of course?”

His face went bright red as soon as he spouted that sentence. Although, Jennifer didn't look the least fazed by that outburst. In fact, she was looking up at him in awe, not thinking for one second he might be some pedo out to seduce a little girl like her.

But that wasn't his intention. Not one bit. In all the time he'd come to know Jennifer, she was the most honest girl he'd ever met. Yeah sure, she was a kid, but she wouldn't stay a kid forever. If he were to have a lifelong partner, it would have to be her; someone he was comfortable with, someone who'd make him smile. And Jennifer made him smile on countless occasions.

Giovanni knew all along that a person like him would never succumb to the idea of marriage. His blood was too soiled, too black, like his hair and eyes, a curse for generations, a child of the mafia. Taking a lover would be ideal for him.

"Lover. Really?" Jennifer's voice dragged him out of his thoughts. "You think I'm beautiful? My pa says I'm not a beautiful child, so no one wants to marry me like they want my sister, but you're the first one who says I'm beautiful."

Suddenly, she jumped onto his lap and clenched his shirt collar, gazing up at his large form with a worried look on her face.

"He says boys only want to marry girls who are beautiful. I'm not beautiful, though. Are you really sure you want to make me your wife? I won't be upset at you if you refuse."

He wanted to tell her there was a difference between a lover and a wife, but he didn't have the heart. At that moment, she was chewing her bottom lip, and it kind of hurt him a bit.

“Hey, you’re beautiful, Jennifer. Very beautiful. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.” He patted her head like a big brother would a little sister.

“Even with the freckles on my nose?” She shoved her face right in his again.

Giovanni blinked, flicking his eyes about and looking at those freckles scattered on her nose and cheeks. She was a small kid, but she was so cute with her big green goggle eyes staring back at him. He found himself thinking what she might look like when she grew up. “Yeah. Even with the freckles.”

“Then I’ll be your lover. We’ll marry and live happily ever after, like Cinderella and her prince.” She nodded, as if it were an easy decision.

Did she not understand the enormity of his suggestion? Was he really willing to wait for a little girl like her? He had a choice to make regarding his future. He accepted his fate, with Jennifer and his family. But one thing his family didn’t know was he’d come out on top. He’d change history and define his own rules. They wanted him to be the next heir. Then so be it. He’d accept it with both hands.

Giovanni took another sip of the flat white and found himself smiling, anticipating his future with the little girl beside him. “So...” He turned to Jennifer. “For now, let’s be friends. Then, when you turn nineteen, I’ll make you my lover.”

“Really?” she asked, eyes round as marbles.

“Yeah. But only if you agree when I ask you. You may change your mind when you grow older.”

“No. No, I won’t. I like you, Gio. A lot.” She sounded so sure of herself, as if she’d already had her future planned out,

with him in the picture. What would she do if she found out he was the son of a mafia boss?

Giovanni didn't want to think about this notion. Not yet anyway. When the time came for her to understand they came from different worlds, he'd tackle the issue. For now, though, he'd enjoy her company until she decided she'd had enough.

Giovanni smiled, taking her little hand within his. "Then let's be friends, okay?"

"Okay, let's be friends, then." She nodded, and then beamed up at him again, showing her small white teeth. "But I can't wait to grow up so I can be your wife."

Giovanni chuckled. Yeah, he couldn't wait until then either. Then he wouldn't have to bother with his family again.

With the warm spring sun shining on them, hands still entwined, and the wind singing a lovely melody in the leaves, Giovanni slowly closed his eyes and gently drifted off to sleep

Poke.

Fuck! Someone was jabbing his forehead.

Giovanni blinked, opening his eyes. Suddenly, right in front of him was the image of Jennifer, the grown-up version.

Giovanni's heart raced. Adrenaline fueled his actions. He swung his arm forward on autopilot and grasped her neck until he could see her clear emerald pupils dilate, just like his little friend Jennifer.

"What's your name?" he growled into her ear.

When the young woman didn't answer, he tugged her forward until his face was just a breath from hers. He hissed, "I said, what's your name? Answer me."

The young woman looked flustered and blinked in confusion. “My name... my name is Jenny. Jenny Stone.”

“Where do you live?” he growled, frustration ripping his gut.

“Brooklyn, before coming here to live with you.”

“Have you ever been to Central Park?” he fired.

“Yes, just a minute ago. I was cycling through there.”

Giovanni gritted his teeth. “No. When you were younger.”

“No. Never been there. As I said, only a minute ago. Hey, you’re scaring me. Are you okay? Concussion? Bad dream? What’s wrong? You’re hurting my neck.”

“Fuck!” Giovanni let Jenny go and ruffled his hair in frustration. This was Jenny, his maid, not his little friend Jennifer. And he was in his office, not outside in Central Park.

What was wrong with him? A mere memory from ages ago had made him lose his mind.

“Boss, what is it? Want me to get you a cold towel?” Jenny asked, face literally in his personal space, palm resting on his forehead, gently checking his temperature.

Giovanni shoved her hand away and tossed a deadly glare at his maid, backing up against his couch.

Bad dream, huh? He wouldn’t say bad, more like a memory. The only bright memory in his dull and dark past.

Giovanni shook his head to rid himself of his gloomy past, then flicked his eyes at the grandfather clock standing by the wall... and glowered at Jenny.

“You’re late, Jay,” he immediately growled, venting his turmoil toward his maid. “Late. I can’t forgive you for that.”

“But...” She gasped suddenly, claspng at her chest as if she were about to die. Giovanni knew she was playacting again. That girl was as sly as a fox. “I cycled here. I ran and cycled here. My knees. My legs. I’m still puffing as we speak. I’m about to die here. I swear. And I did arrive. But you were sleeping.” She clung to his arm for support, acting as if she were about to lose her balance for real.

Giovanni didn’t like her touch at all. Not one bit. He felt a shiver akin to lust spreading right through his groin. And my God, that pissed him off. Like hell.

Giovanni lashed out at her, or more himself, since he couldn’t control the lust coursing down to his manhood. “That’s because I said to arrive here in ten minutes. You took more than an hour. What were you using for transport? The snail rail?”

“I took my bike. And clearly, asking me to arrive in ten minutes was a bit too much.” She stood up to him, wriggling her nose in disapproval. “Now, if I puff out my lungs, you won’t get your three million, let alone my delicious, addictive coffee.”

“Shut up, Jay,” he barked, rather annoyed with her chitchat. “You’re lucky I let you attend school as part of our contract. Now get me my coffee!”

“Right away, boss. Right away.” Jenny pretended to puff one last time, then ran off to the kitchen to prepare his drink.

Giovanni trembled but somehow managed to settle in his chair. He ran his fingers through his hair in agitation and sighed, closing his eyes.

Fuck! What the fuck was wrong with him. Why did he suddenly think Jenny was his *Jennifer*? Yeah, they might

resemble each other, but his Jennifer would never act like that brainless twitting maid of his.

But fucking God! What got him frustratingly mad was her touch. She got under his skin. All the areas she'd touched were still sensitive, making him tingle with want.

Want? For fuck's sake! Giovanni shivered at the thought. He really needed to get laid, call up one of his mistresses. That should tame his body.

After a small time of meditation, Giovanni slammed his fist on the desk with a big bang.

What the fuck is taking that girl so long? He must have been waiting for a million and one years, but still he hadn't seen her head through his doorway yet.

Giovanni began to wonder what the hell she was up to. Getting up without even realizing what he was planning to do, he stormed to the vicinity of the kitchen, determined to find out.



Oh my God! Oh my God! What the hell was that?

My heart hadn't stopped its pounding yet. Giovanni was so hot I almost collapsed in front of him. If not for his strong body as my support, I knew I would have toppled over already.

Who knew he looked so captivating after waking from an afternoon nap? Pa always had his tongue rolled out and mucus stuck in his eyes, but Giovanni looked like a male supermodel posing for a pillow commercial.

I breathed out and sighed one more time, then went about my task, when there was a guttural sound from behind.

“Jay!”

“What? Who? How? Where?” I turned around and saw Giovanni charging at me like a bull after a red flag. And I was the red flag.

“Jay! Where the fuck is my coffee?” he hissed, his face twisted and contorted in an angry expression, but somehow he still managed to look hot.

“Boss!” I jumped back as he briskly charged into my personal space. And so began the disastrous event.

When I jumped, the portafilter flew out of my hand, making the ground coffee fly high into the air, spreading its brown particles into the space. And landing only on...

Oh, my God! I cringed.

Giovanni was covered in coffee, from his dark head all the way to the crisp white polo shirt he wore.

I'm in deep shit now.

“I'm sorry.” That was my favorite phrase of late. “I'm so sorry.”

I started dusting him off, thumbs and fingers flicking and swiping and smearing the dust more into his hair and shirt.

I sniggered, a thought suddenly swarming in my head. This could be my revenge since he'd cursed me as his coffee machine. I should just play it cool and pretend to help him.

“Get off me. For fuck's sake, Jay, get away from me.” Giovanni fought me like I was a contagious bug, putting me at arm's length.

“No, boss, I have to help you. It's all my fault.” I ignored his command and kept on flicking at his hair, rubbing in the coffee, adding in a good slap or two on his head.

Giovanni, who was once famous for having midnight-black hair, was now covered in brown particles. I wanted to laugh. The situation was too funny. But his death glare stopped me.

“I said get away from me.” Giovanni pushed me off finally. “Look what you’ve done.”

“I know what I’ve done. I’m truly sorry, boss.” I batted my eyelashes, playing it cool and totally ignoring his command. My, my, I was having so much fun taunting him; I didn’t want to stop just yet. “I mean, look at you. You’re no better than a dirty kid. Here, let me help you wipe it off.” Again, one more blow to his head.

“For fuck’s sake, that’s enough!” Giovanni barked, backing until he crashed onto the couch, lying awkwardly.

That still didn’t stop me. I climbed onto him and dusted the powder off for him.

Suddenly, all was silent. Giovanni didn’t breathe. In fact, he didn’t move. He stayed like a mannequin. I took this opportunity to finish off my task.

“Almost there, boss,” I said, unaware I was literally straddling him.

And then I smiled, only to realize Giovanni was looking at me intently. And I mean really *looking* at me. Eye to eye. Nose to nose. And dare I say my lips were hovering above his?

I blinked. He blinked. And then...

“The fuck, Jay? Get off me.”

It was like Giovanni suddenly woke from his stupor. He barked, then shoved me off. I crashed, landing with a big thud on the floor.

“Ow!” I whined, rubbing my sore bottom.

“It’s your own fault.” Giovanni became flustered and looked away. “Who told you to climb me like a tree? Fuck!” Giovanni looked down at himself and made a disgusted face. “I have to get out of these shitty clothes. Gotta have a bath. Don’t follow me.”

With that, he disappeared out the door.

Damn, that Adonis. Wait until I saw him again, saying not to follow him. Oh yes, give me three million, and I still wouldn’t follow him into that bathroom. Seriously, nothing would change my mind. Absolutely nothing.

Oh, who was I kidding? Maybe if I spied on him and surprised him like he did to me before, then I’d call it even.

And when I heard Giovanni growl again, barking for Bobby or Heath to come to him, I took it as my cue, bouncing happily at this God-given opportunity, not knowing I’d gotten more than I bargained for with my teasing.

CHAPTER 9
WETBODIES

Giovanni was mad. No, he was furious. His eyes turned the color of obsidian. He couldn't believe he'd allowed Jenny to invade his space, again, or agitate him to this level.

Hadn't he already noted how she got under his skin? And what was the first thing he did? Went barging in on her, scaring the fuck out of her.

But what really got him steaming mad was his fucking dick. It now stood straight and hard like a fucking tent pole.

But first a bath, then relieve himself. In that order.

Giovanni stomped to his bedroom, removing the soiled shirt from his skin. It was smelly and disgusting. He despised dirt and dust with an intense passion. It reminded him of his miserable past life, a life he didn't want to even think about.

Giovanni stripped, tossing the dirtied clothing to the side, and turned on his heel to enter the bathroom. Then looked down at his dick again.

Nope. Still proud and tall.

Damn his maid.

Rotating the tap on, he watched the water filling the large bathtub, his mind backtracking to that moment when Jenny

was just an inch from his face, berating herself for how stupid and clumsy she was.

Giovanni scolded himself when he realized he was thinking about his maid yet again. Dipping the tip of his finger in the pool, he grimaced lightly and climbed in. He lay back, relaxing his head against the headrest, until he could feel his dick softening again.

Sighing with relief, Giovanni took the bar of soap in his hands. It slipped, flying out of his grasp onto the bathroom floor, a good three meters away.

“Fuck!” What the hell had this day come to? First he couldn’t get his cup of coffee. Then his dick decided it wanted to play, and now his bar of soap wanted to escape out of his claws.

Leaning back, fingers bracing the lip of the bathtub, Giovanni roared with all his might. “Heath! Bobby! Any of you asses. Get in here now. Pick up my soap.”

But no reply greeted him. Only the sound of the grandfather clock ticking.

“Agh.” Anger thumped through him. “Heath! Bobby! Any of you numbnuts, get your asses in here! Right now!”


Still no one greeted him.

Giovanni had decided the best course of action would be to pick up that bar of soap himself. He stood and was already halfway out of the bathtub when a soft feminine voice greeted him at the door.

“Boss, you need me?”

Giovanni jerked his head and saw Jenny. And right then, his dick hardened.

“Oh, fuck!”

“Boss, you need me?” I said,  but I wasn't really looking at his face. No, I was looking at his male anatomy, standing so bluntly on display.

My mouth went dry and my heart roared like a thunderstorm.

This wasn't what I'd bargained for when I came to tease him. Nope, not at all. It was one thing to hide behind a shower door and peek at him. It was another matter entirely seeing his precious tool hanging in front of my eyes.

I screeched. “Gee, you're giving me conjunctivitis. My virgin eyes! They're ruined because of you.”

I shut my eyes and flapped my arms to keep him away from me.

“Shut up, Jay,” Giovanni stammered, just as embarrassed as I was, slipping back into the water.

I peeked from between my fingers, seeing his face had gone red, his fingers gripping the lip of the tub until his knuckles turned white.

“What do you want? Why were you calling the guys?” I asked, inching a step closer.

Now why didn't I just scam out of there? What was I doing standing like an idiot inside the bathroom with my very naked boss in his bathtub? Waiting for his order? No. More like curious. That was my middle name.

“Pick up my bar of soap,” he ordered, avoiding my eyes.

“Aye-aye.” I grinned, knowing he was at a disadvantage.

I bravely sauntered across the bathroom, knowing he was too embarrassed to show me his anatomy again.

“What’s taking so long?” he snapped when I didn’t comply in time.

“I’m getting it,” I grumbled, slowly bending down to pick up the slippery thing. “Gee. Calm down. You might burst a blood vessel.”

“Jay!” Giovanni snapped, turning his head to me. And our eyes locked.

I smirked. And winked mischievously. “Yes, boss.”

“Shut up!”

“Okay, boss.” I bobbed my head. And the slippery soap jumped out of my hand. “And look what you made me do. Now I have to pick it up again for your majesty.”

I smirked when Giovanni gave me another death glare. I simply ignored it. I was about to grab the soap again when my foot accidentally slipped on it, and suddenly, I was skiing with my bare feet, careening to an unknown destination.

Oh hell, I was like a bird. No, more like a turkey on Thanksgiving Day, with the wings plucked out. I slid, glided, and flew, crashing right into Giovanni, only bracing myself when both my hands landed in the bathtub to stop my fall. But I realized my hands were touching something long... and hard... and growing under my fingers the more I touched it.

Giovanni gulped. I gasped and stared at him. He looked at me. And suddenly, it dawned on me. I was actually touching

“Boss... your... banana—”

“Fuck! Get your hands off me.” Giovanni kicked at my hand.

I lost my balance, toppled over, and fell right into his lap, splashing more water from the bathtub, my body now soaking wet from head to toe.

“Jay, the fuck? Get off me.” He wiggled, trying to push me off. But that only resulted in me becoming more tangled with him. Literally.

My cheek kissed his chest. My arms were flung around his waist. I could feel all of him. His taut muscles. His hard abs. And that made me shiver with that foreign feeling again.

I opened my eyes, glancing up to see his angry face, when I saw the tattoo on his chest. From this distance, I could see the intricate design. Two dragons entwined. How very intimate.

Heck, what was I thinking? In this position, Giovanni and I were also intimate. We were molded together like that dragon tattoo.

“Calm down, boss. Stay right there. I’m just going to get out slowly. Don’t move.”

Giovanni’s breath was haggard, like he was running out of oxygen. I knew he was going to snap off my head the minute he regained strength.

“Are you calm yet?” I meekly asked.

“I fucking am. Now get off me.” His voice was like a piece of taut string. And it was about to break any second.

“I am. And I will.” I pacified him.

Slowly, I reached to grab hold of the tub for support. I was about to jump out when I slipped again, stepping on his banana.

“Fuck!” he hissed, pain shooting up his eyes. “That’s it.”

Giovanni tossed me, splashing an obscene amount of water in my face. I yelped. Somehow, during the time I had my eyes closed, Giovanni had me underneath him, his broad chest looming above me.

“Boss!” I flounced about.

Swearing as if he were seriously pissed, Giovanni bolted out of the bath and disappeared out the door, leaving me with no air to breathe.

By the time I got downstairs, all wet and dripping, Bobby was blinking at me, his mouth full of noodles.

“Jay, what’d you do to the boss? He was dripping wet in his bathrobe.”

“You know where he went?” I asked, eyes searching around the room.

“How should I know?” he asked between munching his cup of noodles. “But one thing I know is you’ll be dead meat when he gets back.”

Oh, dear. I was so not looking forward to that.

CHAPTER 10
TORMENT  MEMORIES

Shortness of breath. Increased heart rate. Burning fire under his skin. The need to quench his thirst by kissing the living hell out of those chatty, pouty lips.

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! What the fuck was wrong with him?

Giovanni swore to himself all the way to Timbuktu—well, to his private gym actually—where he used that excess energy to beat the living hell out of the punching bag.

But even with the massive impact of each punch, he still couldn't alleviate those symptoms or forget those lucid memories in his head. He could recount every detail. The way his naked body wedged above Jay's, the way her clothing soaked to her skin, outlining her curvy breasts. The way his skin burned with desire and lust evaporated through his pores. His feelings were so intense he could hardly breathe.

What the fuck was wrong with him? She was his maid, for fuck's sake. Nothing more. So why was he so wrapped up with her?

Giovanni threw a few more punches, breath coming out loud and fast, until he was exhausted, body slumping onto the mat. He chuckled like a crazy fool.

“You are one crazy fucker, Gio.” He panted. “Lusting after your own maid.”

He closed his eyes, remembering her cheeky smile and the way she liked to provoke him.

Giovanni laughed. It was fun having her around. She amused him. In the beginning. But not now. He wanted her like he wanted his next breath.

“Just pretend she’s one of the boys,” he told himself. “Just pretend she’s one of—”

His chant was interrupted when, in his mind’s eyes, he saw his little friend Jennifer, her smiling face dotted with freckles and curious green eyes shining.

Giovanni let his mind drift down memory lane.


“Hello, Gio, handsome boy. Coffee?”

“Let me guess? Flat white?” He smiled, welcoming his little friend, taking the brew from her hands.

“Yeppy. You got it right. So, as a reward, I’ll read you a book.” She lay on the grass, her head resting on his lap.

It was a usual occurrence now. She would visit him at their place under this beech tree. She would always bring the cup of coffee she’d made for him, and he would sit and wait.

Gio caressed Jennifer’s damp forehead. “It’s hot today. You should wear a hat next time.”

“I know. Ma told me that, too. But I got too excited, so I ran out without the hat.”

“And what’ll you be reading for me today?”

“Cinderella.”

“Why Cinderella?” Giovanni asked.

“Because she’s poor, but in the end, she meets her Prince Charming, like me meeting you.”

“I’m not Prince Charming.”

“Yes, you are. You’re handsome, Gio, handsome boy, like Prince Charming. That’s why you’re my best friend and Prince Charming.”

“You don’t have any friends at school, Jennifer?”

“I talk too much. Pa says girls should keep quiet. Not speak their minds. I don’t know what he means, though. Plus, he said I’m not beautiful.”

“Jennifer—” He scolded.

“It’s okay, Gio. I don’t care.”

Gio smiled and soon fell asleep wrapped in the serenity of his little friend’s voice.



“Giovanni,” a woman purred in his ear, interrupting his reminiscence. The next minute, he felt a light body straddling his torso.

Giovanni flicked his eyes opened. His gaze fell on a pale, porcelain face decorated with blond hair, blood-red lips, and cheekbones that could cut apples. Fire burned through him again.

“Melena,” he uttered before swinging his arm to cradle her neck and jerk her face down, kissing the hell out of those lips. He rolled her over, his body looming above hers.

She panted underneath him, her voice rasping out, “Hello, Giovanni. Miss me?”

“Like yesterday.” His lips twisted in a cruel smile, taking those lips again.

She writhed, her long red nails digging into his skin.

“Do you want me?” he rumbled into her ears.

She nodded. The desire was too unbearable; she could no longer speak.

Giovanni ran his fingers along her shoulder blade, caressing her collarbone and up her neck, until—

“Giovanni, what are you...?” Her eyes grew wide as the situation finally dawned on her. Giovanni was going to strangle her.

“Why are you here, Melena?” Giovanni asked coldly, the lust extinguished as quickly as it came, now replaced with fury.

“Because you’re my lover.” She struggled for breath, gripping his fingers to try and loosen them. But it was no use.

Giovanni snarled. His eyes were obsidian, disgust radiating from them. “Really, Melena? You thought all this time I was your *lover*? We’ve fucked once.”

“Yes,” Melena managed to gasp out, choking on her next words. “Please... Giovanni... don’t—”

“Oh, Melena.” He tsked, shaking his head in disapproval. “What would Leo say if he knew you were this naive? What if I knew all about his plan all along?”

Mentioning the name Leo made Melena’s eyes grow large with fear. “You know?”

Giovanni chuckled, letting her go. Melena made her escape by running to the door, but he decided at that moment

to pounce on her like a mouse. He charged into her, backing her against the wall until she had no means of escape.

He gripped her neck again. This time the desire to break her was so strong he almost couldn't control himself. He told himself she wasn't the problem. She was simply a toy used in a game between Leo and himself.

“You think I'm a fucking idiot?” he hissed. “I control half of New York City, Melena. Tell Leo if he wants to use you to bring me down, he should rethink his plan. The reason I let you into my life wasn't because I loved you or wanted you as my lover. I was fucking bored. And you were amusing. To a certain point. But now I'm bored again. So tell that nut job I'm done. With you. And if he wants to really get to me, he should show his bullshit face, not act like a ninny hiding behind a woman's skirt.”

“Giovanni, you can't do this to me,” she cried, crumbling to the floor.

“Oh, yes, I can. Now, I'm going to let you go easy. Unless you want to lie in the bottom of the Atlantic. Your choice.”

“You're too cruel,” she cried in anguish. “You think I approached you because Leo asked me to? It's because I love you. I want to be with you.”

“I'm not interested in your poetry, Melena.” He spoke over his shoulder. “Go. Before I change my mind.”

Melena picked herself up. “Don't think this is the last you'll hear of us. We'll be back, and you'll pay for what you've done. Leo will get you.”

Giovanni twisted his mouth in a cruel smile. “Then tell him I'm waiting. But get his coffin ready, too, because the next time he sees me, he'll be buried under a ten-story building.”

And he sauntered out, leaving the crying girl.

Giovanni was absolutely done playing this game of cat-and-mouse with Leo. The fucker had wanted his position since Giovanni had become boss of New York City after the big honcho, Giuseppe Dente, had given him this position.

Not only had he proven he was capable of handling petty matters, but he was also the strongest fighter. The others in the group had respected him and accepted him as their leader.

But not Leo. Leo still thought he was a useless, filthy bastard, picked up by the head honcho at age fifteen.

Yeah, he had been a dismal-looking boy, prowling the streets of Brooklyn. Yeah, his skin was saturated with dirt, filth permeating the air wherever he went. But he was strong. He had the will to live. He didn't need to live according to someone's will.

Giovanni drove home, thoughts of the past dissipating as irritation mounted with each passing minute.

Shit! What a day. He needed his coffee—now. And the only way to get that coffee was to wake up his maid. But it was almost midnight. The house was quiet as a rat's nest. When he remembered the last time he saw her, his heart rate surged and his mouth ran dry. She was in the bathtub, soaking wet, with clouds of lust and maybe confusion misting her eyes.

“What the fuck? She's one of my boys. I'll be fine.” Giovanni reminded himself before opening Jenny's bedroom door and entering.



Is he still mad with me? Lying on my little cot, eyes staring at the ceiling, an arm over my forehead, I asked this question.
Ah, who cares?

The clock had already ticked past midnight. I was so tired I should have just closed my eyes and gone to sleep. I had to hand in my economics report early, and if I failed to do so, I would be dead meat.

Except I couldn't sleep. Not even a wink. All I could think of was his banana.

I moaned, crushing a pillow over my face. Ah, I was so embarrassed just thinking about it. I still couldn't believe I'd actually touched it. My poor virgin hands!

But come to think of it, that experience wasn't so bad. It felt hot and slippery and—

What the heck was I thinking? Wasn't so bad?

Girl, get your head checked. That mafia boss was a devil in disguise. I shouldn't even be thinking along those lines.

Big capital letters: *MUST WORK OUT A WAY TO GET OUT OF THIS DEBT FASTER. Even better, find Pa and strangle him for putting me in this situation.*

I turned off the light, mind still pursuing that slippery scene in the bathroom. In the midst of it all, I saw Giovanni's face hovering above mine, his lips drawing closer. Except this time, we weren't in the bathtub. I was lying in bed and he was hovering above me, his raven eyes boring into mine with hunger.

I blinked once. He was still there.

“Boss? Is that you?”

His lips didn't move. But I could sense his body coming closer.

I wanted to touch him. I wanted to feel him. An irresistible force pulled me into him, but I couldn't move. My body felt

all sluggish with a mixture of hot flushes and sensitive skin.

Soft lips landed on mine, caressing the sensitive skin. I closed my eyes and gently fell asleep.

Giovanni. He kissed me?

Must have been my imagination.

CHAPTER 11
DINNER  SASTER

It was one of those days when I was up to my eyeballs in chores. Heck, my arms were about to fall off my shoulders. Not that I was complaining, but seriously, would it be so hard to just pick your clothes up off the floor for once, and put them in the laundry basket?

I was talking about Giovanni here. He was like a kid. No, worse than a kid. He was like a toddler with a shaker full of sand, and he'd spread that sand all over the floor, waiting for lovely me to pick up the grains one by one.

Speaking of the god, he'd disappeared after the bathroom scene yesterday. Not that I cared where he went. I was too busy trying to hand in my assignment on time. Thankfully, I did manage, avoiding a grade reduction.

Crispin, on the other hand, was on an angry spree, vomiting foul words because he was so damned mad on my behalf. I had to console him by taking him out to that Korean Restaurant we didn't get to go to when Giovanni called me over yesterday.

It was about five o'clock when I completed all my chores. Time for cooking, I supposed. God almighty, Giovanni would go mental and start smacking my butt again if I didn't get the

meal done on time. He was so particular about everything being perfect and prompt.

Just as I was heading downstairs to start my meandering task of cooking, Giovanni casually strolled into the main lounge, hands in pockets, sporting a huge smirk on his face.

Maybe I'm not going to get in trouble after all.

“Our company made a profit. I’m treating you all to dinner tonight. Where do you want to go?”

Going out for dinner? Hooray! I don't have to cook.

I was starting to get sick of doing all the cooking for these five grown men every day. They were like the five bears, eating everything and anything I put in front of them. I guessed a night out to diner would finish my day off nicely, since last night I’d barely slept a wink. Not to mention that weird dream.

“Hallelujah!” Bobby gushed, reflecting my mood. “Boss is taking us out for dinner. I’m so excited. Where should we go?”

“Wherever you want to go, boys,” Giovanni replied.

I was sitting on the sidelines, palm under chin, scoffing at myself. *Boys... What am I? One of them, too?*

“And girl,” I pointed out.

Giovanni ignored me. In fact, he wasn’t even looking in my direction.

Is he still mad about yesterday? Is this his way of punishing me?

“So, where will it be?” he asked, looking at Heath, Bobby, Jonny, and Finnie.

Again, I was excluded.

Fine by me. If he wanted to ruffle my feathers, then he didn't know the real me.

"I suggest we go to a five-star restaurant." I put in my suggestion. "Don't you think so, Bobby? Finnie, what do you say?"

"I say—" Finnie began, but Bobby cut him short.

"No, let's go to the burger joint down the road."

"What?" I gasped in shock. "Boss said he'll treat us to dinner. We should go somewhere classy and expensive."

"But I don't want to eat steak again." Bobby moaned.

"Or gravy," Finnie added.

"Yeah, in a five-star restaurant, everything's swimming in gravy." Jonny further crushed my balloon of hope.

"That's because you always go for roast. Why don't we try something else?" I persuaded them. Which didn't help my predicament, as Bobby once again announced his suggestion.

"Yeah, like pizza. I crave pizza."

"What the hell is taking your sissy asses so long?" Giovanni shouted from the doorway. "Are you coming or what? I'm feeling generous right now. Another three minutes, I'm not so sure."

"Put a spin on it, guys. We can discuss this in the car," Heath instructed us all.

We then ripped our butts off the seats and crushed ourselves into the limousine, driving to our unknown dinner destination.

Finnie and Jonny sat on the sides with Bobby between them. Oh, the luxury of a limousine. Heath was our driver. At

the moment, we were on fire, each of us throwing out suggestions as to which restaurant would best suit our taste buds. We grumbled and grunted. Meanwhile, Giovanni listened contently on my side of the seat, not saying a word. But his body was seriously speaking to me in a different way. A very painful way.

Giovanni was literally wedging me against the car door. I squeaked like a mouse trapped in a cage. Actually, it was his cage of hard muscle. I was surrounded by him. His hard pectoral muscle pressing against my breast; his strong, lean arm resting on my leg. I couldn't move an inch to save my life.

He enjoyed tormenting me. That had to be it. What with the smirk on his face and the constant pressure he applied on my arm. *God, it's sore.* Now my legs were riddled with pins and needles. There was so much room in the limousine, but he had to squeeze his body against mine. I wished he would move just a tiny bit so I could breathe.

Is this his revenge for me seeing his willy banana?

But I didn't give in to him that easily. No way was I letting him punish me. So, it was a silent battle between the two of us. I deliberately stretched my arms out in a yawning gesture, and POW! I slammed my elbow into his abs, eliciting an *oof* sound from his mouth.

Hah! I won. Giovanni backed off a bit. Even if it was only an inch.

With more room to breathe, I entered discussion mode. "I say we should go to a fancy restaurant."

I had an ulterior motive. If I couldn't get him to back off entirely, then I'd clean out his wallet. Let's see who was the

last one standing. Make me mad, and I'd make sure to not even leave a cent to his name tonight.

To my utter surprise, we did end up in a restaurant, except it was the shittiest restaurant ever. An all-you-can-eat for twenty dollars per head.

Bobby was all hyped up, acting like a baby in a toy store. "Fries, I want fries with chicken seasoning and a can of coke," he raved and raved. "Then I'll have an ice cream sundae for dessert." He went off to make his order.

"I'll have the Hawaiian pizza," Finnie said and disappeared, too.

The other two went off to look for their food, which only left me with the boss. I didn't want to be alone with Giovanni. My mind kept replaying the smooch-smooch scene from my dream or the slippery-sloppy scene from the bathroom. I quickly got up, too.

I was about to leave when a hand came out of nowhere and grabbed my arm, pulling me down again. I was so startled I jerked my arm back, already feeling that burning sensation where he'd touched, so similar to that sensation from last night.

"Ah, boss, mind where you're touching." I rubbed my arm to soothe the tingle.

"What, I can't touch my product now? You're my coffee machine, remember," Giovanni barked.

"Yes, I remember. You don't have to keep bringing up the subject. Sometimes you sound like a broken record," I muttered, not looking him straight in the eye. Instead, I got up again, going to search for some food of my own. I was ravenous.

If only that task were as simple as it seemed. Once again, Giovanni clung to my arm, swinging me around to face him.

“Aren’t you going to ask me what I want for dinner?” He spoke so close to my ear I ended up staggering backward in surprise.

“No.”

“I thought you were my maid and I have full use of you.”

“Can’t you at least give me tonight off? I want to enjoy my time with the boys.”

I seriously didn’t want to pout, but this whole foreign feeling was really playing havoc with my mind.

Ah, must be that stupid dream. I have to let this feeling go. Wash it away with some holy mineral water or something. Now where do I find some?

“No. Get me some dinner,” he demanded.

“Fine,” I grumbled. Again, I was about to leave when he grabbed hold of my arm. “Now what?”

I flung his arm away, this time making sure to shove whatever feeling I was experiencing right down my throat so my stomach acid could destroy it into oblivion.

“Aren’t you’re going to ask what I like to eat?”

“No.”

“What kind of maid are you?” he scolded, a frown appearing on his forehead. And my God, my fingers wanted to caress that frown away. I had to control myself. So I put all my energy into answering his question.

“The type that is very tired because her boss refuses to give her a night off to enjoy some time with her friends.”

“Just get me some food and shut your mouth. You’re starting to annoy me with that blabbering of yours.”

You! I wanted to yell at him.

What did I see in this mafia guy anyway? Every single word that came out of his mouth was something negative about me. Damn, he irritated me to no end.

“Fine.” I huffed. “What do you want to eat?”

“Anything. Just bring it over.” He shooed me away.

I was only too happy to oblige. I jabbed Bobby in the stomach to grab his attention when I reached him. He was standing in front of the buffet, too busy stacking burger upon burger on his plate to notice me.

“Bobby!” I slapped him on the shoulder. “Know what the boss likes to eat?”

Bobby turned around and grinned at me. “Three words, Jenny. Spaghetti. Pasta. Lasagna.”

“They’re all Italian.” I summed up his answer.

“Of course. Boss is Italian. That’s why he likes it so much.”

Giovanni was pure Italian? No wonder he had that dark, tall, and handsome look. But he spoke without an accent. He must be a second or third-generation Italian, then.

That got me thinking again. All the time I’d lived at Cory mansion, Giovanni had never once mentioned his family.

Now where did that thought come from? I hadn’t the time to be sentimental.

“Okay, tell me what he *doesn’t* like.” I shifted my attention back to Bobby.

“One word. Hot food. Wait, maybe that was two words.” Bobby started citing those two words again. I didn’t give him a chance to repeat his mantra.

“You mean spicy food?” I clarified.

“Yeah, especially chili.”

“Anything else?”

“Seafood.” Bobby went to dish up more food on his plate.

I smirked, patting his shoulder. “You got it, my man. Go back to our seats. I’ll just make an order for the boss. Then I’ll be right back to join you.”

Ten minutes later, I presented Giovanni with his dinner. It was a hot and spicy dish with rice on the side. The dish was beautifully made. I was sure Giovanni would enjoy eating this delectable fare, especially since it contained fresh marine meat. On a side note, I even asked the waiter to add some extra chili.

Giovanni just stared at the dish as if death were in front of him. “What the fuck is this?”

I wasn’t fazed by his intimidating curse one bit.

“It’s your dinner,” I said, smiling slyly. “You said you’d eat anything, right? So eat it.”

Giovanni just glared at me. I knew what it meant. *Do you want to die?*

I glared at him, too. With my own meaning of course. *If I die, you’re coming along, too.*

With us in our staring competition, Giovanni finally gave up first. I cheered for myself. I somehow felt I’d gained the upper hand, a small victory in this intricate web I was in.

Giovanni took one bite, his eyes still glued to mine. And then he started coughing. His eyes became watery. I panicked. *What's wrong?*

“Boss, what’s wrong?” Heath came to Giovanni’s side. He glared at me. I shriveled back like a turtle into my shell. “What did you give him to eat?”

“His dinner.”

“Don’t play. What did you give him to eat?”

“Food. A hot and spicy dish with seafood.”

Upon hearing of the word seafood, Bobby cried, Finnie looked like he was about to throw up, Jonny appeared scared, Heath’s face flamed red, and... holy crap, Giovanni just fainted.

I was in big trouble.



How was I to know Giovanni was allergic to seafood? I thought to play with him a bit, but I didn’t want him to die.

Don’t die. Please don’t die. Although, if he did die, I’d be let out of our contract... but I didn’t want to go to jail. I didn’t want to jump out of the frying pan only to leap into the fire. This intricate web Giovanni had spun around me was already binding me so tightly I could hardly breathe. I didn’t want to spend the rest of my youthful years in jail, too. That was too much for my young heart to handle.

“Boss, I’m sorry.” I sobbed, head bashing on his chest. I couldn’t believe I was actually feeling sorry for the mafia boss. “I didn’t mean to kill you.”

“Jay, would you stop crying already?” Giovanni chided, head propped on a hundred and one pillows. “You look like a

derailed train; with snot coming pouring out of your nose.”

“A train doesn’t have snot,” I mumbled, tears washing down my face.

“Well, you do. Now go wipe your nose. It’s disgusting.”

I wiped my nose clean on my sleeve. And cried some more.

I didn’t know why I felt this upset, but the thought of Giovanni not being able to enjoy all the lovely seafood out there in the world really saddened me. He’d miss out on all those delicious dishes. Steamed lobster with lemon sauce, fried crab with lemongrass. Oh, the thought had my mouth salivating and belly rumbling. And this kind of made me more upset. Because if Giovanni couldn’t eat it, then there was no way a poor maid like me would get to eat it, either. I ate whatever the god ate. I cried some more at the thought.

“For fuck’s sake, wipe your tears and use a tissue or something,” he barked.

I didn’t do as he said. I continued to weep.

“Jesus. I hate it when you cry. Come here.” He pulled my head forward and wiped my nose for me. “Bobby,” he called.

“Yes, boss.” Bobby appeared out of nowhere.

“Take this away. And give me hand sanitizer.”

“Right away, boss.”

Bobby took the dirtied tissue and came back a second later with sanitizing gel. Giovanni proceeded to wipe his hands clean of all the germs I might have passed to him. Once done, he gave me a serious look.

“You’ve done it now, Jay,” he said. “Now how am I going to get any work done? I’ll be stuck in bed for at least a day.”

“I’m sure between all of us, we’ll put you back on your feet in no time, boss.” I sniffled again.

“No, I’m busy. Got money to collect and people to threaten. I don’t have time to look after the boss,” Bobby said, already backing out of the deal.

“Yeah,” Finnie had to add. “Weren’t you the one who made him eat the seafood? It’s your fault. Now you have to look after him all by yourself.”

“Not to be rude or put the blame on anyone, but I think this is a collective fault.” I tried to back off the deal. “Think about it. Who wanted to go to that all-you-can-eat restaurant in the first place? Bobby...” I pointed a finger at him. “You wanted that burger, and Finnie...” I pointed the finger at Finnie then. “You wanted to eat the pizza. So you’re both in this with me.”

“No, they’re not.” Giovanni cut in, silencing our argument.

“What? Why?” I asked, already feeling the buzz in my heart at the mere thought of staying alone with him.

“Because they have work to do.”

“Okay, fine, but how about Jonny and Heath?” I argued.

“They have to go outside the country for work.”

“But, boss—”

“Shut up, Jay. The deal has already been sealed. You’re to look after me for the rest of the day and tomorrow.”

CHAPTER 12
BABYSITTING THE BOSS

A *m I his maid or his babysitter?*

Stupid Jenny. Apparently, as of today, I was both.

Since waking up this morning, I was on all fours, making sure every inch the god descended upon was spotless. After a quick breakfast of toast and milk, I dashed upstairs, just in time for the god to rise from his heavenly bed.

“Boss, you’re having a shower?” I asked when I heard the shower running and saw piles of clothing scattered all over the floor.

“Yeah,” came his muffled voice from somewhere inside the bathroom suite.

“Should I get your clothing ready?” I picked up his shirt and discarded it in the laundry basket.

“Yeah.”

“What type? It’s predicted to be sunny today. Polo shirt? T-shirt? Shorts?”

“Suit, tie, and blazer.”

I stood up stiffly, eyes staring at the partially closed door in disbelief. “But, boss, you’ll be staying at home all day. Why do you need to dress in formal wear?”

“Because I want to. You got a problem with that?”

Umm. Must have been his way of showing off again. It wasn't enough that he was boasting in my face every day about how wealthy he was. He had to remind me every single minute that I was his coffee machine and maid.

Oh, I hate him. Just because I'm a poor student and in debt...

A wet hand landed on my cheek. I jerked, turning around, and—

Giovanni. Naked.

I blinked.

And screamed.

“Holy hell, boss. You scared me. Get your naked body inside. You almost gave me a fright.”

I shoved my palm flat on his chest, but it was slippery. Giovanni ignored me, standing like Adonis the naked statue, leaning against the doorframe.

I knew my mission of getting him inside that bathroom was close to zero percent likely, so I shut my eyes, turning around to keep from that temptation. And of course, my heart was dancing to the song of temptation, too.

“Don't be a prude. It's not like you've never seen me naked before.”

Crap! Does he know I peeked on his bath time before?

“Some women prefer not to have that image imprinted in their mind until they meet their soul mate,” I said in defense of my dignity.

Too late for me, though. I'd already seen his package. And stepped on it, too. The image was too clear in my head to erase.

No sound came from Giovanni. Thinking the coast was clear, I spun on my heel and—

“Boss, you're still naked,” I screeched, jerking my hands in front of my eyes again.

“Did I say I was going to get dressed?” He strode toward me, his manly goods hanging and all.

“Have some mercy on my eyes. Please.” I spun around and shut my eyes again. I knew if I stood one more second looking at him, I would seriously attack him. He was just too captivating.

Oh, the image isn't good. Me and him... tumbling around in bed—

“Jay!”

“Yes, boss!” I answered immediately, my vivid imagination cut short.

“Come here.”

“Are you all dressed this time?” I peeked between my fingers.

“No.”

“Then I'll get going.” I tiptoed toward the door. “Leave you in peace so you can—”

He caught me. And he was still naked.

“Boss... boss, what are you doing?” I flung about, trying to loosen his grip. No such luck, though.

“I need help.”

“With what?” I stammered, voice coming out all nervous.

“Getting dressed.”

Oh no. So, I put all my weight on my feet just to create some resistance. But he was strong. After all, he was Adonis. He pulled me along like I was a bag of lentils. And I collided into him, smashing my cheek onto his bared chest.

Again.

“Boss!” I blinked, mind numbed in shock. I tilted up my head and looked at him. His obsidian eyes met my green ones. I swallowed.

“Get me my pants,” he commanded, voice perfectly in control.

“What?” I blinked again. Obviously, I didn’t hear him. I was too busy ogling his handsome face.

“Get me my pants.”

“Oh, pants. Yes, pants.” I woke and walked blindly to his opened wardrobe, picking a pair Armani dress pants.

“Now what?” I passed the pants to him, reminding myself to never look below his waist.

“Help me get dressed.”

I almost choked. “What? You want me to help you into your pants? Do you want me to touch your banana again?”

I refreshed his memory of our time together in the bathtub, and believe me; it wasn’t a good sight.

His jaw ticked.

“It’s not a banana. It’s my dick,” he shot out bluntly, annoyed at my term for his male anatomy.

“But, boss, I don’t want to touch it,” I stammered, wanting to get out of this task.

“I’m not asking you to touch it. I’m asking you to zip up my pants.”

“But, boss, you have hands.” I tried again. Maybe if I kept giving him excuses, he would give up.

Or not.

“Jay, are you the boss or am I the boss?”

He turned the tables, squashing me against the wall. And now I was stuck. I avoided eye contact.

“Jay, answer me.” He pinched my chin.

“You’re the boss, boss,” I mumbled meekly.

“So, zip my pants.”

“But you have hands,” I mumbled again.

“Jay, zip it or you die.” That was his ultimatum. Zip or die.

“Do I have another choice?” I bleakly looked up at him.

“No.” A straight, blunt reply.

I moaned, drumming my foot in frustration. “Must you do this to me?”

I closed my eyes, having no choice but to go through with it. I reluctantly searched for the zipper. Having found it, I concentrated on my task, slowly zipping the fly.

He hissed in my face, since I was doing such a lousy job, “Open your eyes, Jay. Take your job seriously.”

“I am taking it seriously,” I snapped, flashing my eyes open.

Gee, how can I take my job seriously when he's breathing down my neck?

“Then look at what you’re doing.”

“You’re tormenting me, boss. I’m so not comfortable doing this.”

“Zip your mouth and start zipping my pants.”

“If I’m such a slow zipper, then why don’t you do it yourself?” I mumbled.

“What did you say?” He pinched my chin again, this time tilting my face until our eyes locked.

“Nothing, boss,” I mumbled, blinking and getting back to work.

After five seconds, I got shouted at again. “You’re too slow. How long do I have to wait until you finish the job? Just zip it up, for fuck’s sake.”

“I am!” I shouted, jerking the fly up with full force.

“Ow, the fuck!” Giovanni was on his knees, hand cradling his precious manhood. He whined, his face going red. “What the fuck did you do to my dick?”

“Sorry, boss. I didn’t mean to zip your banana.” I rushed out the door just in case he decided to attack me. “But don’t do this to me again. I’m not ready to part with my virginity yet.”

“Who said I want your virginity...? Ah, fuck!” He howled, bending over, a pained expression on his face.

I didn’t listen or look any further. I sprinted out of his bedroom like lightning.



Half an hour later, I'd finished cooking. Giovanni, though, still hadn't made his appearance. I, on the other hand, had fully recovered from my abnormal bodily reaction. I bet he was still nursing his poor banana I'd accidentally injured. And just when I was about to serve the breakfast, Bobby came sauntering in.

"Howdy, Bobby," I greeted him.

"Howdy, Jenny." Bobby returned my sentiment, slumping into a seat. As soon as he saw my face, he asked, "Did you do something to the boss again? Why's your face all red?"

"Who, me? Red?" I chuckled nervously. I thought I'd already recovered. So, why was I still red? I touched my cheek. And it was hot. "You should ask what he did to me."

"What did he do to you?"

"He..."

"Bobby. Scram." A deep voice came from behind my shoulder.

I shuddered.

Yikes! When did Giovanni get here?

"Boss, you're here." I grinned nervously. *Please don't kill me.*

"Howdy, boss. Food?" Bobby suggested. Food always made angry people happy. "Don't know what Jenny was making, but it looks—"

"Bobby! Scram!"

"Yes, boss." And Bobby did scam with his tail between his legs, a wounded look on his face.

Save me some food, he mouthed to me.

“Don’t worry. I’ll save you some. See you tonight.” I waved Bobby off as he exited the door.

Giovanni grunted to grab my attention. I took a deep breath. I’d survived all kinds of situations. I wouldn’t die today. So I greeted him with my best kept secret. My seductive smile.

“Boss. Please sit down. I have good food for you.”

Giovanni stood with arms folded across his chest, face as sour as grape juice. My attempt to please him didn’t work.

At least I should give it another shot. I guided him to his chair. “Boss, don’t be mad about before. I want to apologize. I didn’t—”

“Don’t get overly friendly with Bobby. He might cling to you.”

“At least he didn’t cling to me like someone did a while ago. Just because I accidentally zipped into something precious of his...”

He snapped, “If you didn’t pull the zipper into my dick, I wouldn’t have clung to you. And don’t worry. I don’t find you desirable. So you can take your god damned virginity and hide it in a cave somewhere.”

Such crude words. Someone should shove a sock in that mouth. Maybe me.

Giovanni extracted the chair and slumped into it himself. Then he leaned forward, eyes searching for something.

“What are you looking for?” I asked, peering at whatever he was looking at.

“You’re not thinking of poisoning me again, are you?” That face was full of suspicion.

I laughed. “Boss, if I wanted to poison you, I would have done it ages ago.”

“No seafood, shellfish, or marine animals?”

“None. Zilch. Zero. All is good.”

“What is this, anyway?” He tapped at the bowl of porridge, finding interest in my food.

“Rice porridge. Otherwise known as congee,” I proudly announced.

Giovanni looked at me dumbly. Guess he was pretty dense in the area of food. I tossed him my smarty-pants smile and explained to him what congee was.

“Child’s play. Italians don’t eat congee,” he stated like the almighty god he was.

“Ahem. I was brought up with lots of Asian friends, and when you’re sick, you eat congee. So eat congee and you’ll be better in no time.”

“What is this thing?” Giovanni turned his attention to the pickled cabbage dish next to the congee.

“Kimchi.”

“Isn’t that a Korean side dish?”

“Yep.”

“What’s that got to do with the congee?”

Good point. It had nothing to do with the congee. But I liked it. And that was all I cared about. So I put my rationale forth.

“Korean plus Cambodian. Kimchi plus congee. Delicious. Fabulous.”

“Rice glue and chili cabbage.” Giovanni glared at me, a disgusted look on his face. “You’re sick, Jay. I’m not eating it.” He shoved the two dishes across the table, lips pouting.

“Oh, boss. Don’t be fussy. It’s delicious. I have it all the time when I’m sick. It’s delish.” I slid the two dishes across to him again so the smell of kimchi could suffocate his nose.

“For you, but not me. Order me pizza.”

“Sick people don’t eat pizza. Now eat that congee.” I reprimanded, gaining the upper hand. “Sick people should listen to healthy people. Now eat.”

“Jay, I don’t know how to eat this thing. What do you eat it with? A fork?”

“Spoon, boss.”

“Show me.”

Wow. He was seriously like a kid when he was sick. But I did help him because I was kindhearted and generous.

I smiled gleefully and picked up the spoon, dipping it into the congee and offering it to him. He didn’t take the spoon from my hand. He tipped his head forward and grabbed the spoon with his mouth, slipping the congee down his throat.

I froze. Mouth agape. That action was a bit intimate.

“Well?” My voice trembled a bit.

“Again. I haven’t got the taste right yet.”

I sighed and dipped some more for him. Giovanni opened his mouth, then closed it again, his head turning to me, questions lurking in his eyes.

“You know I can’t eat chili.”

“It’s all right. This kimchi isn’t hot. It’s only the color. But if you don’t want to eat it, then let’s just stick to the congee.”

Giovanni shrugged and continued to use my hand as his spoon. “Still can’t taste anything.”

I laughed, feeding him more. “You’re not supposed to taste anything with the congee. It’s supposed to taste bland.”

Giovanni didn’t comment further. He was too busy gulping down the porridge like he hadn’t eaten in a century. For a mafia boss who in the beginning was as scary as hell, he sure tossed up a soft side when he was sick. I smiled to myself. My heart smiled, too.

Oh dear, my symptoms are starting again.

“So, how was it?” I asked, when his bowl was licked clean.

“Passable,” he muttered, dabbing a napkin to his lips.

“Right. Just passable, boss. The bowl looks so clean I don’t think I need to put it in the dishwasher.”

Giovanni jerked his head, snapping at me. “Clean up. I’m going to get some work done.” He shoved himself off the chair and strode to the door.

Ah, back to the devil mafia boss again. But his last sentence caught my attention.

“But, boss, I thought you were sick. You’re not supposed to work today. That’s why I’ve been babysitting you all morning.”

“Who said I was sick? I’m as tough as a boar. Get back to work. You’ve got a full house to clean, and laundry is piling up. I want my shirts pressed and coffee on my desk in ten minutes. Get to it, chessboard.”

I watched Giovanni exit, wanting so much to strangle his neck.

Damn. And here I was playing “babysitting the boss.” I’d been tricked!

CHAPTER 13
BLOOD FROM A STONE

“I heard from Bobby you were sick?”

“Food allergies.”

“Did you go to the hospital?”

“No. Heath helped out before it got worse.”

“You should be careful what you eat.”

“I know.”

“You were also in a fight with Leo?”

“No. He sent a woman my way. Thought I would get totally captivated by her. I sent her packing, though. Along with a warning to Leo.”

“Don’t mind Leo. He’s not right in the head.”

“Say that to his face when you see him, old man.”

Giuseppe Dente, the head honcho of the Dente Mafia, observed the young man sitting in front of him. He passed two documents, each sealed in a large envelope, to Giovanni.

“What’s this?” Giovanni asked, hand running along the rim of the thin envelope.

“I need you to collect his debt. He falls under your jurisdiction.”

“How many millions are we looking at?”

“A few.”

“Got it. My boys will sort him out. And the other one?”
Giovanni picked up the thick envelop to examine.

“Business. I need you to negotiate with him. Set out all the terms and conditions.”

“Regarding?”

“Funding he wants from us.”

“Who’s he?” Giovanni flicked his eyes at him.

“Another mafia family.”

Giovanni chuckled. “Really? Someone wants to join forces with our family?”

Giuseppe looked at Giovanni with adoration in his eyes, seeing the leader he’d become. Giuseppe remembered the first time he saw Giovanni. Dirt rag. A tall, gangly boy out on the streets. Soot smeared all over that oval face.

But Giovanni had come far, proving himself with self-determination. His education was top grade. His fighting skills were top notch. The boy had overcome every obstacle put in his way. If he had a son, Giuseppe would want him to be like Giovanni. That was why he’d given his last name to this boy. The boy his family neglected.

Giuseppe didn’t know much about Giovanni’s family. Giovanni never talked much about his past. Although, he would deliriously dream about his family whenever he was sick. Screams of agony. Shouts of anguish. Cries of pain. There was also something about protecting his mother. But Giuseppe knew this was a topic Giovanni wasn’t comfortable talking about. So, he never pushed the boy.

“I’m proud of you, Giovanni,” Giuseppe said after some time. The wheelchair squeaked as he moved closer to Giovanni. “I’m sure your father would be proud of you.”

Giovanni scoffed. “I have no father.”

A wounded look appeared on Giuseppe’s face. His wrinkles had become more prominent since he’d hit sixty. And especially due to his declining health.

Because of his diabetes, his legs had been amputated. Life in a wheelchair was hard. But not as hard as having no life to live. And that was what he’d told this boy every day since the first day he’d set foot in this house, under his care.

“Your mother, then. She’d be proud of who you’ve become.”

“Would she be proud of me if she knew I belonged to another mafia family?”

“Giovanni.” Giuseppe clutched the boy’s hand. “The Dente family may be a mafia family, but those days of killing people and dealing with the black market are long gone. Our battlefield is now negotiation and business ventures. And you’ve done that by helping me with my business so far. Hotels. Malls. Apartments. And lending companies. If anything were to happen to me, you’ll be my sole heir.”

“Old man. What’s all this talk about? You’ve got a long way to go before God takes you to heaven.”

“Hell, Giovanni. Hell.” Giuseppe reclined in his chair. He was tired. He missed those happy days when he was younger, robust, and full of energy. He missed those days when he fell in love. So much in love. Especially with a girl who’d ended up with another man.

Giuseppe opened his eyes again, banishing those thoughts from his mind. It was too painful for his heart to bear. If only they'd had a son from their quick liaison before they broke up. He still mourned that day.

“Heaven, Giuseppe. You saved my life. I wouldn't be here without you, old man.”

“You're a good kid. Get to work, then. I've got some things to take care of myself.”

“Would you like me to escort you somewhere? Heath brought the van.”

“No. Maxfield will take care of it. You take care of this business. I really want this project to work.”

“Sure, Giuseppe. I won't let you down.”

“You never let me down, Giovanni.” Giuseppe smiled tiredly. He called Maxfield and exited.

Giovanni smiled, downing the last of his Pinot Noir, and exited the room, too.



Giovanni slammed both fists on the table. I almost jumped a mile high through the roof. Now, if I weren't the recipient of his wrath, then who could it be directed at?

I took a peek at Giovanni. He was glaring at his underlings, all of them sitting like little children about to get scolded by their mother—in this case, the father—and my God, he looked mad. Not in a lunatic way, but as in red face, steam coming out of his ears.

The mood right now was even icier than the icebergs in the Arctic. I was busy polishing the many ornaments inside his

office, but I couldn't help eavesdropping on their conversation when he started swearing like a madman again.

And there was a side effect to his swearing, too. The more he swore, the more my hands seemed to scrub his precious ornaments, until—

“Jay!”

Oh crap! Now all his attention was on me. I trembled where I stood. “Yes, boss!”

“Sit down. You're annoying me with that scrubbing of yours.”

“Yes, boss.” I nodded meekly and darted my eyes about to look for any spare seat for me to wedge my bottom on. Bobby seemed to have a little room left on the edge, so I went to his side. As soon as I approached the guys, I could see they were clasping their hands in fear.

Something didn't feel right. I should brace myself. I knew I'd be in for an earful soon.

I shuffled Bobby out of his seat, but he wouldn't let me in that easily. He kept pushing me back. On and on we went until —

“Jay!” Giovanni's shout made my body freeze up.

“Yes, boss!” I yelped back, too fast and too loud for my ears.

“Get your ass in a chair. Now!”

“I am,” I whimpered, turning to face him. Oh My God! I'd never seen Giovanni this mad before. Would he cut off all our heads?

“Then what’s the fuss about?” he growled, his face inches from mine.

“There are only four chairs,” I meekly replied, blinking back at him.

“For fuck’s sake.” He ruffled his hair, possibly annoyed with me again. “Here, take my chair.”

“What?” Everyone in the office, including me, almost flipped over in surprise.

Giovanni giving up his cushy chair for me? But the “giving” part wasn’t the big deal here. The big deal was the chair itself, the big, black chair that contained so much power, like the throne of a king.

Does that make me the queen?

I gulped, suddenly not liking where I stood. “Ah, boss, it’s all right. I’ll stand and listen here, like a good—”

“Just sit your ass on that seat, Jay.” Giovanni came around and literally dragged me to his chair. He pushed me down, his hands resting on my shoulders, and now I was trapped. I was literally facing the guys on the other side of the desk, and they were all looking at me in disbelief.

I saw Bobby mouthing something at me. I couldn’t understand what he was saying.

What. Are. You. Saying? I mouthed back.

He. Likes. You.

Shut. Up. Not. True.

He. Offered. You. His. Chair.

Bobby was making me more nervous. I couldn’t help it. I gave him my ultimate weapon, the bird, otherwise known as

my middle finger.

“Jay!”

Oh crap! Did Giovanni catch me?

“Yes, boss.” I put on a fake smile for him.

“What’s with the finger? Are you going around flipping people off now?”

“What? No. I was just using my middle finger to scratch my nose. If you don’t believe me, ask Bobby.”

Giovanni immediately swung his attention to Bobby. He trembled in his seat. “She was just scratching herself, boss. It’s better if you stay away from her. You might get infected.”

“Hey, itchy skin isn’t contagious.” I tossed my defense back.

“Would you two shut your mouths? I’m in charge here.” Giovanni ceased our argument with his command.

“Sorry, boss,” both Bobby and I chorused.

“Now, for the problem at hand.” Giovanni planted himself on his desk, his masculine arm just next to my breast. I tried to move away, but one of his hands was still holding the back of the chair, trapping me. I tried to keep as still as possible so as not to touch him. He carried on speaking, oblivious to my itchy reaction. “I know it’s hard to squeeze blood from a stone, but—”

“Boss, are you talking about me?” I tweeted, catching the word stone.

Giovanni’s eyes were twitching again. He swung around and glared at me. “What about you, Jay?”

“I’m a Stone here, boss. Look, if you’re going to discuss my personal matters—my Pa’s debt—could you please not talk in front of the guys? It’s a sensitive topic. It always makes me upset.”

Giovanni clicked his tongue and clenched his jaw. He then closed his eyes for a full three seconds. I could see the vein throbbing in his throat. *Oh, my God. He’s not going to burst his artery, is he?*

“You know, Jay, you should really be more like your name,” he said through clenched teeth.

“What, you mean—Jenny? Smart, honest, brilliant?” I asked, listing all the good qualities of my name.

“No, a stone, like a rock.” Giovanni slammed his fist on his desk again. I almost bounced out of my seat with the vibration. He glared at me and seethed through his teeth. “Now shut up and stop interrupting me.”

“Sorry, boss.” I zipped my mouth, and listened to what he had to say.

“As I was saying, it’s hard to squeeze blood from a stone, but you asses...” Giovanni pointed his finger at his four underlings. “If only you tried harder. That old hermit is just buying time with his excuses. I don’t want any more excuses. Mess this job up and I’ll mess with your faces. You all got that.”

“Yes, boss.” They all hastily nodded.

“Ah, boss?” I had to lift my hand to ask for his attention. I cringed. Why did I do that? But I was curious. And what did people say about curiosity? It could kill you. And I was asking for my death sentence. Right here. Right now. “Umm. Who’s the old hermit? And what did the guys do?”

“For fuck’s sake, Jay, get out of my seat and go make us some coffee.” Giovanni exploded. He lifted me by the collar and shoved me off his chair. I almost fell, if not for my good reflexes.

“Easy, boss. I’m a delicate creature here. You don’t want to ruin these hands. They’re precious. If anything happens to them, you ain’t getting any coffee.”

“Jay, I’m seriously thinking of just turning you into coffee beans.” Giovanni’s face turned raspberry red.

“Ouch, boss. Sorry. I’m off, then. I’m off.” I backed away until my back hit the door, and then I sprinted out of the office for my dear life.



Today was another debt collection day. The five of us were now sitting in the black van, discussing why the boss almost lost his head yesterday.

Apparently, it was all about some old man who refused to pay his debt. Said man was a millionaire, as Finnie told me. Squeezing blood, in mafia terms, meant money.

See, I’m getting smart, learning all about the life of the mafia.

So, it was very hard to get money from him because: A) he was a well-established man, B) he worked for the government, and C) he was a stingy bastard. So, we had to come up with a plan. My brilliant mind was already swarming with ideas. And one point filtered past my lips.

“I say we stalk him.” I gave myself an imaginary pat on my head for my splendid suggestion. “What do you guys think?”

“I think you’ll end up being the maid in jail.” Jonny supplied.

“But aren’t we already illegal businessmen?” I clarified.

“Jenny, we are legit businessmen. Boss doesn’t like to think of us doing illegal work,” Finnie responded.

“So, what we’re doing here is legit stuff—threatening people with turning them into breakfast just to get some cash? Is that what you guys are telling me?” I looked at all four, straight in their faces.

Bobby had the decency to flush. “It’s part of our job to act tough. We have to protect the boss.”

“Boss?” I frowned. “What has he to do with any of this? Hey, that reminds me. How did he get into the mafia? Do you just happen to be born into it? Or did something happen to him and he became—”

“Shut it, Jenny!” Heath cut me off. “Don’t talk about the boss’ history. He doesn’t like anyone digging into his past. So, if you want to stay here peacefully, don’t ask about it.”

“Chill. Fine. I don’t care.” I lifted my hand in surrender.

And that was the end of our discussion. Everyone just nodded when I mentioned the stalking method again. Bobby then pushed on the pedal and drove into the city, Queens to be exact.

I’d never been to this part of town before. I was a Brooklyn girl through and through. But the buildings in Queens looked fantastic. Until I realized we’d circled that same flashy building three times.

“Hey, ah, Bobby, are we lost?” I tapped his shoulder to grab his attention. “We seem to be going around the same

block.”

“Nope. We’re not lost. The building is right over there.” Finnie pointed to the tall, grey tower.

“Then how many more times are we going to swirl around the place?” I poked my head between the front seats, looking at Bobby making yet another round.

“Boss said to only park at a dollar car park. I’m trying to find one,” he answered with a nod. Like that would save the fuel money.

“Won’t circling the place five times cost more than finding a dollar car park? Think of all the gas we’re wasting. How’s that going to benefit us in the long run?”

“Jenny has a point.” Jonny agreed.

“Yeah, why didn’t I think of that?” Bobby scratched his head.

He immediately found a car park. It was a two-dollar space. What was the fuss before? I couldn’t work out what these guys’ brains were made of. Anyway, we swiftly got out of the car and entered the high-rise apartment.

We acted like spies. We divided our group into pairs. I paired up with Bobby, Jonny with Finnie, and Heath... Well, he was Bigfoot. He didn’t need to pair up with anyone.

Bobby and I were stationed at the main foyer of the flashy apartment. Heath was in the black van, scanning personal documents about Mr. Hermit. Jonny and Finnie hung out near his apartment door.

At precisely fourteen-hundred hours, we spotted Mr. Hermit walking out of his apartment. I got this message from Finnie. And just five minutes after that, Bobby and I saw the

elevator door open. Out walked Mr. Hermit, with a cane, followed by two beautiful female assistants glued to his sides, one blonde wearing a short skirt, and one redhead wearing a dress with a neckline so low I almost thought her melons were going to squeeze out the top.

We followed Mr. Hermit at a sensible pace until he got into his limousine. Now, all four of us were sprinting to the van, shoving ourselves into it. And before butts met seats, the van drove off at a dangerous speed.

“Follow that limo, Heath. Follow it,” I shouted, adrenaline running high, eager to get to the bottom of this ridiculous raid.

I knew Giovanni would be upset if he didn’t get his money back. I’d do whatever in my power to help.

Our vehicle followed the limo until it screeched to a stop, right in front of a highly prized establishment.

I saw Mr. Hermit walk into that building with the two girls by his sides. I glanced up at the polished signboard. “Welcome to the Gentleman’s Club.”

“Now what are we going to do?” Bobby asked, his shoulders slumping in defeat. “Boss said we need to get the money from him today. But we can’t go in there. Everyone will know us.”

“What do you mean, Bobby?”

“Boss owns that club. We can’t go in there because we look more like bodyguards and gangsters. Boss said we’ll scare all the customers away.”

Ping! That was the sound of an idea popping in my head. I smiled slyly at the guys. “Don’t worry, guys. I’ve got a plan. But first, how much money do you have? Are you willing to invest in me?”

CHAPTER 14
SWEET ADDICTION

Giovanni looked up at the signboard of his exclusive establishment. With a smirk upon his lips, he read what was written on it. “Welcome to the Gentlemen’s Club.”

What a perfect name for a club. Gentlemen only. No bullfighting crap.

Giovanni tapped his walking stick twice and walked through the entrance at an elegant pace. A man of twenty took his outer coat and top hat, and then escorted him into the club.

Giovanni knew today he was dressed to the max. A black bowtie, crisp white shirt, and an Armani suit. His hair was done up with thick waves covering his eyes. In his briefcase was the document Giuseppe gave him. And he’d read it.

Rocco Bianchi. Wow. What a small world. Who would have thought the man who cursed him to die on the streets would be the one who would be asking for a loan from him?

Giovanni wasn’t that cruel to the man who’d brought him up, despite the physical abuse he’d endured throughout his younger years. But he also wanted to satisfy his ego by seeing that man beg. Oh, the anticipation was unbearable. Victory was almost here after fourteen years. He could almost taste it.

Giovanni scanned his surroundings the minute he set foot inside the private club. It was a low-lit atmosphere, but he'd been here so many times before, he could recognize all his staff.

Giovanni walked to a very secluded spot only the top VIP guests could make use of. He sat down in one of the plush chairs, resting his walking stick beside him.

He sighed and closed his eyes, his head slumping back against the large cushion. His thoughts returned to yesterday's events.

He shouldn't have blown up. It wasn't his minions' fault they couldn't get the money from old geezer Hermit. But after three consecutive tries, they all came back with goose eggs.

The subject matter of how to approach Rocco Bianchi was still bogging his mind. And then Jay had to add fuel to his already burning flames with her annoying scrubbing.

Jay.

Since she was a permanent fixture in his life, he felt different. Yes, his life had turned topsy-turvy. Yes, she'd caused him to have these weird feelings and lustful thoughts, but he couldn't understand why he didn't just kill her off or fire her for that matter. The three million dollars was a sham. He didn't care about it. He had more sharks to take care of. But he found he enjoyed her company. Like when she was in the bathtub with him or feeding him. They were such enjoyable moments.

But he'd realized quite recently his mind had filtered out the memory of his dear friend Jennifer. He'd forgotten his little friend, who'd saved his life of pain and misery, that one little

friend who made him feel all warm and cozy all those years ago.

Giovanni should feel guilty. But he didn't. Even when he tried to force himself to, all his mind could conjure up was Jay's face.

He still had his eyes closed, his long, black waves covering a portion of his face, his mind deep in thought, when he felt a soft bottom deposited on his lap. Another woman from the gentleman's club, he suspected.

Giovanni was about to open his eyes and tell the woman off, that he didn't want any company tonight, when said woman whispered something in his ear, making his whole body freeze up.

“Handsome boy. Are you hurt?”

Jennifer. Oh fuck, this was Jennifer. That was what she had said when she first saw him sitting underneath that beech tree in National Park.

Giovanni was bogged with emotions, a thousand questions racing through his mind. He wanted to cry, to laugh. But he was also scared of finding out what his Jennifer would look like after all this time.

But it didn't matter. It didn't matter one fucking bit what she looked like because she'd always been there for him in his time of need, and that was what made her so special to him. She was there to comfort him and made time fly when he was at his most depressed.

Trepidation ripped through him. Blood roared in his ears. And he had a hard-on the instant that soft bottom hit his thighs, that silky voice whispering in his ear.

Giovanni tried hard to subdue his manhood, clenching his teeth and breathing evenly, but he was just too excited.

He opened his eyes slowly and saw emerald irises, almond-shaped eyes, long, thick lashes painted dark with mascara, light freckles dusting that small button nose, and red juicy lips made for kissing.

Giovanni put all those small beautiful features together until his brain could comprehend the whole face. And then he sucked in his breath, his body frozen in shock, because staring right back at him with twin red-blotched cheeks was the one woman he never imagined seeing here.



“Wow, Jenny, you look hot.” Finnie complimented my looks as soon as I stepped out of the changing room in a highly established boutique.

I smirked, twirling around the four guys for added effect. “I know, right? I do look hot. Even I couldn’t recognize myself in the mirror.”

This outfit really put my best assets forward. My beautiful breasts were thrust out, showing nice cleavage down the front. The red dress complimented my ivory skin. My hair was styled on the side, ringlets falling in wisps. And adding in red heels, too, I was the devil’s daughter, out to carve out any man’s heart.

I couldn’t help laughing myself silly. If Amelia or Pa were to see me now, they’d no longer think I was plain. And I was sure Mr. Hermit would feel the same way, giving up all his cash just for a chance to kiss my hand.

Heath looked me up and down at that moment, rubbing his neck in agitation. His action made me a teeny bit nervous. Was

I not up to his standard?

“What is it, Heath? Am I not fit enough for this character?”

“I don’t know, Jenny. There’ll be many people about. I hope you can pull this off.”

“Yeah. I say she can pull this off.” Bobby defended me. “I’m going in there, Heath. I’ll look after her. You guys just make sure to protect us.”

That was our plan. Bobby and I would go in as mistress and butler. My job was to persuade Mr. Hermit to part with the amount of the debt he owed the boss through my sweet, seductive charm.

Although I’d never acted before to save my life, I knew I could pull this off. I had to. To gain Giovanni’s trust. This way, maybe he’d reduce Pa’s debt.

Bracing myself in the backseat, we all drove back to the Gentlemen’s Club. And now here I stood, facing that very same building. I only hoped Mr. Hermit was still inside.

Bobby and I proceeded in as planned. Bobby hissed in my ear as I walked into the dim room. “Look for the old man with a cane. He’s always with his walking stick.”

I nodded and walked around, gliding gracefully like a swan, my bottom swaying left and right for added seductive effect. It was pretty quiet. I couldn’t make out people’s faces at all. But then again, I didn’t need to look for faces. I needed to look for a single walking cane. And I found it.

I smiled slyly and expertly slid my bottom onto that lap. Mr. Hermit’s body went rigid. He looked totally different under the low light. His hair was messy, covering his face.

I wound my arms around his neck and whispered into his ear, “Handsome boy, are you hurt?”

Gee, where did I learn that line? It sure came to me easily.

Mr. Hermit flicked his head up, meeting my eyes.

I gasped when those deep raven eyes locked with mine, with hunger, and—

“Giovanni!” Recognition slammed into me.

I leaped out of his lap, but Giovanni caught my wrist, swinging me back to him.

“Jay, what are you doing here?” he growled, arms wound tightly around my waist.

“Boss, let me go.” I tried loosening his hold, struggling and peeling off his fingers, but he wouldn’t let go. “Boss, please, you’re ruining our mission.”

“What mission is this?” Giovanni closed the distance between us. My heart thumped at an uneven pace.

“You’re not supposed to know,” I said, squirming in his arms. “Now, let me go before the subject disappears.”

“The fuck are you on about, Jay? Tell me right now or I’ll hold you down like this until you answer.”

My eyes darted to my left and right, wondering where old Mr. Hermit had gone to. I definitely saw that brown walking cane. So, how did Mr. Hermit turn out to be Giovanni?

“Jay, the fuck are you staring at? Look at me.” Giovanni pinched my chin and forced my gaze back to his.

The minute my emerald irises met his black ones, I was lost in the depths of that ever-swirling black sky. My heart raced; my skin tingled.

“Boss, please. I’ve no time for this. Now let me go.”

“Stop squirming on my lap, goddamn you!” Giovanni closed his eyes, suppressing whatever emotion he was experiencing.

He took three deep breaths and then tossed me over the plush couch, surprising even me by trapping me beneath him. Just like that time in the bathtub. Just like that time in my dream. And then before I knew it, his face descended, coming closer and closer until—

Bonk!

Heath, Bobby, Jonny, and Finnie came out of nowhere and subdued Giovanni, dragging him back until I could breathe again.

I freaked out.

Oh God. I seriously hoped they didn’t mistake Giovanni for Mr. Hermit.

“Bobby. Heath. Wait! That’s the boss. That’s Giovanni,” I shouted, rushing after them, tripping over my heels twice. I cringed as pain raced up my legs.

Damn these heels. They’re a torture device for women’s feet.

But I suppressed myself. I had more important things to deal with. And that was to make sure the guys didn’t punch Giovanni’s lights out.

I had imagined the worst, seeing Giovanni all swollen with bloody lips. But by the time I got there, it wasn’t Giovanni who had a black eye; it was the other four. I ran to them.

“Jay, get in the car,” Giovanni shouted, halting my steps.

“But, boss—” I looked from the four distraught minions to the boss.

“Now. Don’t make me repeat myself, Jay.”

I knew I was a playful person, always wanting to taunt him, but today, I knew he was up to his eyeballs in rage. I didn’t want to provoke him.

It was cold outside. I shivered, not from the chilled air, but because of the guilt riding through me. It was all my fault. Now the guys would pay the price.

Giovanni took his coat off and put it around my shoulders. I looked up, not sure why he did this. He only said two words. “Wear this.” Then he led me to his car. I got in obediently, not wanting to argue anymore.

On the road, he drove at a dangerous speed, passing through yellow lights. We didn’t speak a word. I wanted to talk, but I was scared. Giovanni just kept his eyes on the road.

I couldn’t take his silence anymore. I mustered up the courage and spoke. “Boss...”

“Shut up, Jay. Not now. Wait until we get home,” he said coldly.

“Okay,” I tweeted, knowing now was not the time to push his buttons.

But he didn’t take me home. Giovanni drove me to an isolated place, parking the car at a cliff’s edge.

And then he killed me. With his gaze.

I was a trembling corpse, still breathing because he allowed me to. But not for long.

His long, lean fingers wound around my neck. I struggled to breathe. I closed my eyes, trembling in my seat. My life was now in his hands.

He's going to kill me and dump my body in the sea. I'm going to die. I know I'm going to die. But I don't want to die yet.

“Boss,” I mouthed, not sure if any sound came out. All I could focus on were his fingers around my neck. Suddenly, they softened, lingering on my collarbone. And nape. And...

I blinked, opening my eyes. He was assessing my face, just as I was assessing his.

Hard edge. Rough and raw. He was so dangerous today. But his eyes were so soft. And so innocent. Could this man be capable of killing so many men? Was this man really the mafia? Under the light of the full moon, he was like a little lost boy, hand gripping me for support.

“Boss.” I broke the silence.

Giovanni gripped my arm. Hard. I cried out. He released me just as quickly. And started beating his fist on the steering wheel. “Fuck! Jay, fuck!”

His face twisted with all sorts of expressions. Anger, vexation, annoyance, but most of all, there was pain and misery.

I was scared and somehow felt quite sad for him. I'd never seen Giovanni react this fiercely to any situation. It was as if he were fighting with himself. One minute he was Dr. Jekyll; the next he was Mr. Hyde.

As soon as his profane display ceased, he put the car back into motion again. I didn't dare say a word during the drive home. And as soon as the car passed through the security gate

and parked in front of Cory Mansion, I shot out, frightened Giovanni might transform into Mr. Hyde again.

The guys were already there, waiting for us to arrive. As soon as Giovanni saw Heath, he stormed up to the tall man and struck a blow at Heath's jaw with his clenched fist.

“What the fuck did I tell you, Heath? Why did you bring Jay into that establishment?”

Heath didn't respond. He only hung his head.

Giovanni was possessed by the devil. He was now Mr. Hyde. As soon as I saw his fist in the air again, I knew Heath was going to take another blow. I ran and stood in front of Heath just mere seconds before that strong hand hit my face.

“If you want to punch Heath, then punch me instead. I was the one who came up with the plan. Not Heath.”

“Fuck, Jay, get out of the way.” Giovanni seethed, eyes burning with rage.

“No.” I stood my ground. This was my fault. And I should take the blame. “Heath didn't do anything wrong. I was just helping them collect the money.”

“You were trying to collect that old geezer's money, right? By dressing like a slut.”

I was furious. He mocked my dignity and morality. I fired back at him, “I'm not a slut. I'm a girl on a mission.”

“And what mission is that? To fuck that old geezer. To lose that virginity you so want to keep.”

Tears wanted to seep from my eyes, but I suppressed them. “I have my right, you asshole. And just because I dressed provocatively, it doesn't mean I want to sleep around with anyone. That man needed persuading. Otherwise, he wouldn't

hand the money over. You said to do anything to get your money back. So I did.”

“I didn’t mean for you to get involved or dress like a slut like that. You’re better off in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning, and making coffee.” His voice cut my heart into sections. And it was bleeding. I was in pain. And angry.

“I’m a woman, Giovanni. I want to dress and act like a woman for once. I don’t want to always dress like I’m one of the boys, hair always covered in flour, clothes smelling of coffee. I want to dress like a woman.”

Somewhere along the way, the room went quiet.

“You are one of my boys, Jay. Don’t ever dress in that clothing again. Remember, you’re my coffee machine, my maid. So start dressing like one.”

“I’m not your boy. I told you that. I may have a flat chest, but I’m a girl. A girl, Giovanni.” I emphasized my point, tears streaming down my face now.

“Then what do you want me to do?”

“Act like I’m a girl for once. See I’m a girl for once. Not your maid. And certainly not your coffee machine.”

“You mean like this.” He grabbed my chin, backed me up until I was pinned against the wall, and kissed the living hell out of me. His tongue invaded my personal space. His lips sealed over mine. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t think. And by the time I managed to push him off and run out of the room, my heart wouldn’t stop pounding.

CHAPTER 15
AF TERGATH

G*iovanni kissed me.* All through that night, I repeated the mantra. *Giovanni kissed me.* Despite it was in the heat of anger, he still kissed me.

I traced my lips, lingering on that small spot where his lips touched mine. I tried to fall asleep, but when I did drift off, my mind kept conjuring up all sorts of scenarios, all of which involved me and that mafia boss in some sort of compromising position.

At three o'clock, my eyes opened. It was my biological clock. That was the usual time Giovanni would kick at my door to announce he wanted his coffee to quench his midnight thirst.

And so I got up, made a black decaf, and slipped into his office. Something inside me still prayed he wouldn't be in. Of course, God didn't hear my prayer. Giovanni was seated in his chair, tracing his lips, too.

And suddenly, the kissing scene from last night slammed into my mind again. My hands shook. The coffee cup rattled in its saucer.

"Who is it?" he shouted, face turned in my direction. I stepped back into the dark, obscuring his view.

Oh God, I didn't want to face him. Well, not yet anyway.

Stupid, Jenny. Why the heck did you make this coffee for him?

I couldn't understand why I behaved like this. Did I want to appeal to him, please him in some way just so he could reduce Pa's debt?

Very unlikely. I could be selfish and run away. Leave everything behind and scam. Pa could deal with it. Giovanni could find Pa and they could negotiate with each other.

But I couldn't. I just couldn't. Not just because of Pa, but because there was something else there, too. I just couldn't find the reason yet.

"Boss, it's me," I said hoarsely, stepping into the light, the cup of coffee in my hand. "I made you black decaf."

I quickly walked to his desk, placed the coffee on the hard surface, and was about to dash out of the room again when a hand lingered on my arm.

A zap shot up my spine. My heart skipped a beat. The room seemed to constrict somehow. I fought for breath, clutching the ledge of the table for support until my knuckles turned white. I knew if I didn't hold on, my legs would buckle.

"Jay!" That deep baritone rumbled into my ear. And that was the tipping point. My legs buckled.

Giovanni caught me, bracing me against his steel-hard chest. I leaned in subconsciously, molding myself even more into him, until his chest was flush against my back. His head somehow found its way into the space between my shoulder and neck.

“Jay,” he whispered again. The heat of his breath seared my skin as his nose continued to brush the nape of my neck.

I shivered again and closed my eyes, sucking in a deep breath.

Why was it so hard to breathe, so suddenly? What was wrong with me? What did Giovanni do to me?

“Boss.” I panted, losing control of my voice. I gritted my teeth. My body was trembling so badly I was starting to worry. “Boss,” I uttered again.

Giovanni turned me around and tilted my face up. Our gazes locked. His was misty, filled with something I couldn’t identify. Mine was also misty but filled with unshed tears.

My belly squirmed when his fingers caressed my lips. His face grew closer. His eyes were so black, like the night sky. I was lost in them.

It only happened in a split second, but to me, time had stopped. I was suspended in space, aimlessly floating in a sealed vacuum.

Giovanni sealed our lips, kissing me with anger and passion all rolled into one. His teeth clicked with mine, his tongue hungrily fighting to get into my mouth, to gain control of my senses. And my senses were lost. No longer could I control my limbs. I was at his mercy.

But Giovanni didn’t show any mercy. He pressed on, kissing me with all his strength, as if each and every kiss were his last one. He tore at my lips, swallowing all my cries.

I whimpered and grasped on to him, my fingers digging into his shirt, wanting more of what he gave, wishing he could kiss me just that little bit longer, for this was the very first time I had experienced this kind of sensation. Our kiss from last

night was tempered with anger. This kiss was fueled with passion.

Or, that was what I'd thought. Until he angled his mouth, increasing the pressure. The pace was fast. I struggled in his arms. He didn't let me go. And then I knew. This wasn't a passionate kiss. This was anger in the form of a punishment packaged as a kiss.

So, he was still mad with me from last night. He was only punishing me for not knowing my place. I was his maid after all. Even if not by choice, I was still his maid. I shouldn't have dressed in such a provocative manner so as to tempt men. I should just be myself. Plain Jenny.

Had I forgotten the first sentence Giovanni uttered when he first saw me? "You're ugly." Those were his first words used to describe me. So, how many times must people remind me I was ugly before the information sank into my brain? Pa. Everyone in class. Countless people my age at the University.

But I'd fought hard. I thought if I couldn't be beautiful, then at least I should be smart and kindhearted. I already knew I was stupid and clumsy, so I studied hard to get into college. I knew, too, that I talked too much whenever I got nervous. But this was an innate trait I found hard to change. Even then, no matter what I did in the past to try to redeem these qualities—be it to clean the house, clean the bathroom, do all the laundry, be a good daughter to Pa or a good sister to Amelia—at the end of the day, I was still clumsy, plain Jenny.

I'd never minded before that I was inferior to Amelia. Even when she went to the school formal and Pa said she was beautiful or even when her countless boyfriends kissed her on the lips, I fought that purging feeling in my stomach, that feeling of envy that wanted to explode to the surface because

no one had ever wanted me to be their girlfriend or wanted to kiss me.

Until Giovanni.

I tried to remain positive and told myself it was fine to not be beautiful. There were more important things in life. There were people starving in the world, people who fought to stay alive because of cancer and other medical conditions. But sometimes it hurt. It hurt so much when the people you truly wanted to please didn't see you or acknowledge your existence.

Like Giovanni.

The thought struck me hard.

Why did I care so much what he thought of me? I was lucky he'd found use in me as his maid. He could have killed me and been done with it. So why did I have to care whether I couldn't dress in beautiful womanly clothes? And why did I have to cry right now while clinging to him for support?

It was because, for once in my life, I felt I was worth something. Pa loved me, I knew that, but he'd never needed me like the guys here. His favorite daughter was Amelia. I was the extra daughter he didn't need. I should have died in that accident that killed Ma. But I hadn't. Even when I was in the hospital after that accident, losing my memory, I still fought on, wanting to feel I belonged somewhere.

But Heath, Jonny, Keith, and especially Bobby, they all made me feel I was part of a family. They made me feel I was one of them. We ate together. We had fun together, going to different places to collect money. So, maybe I was being selfish now for not wanting anything to change. I pleaded with Giovanni, apologizing to him, so I could stay here.

Yes. I wanted to stay. In the beginning, I hated Giovanni. I hated this mafia boss for always calling me in the middle of the night to make him coffee. I hated him for always calling me “chessboard” or always reminding me I was his coffee machine. And I hated Pa for using me as collateral for his debt. Yes, I hated I was stuck in this position. But that had all changed now.

“Boss, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” I sobbed between our kisses. “Please don’t punish Heath. Please don’t blame it on the guys. It was all my fault. I just wanted to help them get the money for you.”

Giovanni didn’t listen to me. Maybe he didn’t hear me because he was trailing soft kisses on my cheek, temple, and all the way down my neckline.

“Boss, are you listening to me?”

He wasn’t. He was still at it. And his lips landed on mine again.

“Boss,” I cried and sobbed.

“Stop crying, Jay,” he said in irritation, pushing my hair aside to press a kiss on my temple. “How many times do I have to tell you? I hate it when you cry. You look ugly when you cry.”

His nose was nestled in my hair. He couldn’t see the tears dribbling down my cheeks. I silently sobbed. “Boss, please listen to me. I’m sorry for what I did. I thought if I did this, you might cut Pa’s debt by at least a small portion. I thought if we could get the money back for you, you’d be happy and let me go before the due date.”

Giovanni tore back as if I’d bitten him. His eyes breathed fire. “So, you only did it because you want to reduce your

father's debt?"

"Yes." Tears squeezed out of my eyes. I wanted to say more, but I didn't know what. My throat was clogged.

Giovanni pushed me against the wall and pinched my chin so I would look into his face. He looked so angry. So very angry. His eyes blazed fire.

"You pathetic girl," he growled in my face. "So you only want to get out of the contract faster?"

"Isn't that why I'm here?"

"Do you think I enjoy seeing your face? If it weren't for your coffee skills, you would've been dead by now."

"If you hate seeing my face so much, why won't you let me go?"

"I'll let you go if you pay me back the three million dollars your father owes me." He braced his arm against the wall, trapping me against him. His face grew closer until his nose brushed my cheek. He whispered next to my ear, "So, Jay, do you have three million dollars for me?"

I was stunned. I didn't know what to say. Taking my silence as my answer, he kissed me again. He parted my hair and cradled my neck, once again sealing our lips together. The kiss was deep.

I mewed out, "If you hate my face so much, why are you kissing me?"

"Fuck!" He jerked back as if he were burned. "Do you think I enjoy kissing you? You kiss like a dog, Jay."

I kiss like a dog? Not only did Giovanni not like my face, but he also said I kissed like a dog.

A girl who'd never had a boyfriend. A girl who'd never been kissed, but when finally was allowed the chance, kissed like a dog.

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't speak. I just cried. More tears slid down my face.

“Fuck. Go, get out,” Giovanni shouted, shoving me out the door. “I let you go. Now don't fucking cry in my face again. I don't ever want to see your face again. Just get out.”

Giovanni slammed the door. I crumpled to the floor. And gave in to my emotions, crying a thousand tears.



Giovanni closed his eyes and braced himself against the closed door. What had he done? What the fuck had he done? He'd kicked Jay out. And not only that, but he'd said he didn't want to see her again.

But he couldn't control himself. He almost took her. His ability to hold himself together was starting to break, for their kiss was so amazing. It was fire and ice melded together.

His hand trembled as he thought back to a few days ago when he'd sneaked into her room while she was asleep. She'd looked so peaceful, as if she hadn't a care in the world, even when her father owed him three million dollars and she was the collateral.

He'd stayed there, his face just inches away, his lips hovering above hers, until he couldn't contain himself any longer. And then he'd kissed her gently.

He knew she must have thought this whole event was her dream. He made it appear that way. That was why he was happy the next day, even suggesting they go out for dinner, at

the cost of his health when Jay challenged him to eat the seafood dish, the food he was allergic to.

Even then, he didn't tell her off. So, why now?

It was because he fucking wanted her. So much it hurt. So much he felt the ache in his chest like a piece of concrete was embedded in his heart.

Jay!

What the fuck did you do to me?

He might as well face the truth. He was in lust with his maid. He was attracted to her like no other woman he'd ever been attracted to. Yeah, he could jump her. But even though he was a ruthless man, with hands that had been tainted with blood in the past, he wasn't the type to take an unwilling woman.

He'd enjoyed their kiss. Even when he was the one who was doing all the initiation and action, he felt his world had turned upside down and he was floating in a world free of worry and stress. Blissful. That was what it was. The most amazing and earthshattering kiss he'd ever experienced.

But what had made him so fucking mad about their kiss a second ago was that she said she'd only wanted to get rid of her father's debt faster. So he'd lied, saying she kissed like a dog.

She didn't feel the passion in those kisses like he did, did she? She didn't have any feelings for him, did she? No attraction, no shortness of breath, no feelings whatsoever?

Oh, fucking hell. Who was he kidding? She was his maid, a schoolgirl who was almost a decade younger than his twenty-eight years. She didn't see him as anything more than a mafia boss, one who killed and fought for power and control.

Giovanni dragged himself up and shuffled back to his chair, crushing his face in his hands. He was scared to admit it to himself, but he had to face the truth. He was totally captivated by his maid, Jenny Stone. And there was only one way to deal with this problem of his. He picked up the phone and dialed the one man who would help resolve everything.

It was long past due to find Jennifer.



I had a sleepless night. I dreamed of Giovanni and me kissing again. It was weird. Why did I dream of him; when he didn't see me as anything more than his coffee machine?

I knew I should leave. That was what he'd told me. I could leave, so why was it when I woke up that morning, I lingered in bed.

My phone vibrated. I swiped it on. It was a text from Crispin.

Crispin: *Where are you? Class about to start.*

Jenny: *Sorry, Cris. Sick. Won't be at school today.*

Crispin: *What's your address? I'll visit you. Want me to take you to the hospital? Is it really bad?*

Jenny: *I'm all right. Just small headache. Gonna sleep a bit.*

Crispin: *Your symptoms aren't coming back, are they?*

I thought about that time I was in the hospital after that car crash that killed Ma and put me in critical condition. I stayed in the hospital for a total of six months. I must have crashed my head into something because all my memories from my childhood up until I turned six had been forgotten.

Not a lot of people knew about that accident that almost took my life. Only Crispin and my family. No, I didn't have that headache. I hadn't since I came to live here.

Jenny: *No. I'm fine.*

Crispin: *Ok. You sleep well, then.*

Jenny: *I will. Take care.*

Crispin: *You take care, Jenny. I worry about you. And remember, text if you need anything. I want to help.*

Jenny: *Thanks, friend.*

I dropped onto my pillow and cried. Why was I crying? I should be happy Giovanni was so kind to let me off. I should rejoice in this opportunity.

But I felt so lonely. So very lonely. And so lost. I felt I was a little lost child with no home to return to. Pa had run away with Amelia, leaving me behind. Only Crispin was there for me.

He was a good friend. He worried about me. But I couldn't rely on him all the time. It was already good enough that he chose me as his best friend. I had to learn to rely on myself.

I forced a smile and pulled open the curtains. The sun shone bright and the sky was cloudless blue. It was a beautiful day outside. I shouldn't feel so downhearted. So I got up, determined today was going to be a good day. I'd say hello to Giovanni when I saw him. Pretend everything from last night hadn't happened. Act like our relationship was fine. Yes, everything would be fine.

After preparing myself for the day, I went downstairs to make some coffee for Giovanni. But he was nowhere to be found. I searched everywhere for him, but he wasn't there.

“Guys, have you seen the boss?” I asked, when I saw the guys in the lounge.

They didn’t hear me. Or more likely they didn’t want to hear me. Their eyes were consumed elsewhere.

I walked sluggishly to them. They were grouped together in front of the flat-screen, commenting about something. I hadn’t a clue what they were on about. I caught a few words like hot and Ryan Reynolds from *The Proposal*.

“Hey, what are you guys on about?” I shoved my way slowly to stand in front of the TV, unlike my usual hyperactive self.

The minute my eyes landed on that screen, my heart started skipping again. And I trembled, feeling cold.

“Our boss is hot, right? Look at his eyes. So black, as if they could suck your soul out of heaven.” Bobby had to mention Giovanni’s perfect eyes. I couldn’t take my eyes off his black pupils then. It was like I was entranced by that face, just like last night.

“More like a black hole that sucks your life force out,” I commented quickly, just for something to say so the guys wouldn’t detect my abnormal behavior.

Yeah. He did suck out my life force. I have no energy today.

Bobby looked horrified at my answer, though. “But check out that body. Boss has such perfect genes. You can’t find a body that hot.”

“He works out at 3:00 a.m. every morning, Bobby. Trust me. I’m the one who makes his coffee.”

“Seriously. Is that why you’re always yawning every morning?”

“Yes. No man is capable of looking good without having to work out. Look at him. He’s too tall,” I said without any emotion.

“Jesus, Jenny. What’s gotten into you? Where’s your spirit? You look like you woke up on the wrong side of bed,” Bobby commented.

“I’m fine, Bobby. I’m fine.” I waved him off.

“But to get back to the subject of tall men, though. My niece’s friends say girls and women are into them,” Finnie added.

“I kind of agree. Girls these days dig tall men. They don’t like shorties, like us,” Jonny said sadly.

“Hey, Jonny, no talking about your height now.” I turned to console the man who was, in actual fact, about an inch taller than me. “You know, tall girls at my college are into short men, too.”

“You’re joking. Do you have any hot friends? Introduce some to us.” Jonny cheered up as soon as I told him this.

If only I could have his spirit today, too.

“Sure. Sure.” I patted his shoulder, remembering to never ever touch on this topic again. There was no way I was letting any of my friends know about this side of my life.

“Well, he’s a Ryan Reynolds to me.” Bobby had to direct our conversation back to Giovanni’s good looks.

“I say he’s more like that actor who played Christian Grey from *Fifty Shades*,” I commented, eyes still fixed on Giovanni’s image on TV. “Don’t you remember, he’s into whacking and slapping?”

“Jenny, don’t you find our boss hot at all?” Bobby turned to me, questioning my capability to rate hot guys. “I’m a guy here, and I still get the shivers every time he walks into the room. It’s like he’s a movie star. He has this charisma about him that captivates people.”

“I agree. Boss has the looks of a movie star. And the body of a male model. I’m just like Bobby. We shiver when we’re near him. How about you, Jenny? You’re a girl. What’s your reaction when he walks into the room?” Finnie put me on the spot.

I felt my face flush and my palms sweat. I cleared my throat, blinked, and said with a casual voice, trying my best not to show them my true feelings, “Yeah right, like I would be totally captivated by him, guys. He’s just a normal guy to me. Nothing special.”

Bobby gasped. “You’re a lesbian, Jenny. That’s what you are. He kissed you last night, and you still didn’t feel any sort of attraction for him.”

Why did Bobby have to remind me of last night or the kiss in the early hours this morning? I was trying to forget it already.

My heart thumped as I turned to the TV screen again. Giovanni was being interviewed on a program called *Close and Personal with the Hottest Male Billionaire*.

Billionaire? And here I’d thought he was only a millionaire. Must be all that illegal business of his. Did they even know he was mafia and not a legit businessman?

The TV presenter was a female. She was literally gushing over Giovanni, hand busy flicking her blond hair back like it was all over her face or something.

And what was wrong with her eyes? Why was she blinking nonstop?

Go to the optometrist if you have an eye problem, lady.

And Giovanni wasn't helping my mood either, when he responded to the signals she was sending. He flashed a bright smile, a smile I'd never before seen on his face.

I chewed my bottom lip, watching him answer her questions. I wished he would smile like that to me sometime.

“So, Mr. Dente, do you have a special someone in your heart?”

Giovanni laughed, flicking his black hair back. His eyes were shining bright, and he grinned at the screen.

“Well, I do, actually.” He turned his face until his eyes were looking directly at whoever was staring at the screen. In this case, it was me and the guys.

My heart thumped as soon as he made eye contact with me, and at that moment, everything ceased to exist. I held my breath and waited for his answer.

“I've known her for a while now. And I want to tell her this.” Giovanni smiled and paused, slowly sending out some sort of invisible wave signal that had my heart thumping mad. “Jennifer, if you're watching this, then you should know I'm waiting for you. I'll wait for you to come back to me so I can fulfil our promise we made.”

“Oh, it sounds like a love confession,” the hostess commented.

“You could say that.” Giovanni smiled.

I couldn't see anything else. Nor could I hear anything. All I could think about was Giovanni in love with his Jennifer,

waiting for his Jennifer to come back to him and fulfilling whatever promise they'd made.

My heart felt something akin to pain. I clutched at my chest. Tears spilled from my eyes again.

“Jenny, what’s wrong with you? Why are you crying?” Bobby asked, seeing my teary face.

“What? Nothing.” I wiped my eyes quickly to remove the evidence. “Something’s just in my eyes. I’m just going to pop upstairs for a minute.”

I rushed to my bedroom, ignoring their calls. I closed the door and took out my phone, rereading the last text Crispin sent to me.

Crispin: *You take care Jenny. I worry about you. And remember, text if you need anything. I want to help.*

Without another thought, I texted him with my new message.

Jenny: *Meet me in front of school café at noon. I want your help.*

I dropped the phone and slid to the floor, sobbing painfully into my hands. I knew why I'd cried when Giovanni said he wanted to find Jennifer. I knew why I'd cried when he said I kissed like a dog. I knew why I'd cried all of last night when he said he no longer wanted to see my face. I'd now found the reason.

Giovanni Dente, the mafia boss, had totally captivated me. And for that, I had to leave here.



This interview was taking longer than Giovanni had expected. The fake mask he'd put on was starting to wear thin. The

woman in front of him was constantly flirting with him, touching her hair, and winking at him.

Giovanni had been with so many clingy women in the past he could spot one from miles away. And this woman had clingy written all over her face.

Does she not have any dignity? We're on a live broadcast here.

“So, Mr. Dente, do you have a special someone in your heart?” she asked, eyes running up and down his body again.

Giovanni pretended to laugh, throwing his head back so the viewers couldn't see how pissed he was at this whole setup.

He knew from the very beginning that this was what it had amounted to. He'd wanted to do this, hadn't he? The producer of this so-called program, *Close and Personal with the Hottest Male Billionaire*, had bugged him for years, wanting to get him on his show, saying they'd rake in millions more female viewers if he'd just appear. Not that the program hadn't already had more than a few million viewers up their sleeves.

Giovanni had declined so many times before. He wasn't interested in being in the spotlight. But last night, after that crazy kissing episode with Jenny, he'd made up his mind to find Jennifer. And that was why he was on this show.

Giovanni had hoped Jennifer was like any normal eighteen-year-old girl, eyes glued to this program. It would make his job of finding her that much simpler. God knew how many years he'd tried to find her. He'd hired countless private detectives, but that girl seemed to have disappeared off the face of this earth. Those lovely spring memories of them

spending days together, drinking coffee under the shady beech tree, were the only fond memories of his teenage years.

Giovanni missed her. His heart had told him so, especially now that spring had indicated she turned eighteen. And he'd made a promise to her to make her his lover.

He wanted to laugh at himself. It was stupid to cling to that small promise to this girl. *Who wants to be the lover of a mafia boss, anyway?* She was too young back then to understand the complicated world he lived in. But maybe they could start out as friends first.

Would she still want to date me if she knew I'm mafia?

This thought disturbed him. Then another thought swiftly took over his mind.

What if she turns out ugly? What if I can't bed her? Giovanni shook his head to dispel these thoughts.

No, Jay would never be ugly. Even if to others she might not have the looks, his heart had been totally captivated from that first moment he'd set sight on her all those years ago, what with her chitchat and kind, soft heart.

Giovanni paused at that thought. *Fuck.* Did he just mistakenly use Jay's name in place of Jennifer? Where did that come from? Oh, right, it was because he was still enamored with her, lusting after her; that was the whole reason he was here in the first place.

Giovanni turned his attention back to the blonde and smiled. "Well, I do, actually. I've known her for a while now. And I want to tell her this." He then shifted his focus to one of the many cameras, making sure they had a good view of his full profile. "Jennifer, if you're watching this, then you should

know I'm waiting for you. I'll wait for you to come back to me so I can fulfil our promise we made."

Giovanni closed his eyes for a second, imagining the grown-up Jennifer nodding when she heard his confession on TV. But all he could see in his mind's eyes was Jay's face staring back at him from the other side of the screen.

Fuck! He was in deep shit now. Jenny Stone, his maid, had totally captivated him.

THE END


Totally Alluring

Maid to the Mafia: Book 2 is now available to read. Click on the link below to purchase at your favorite online store.



[Book 2: Totally Alluring](#)



If you love Jenny and Giovanni's story, please spread the love and consider writing a review on the website you purchased, or downloaded this book from. Thank you.

[Book 1: Totally Captivated](#)



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A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear reader,

Thank you so much for reading the first book of Jenny and Giovanni's love story. Their story is long, comprising of four books in total, before they get their happily ever after.

I can't wait for you to pick up their second book, *Totally Alluring*. This time, we are ramping up the heat between them. There will be smut, smut and lots more smut. Be prepared, because it's going to get really hot.

But while Jenny was busy living under Giovanni's roof and working as his maid, have you ever wondered what happened to her sister, Amelia, and where she had disappeared to?

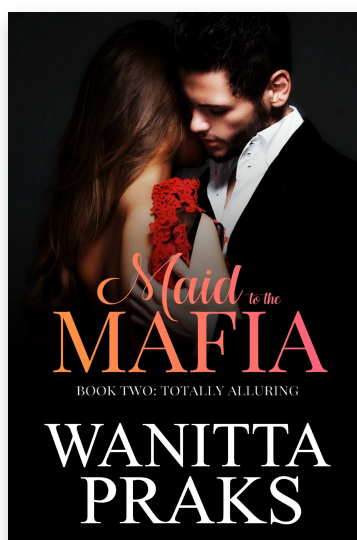
The answer to that question will be written in her own book. Yes, Amelia will have her own series, which when complete, can be read concurrently with Jenny's story, because both of their stories occur in the same time frame. Amelia's story will be released in January 2021. Preorder is available now. I look forward to you reading Amelia's love story, too.

See you in the next book of Jenny and Giovanni's love story,
Totally Alluring.

From Author, Wanitta

Extra note: *The Mafia and His Maiden: Beautiful Hell* is Amelia's first book, under *The Mafia and His Maiden* series.

TOTALLY ALLURING
MAID TO THE MAFIA: BOOK TWO



[Book 2: Totally Alluring](#)

Available Now

“From today onwards, you are deemed as my lover. Be prepared to meet your fate.”

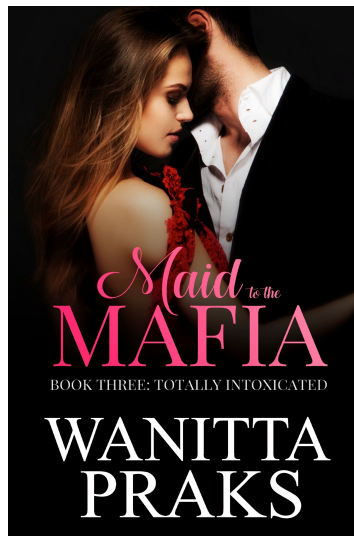
And those are the words that came out of the very man who makes her heart flutter, Giovanni Dente, the mafia boss with movie star good looks and a coffee addict.

Between working as his maid and brewing his coffee as payment to her father's three-million-dollar debt, Jenny finds she has to fight off his advances, using every skill she possesses not to be lured into his seductive trap. But what can a poor student like her do when every touch and kiss Giovanni bestowed upon her has her craving for more?

Jenny knows her defense is about to break down because this mafia boss is totally alluring.



TOTALLY INTOXICATED
MAID TO THE MAFIA: BOOK THREE



[Book 3: Totally Intoxicated](#)

Available Now



“Iron my shirt.”

“Give me a kiss.”

“Make my coffee”

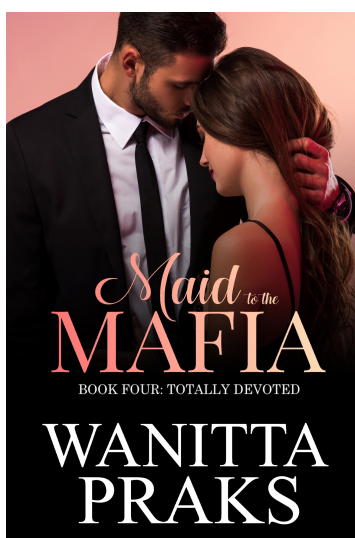
“Let’s make love.”

And that's essentially what Jenny's life has bogged down to. One minute she's the maid, the next she's the lover of billionaire mafia boss, Giovanni Dente.

Jenny tries to separate her two lives, what with friends, college and exams, but the more she lives with Giovanni, the more she's dragged down to the underworld of mafia.

Jenny knows she must fight back, to regain normalcy, but she can't resist because this time, she's totally intoxicated.

TOTALLY DEVOTED
MAID TO THE MAFIA: BOOK FOUR



[Book 4: Totally Devoted](#)

Available Now

Giovanni Dente

She was his maid.

She was his lover.

But now...

She was gone.

Giovanni Dente, the mafia boss of the Dente Clan, exudes power, arrogance, and charisma. No one dares to cross him, until one did, taking away his most beloved, Jenny Stone.

They had kidnapped her. And now there's hell to pay. He'll go in with guns blazing, not stopping until she's with him again.

Because to her, he's totally devoted.

Jenny Stone

I was his maid.

I was his lover.

But now, who am I?

Jenny is in love with the billionaire mafia boss, Giovanni Dente. For the past four months, she'd experienced it all. The love he gave to her, the care he bestowed upon her.

It was all like a sweet dream. But it really was a dream, because now she has to wake up and face reality. She was not the person Giovanni loved. She was not his Jennifer.

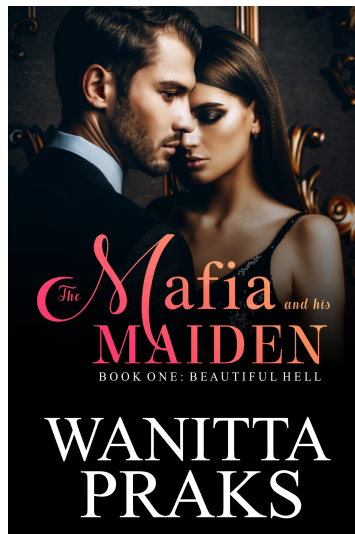
Reality hit her like a punch to the gut.

Is it too late to tell him she loves him?

Is it too late to make him love her?

Because no matter what he says and does, her heart is totally devoted to him.

THE MAFIA AND HIS MAIDEN
AMELIA AND NIKOLAS' LOVE STORY



[Book 1: Beautiful Hell](#)

Preorder Available Now

Release Date: January 13 2021

From the author of *Maid to the Mafia* comes another anticipated and highly charged passionate new love story.

Amelia Stone

Choices. Every choice leads to a consequence. This is now my new life. And I must live with this consequence.

Nikolas Lorenzo, head mafia of the Lorenzo Group. He barged into my life like a raging pit bull, destroying my orderly lifestyle and shattering my innocent dreams. Gun poised at my father's temple, he asks me point blank, "Choose between his life or yours."

I've made my choice, and now I must live with this consequence. I become his.

But ours is a volatile and erotic relationship. He's coldhearted and ruthless, but beneath the surface, I can see his fragile heart, haunted by the ghost of his past.

He is a reflection of me, both damaged souls, bonded together through an unfortunate incident. Will we both live to see the day we cherish each other, or will we both suffer in this beautiful hell together?

Nikolas Lorenzo

"An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth." If you hurt me, I will hunt you down and exact vengeance on you tenfold.

Nikolas Lorenzo lives in a chaotic world, one filled with bloodshed and death. The only light in his life is his kid brother. But when his life got taken away too, Nikolas self-

deconstructs, going on a warpath to search for the culprit. And it leads him to Amelia Stone.

She's painted as an innocent maiden in his brother's eyes, but he knows better. He asks her to make a choice. Life or death. She chooses death. But death is too easy of a way out. She needs to experience the hell she put his brother through.

And so he constructs the perfect hell for her, one where he has absolute control. But whenever he looks into her amber eyes, he can't help seeing that innocent soul in her. Is this regret he's feeling, or will he languish his moments with her in this beautiful hell he created?

***The Mafia and His Maiden: Beautiful Hell* is the first book in *The Mafia and His Maiden* series. Heartrending, angst, and filled to the brim with sensual smut scenes, this first book ends in a cliffhanger.**

Author's Note: Amelia is Jenny's sister in *Maid to the Mafia* series. Nikolas Lorenzo is Giovanni's frenemy. Both Amelia and Nikolas will appear in **Book 4: Totally Devoted in *Maid to the Mafia* series.**

A MAFIA'S FIRST LOVE
LILY AND JUSTIN'S LOVE STORY



[Book 1: Completely Breathless](#)

Preorder Available Now

Release Date: September 15 2020



Justin

No food. No energy. No money.

F*ck my life. Nothing can get worse than this. I'm about to go out on that boxing ring to fight for that \$200 in cold hard cash.

It should be easy. I'm primed for this. I'm trained for this. But I'm hungry. I have no food. I'm going to die. Then I see her. She stumbles into my path.

One look. One lick. One taste. That's all I need to confirm she's mine.

Lily

“A kiss, in exchange for saving your life.” That's what he says to me after he steals my first kiss under the moonlight.

I'm trying to search for my freedom, escaping from my suffocating family, only to find him; Justin Valenti, the heart-throb idol of our college campus, dubbed Heartbreaker.

He's hot. He's dangerous. Like his name implies, he's a heartbreaker. There's no way I'm falling for a guy like him.

But the more I know him, the more I realize he's an honest and quintessential hardworking man.

And with every touch, he leaves me completely breathless.

Author's Note: This is the story of Justin Valenti, Giovanni Dante's best friend, who appears in book 3 and book 4 of *Maid to the Mafia. Completely Breathless*, will take the readers back to when Justin was still a college student and how he met Lily, his first love. Raw and romantic, this first book ends in a cliff hanger.

PROLOGUE



Present Day

“Strip!”

I stood inside his immaculate office, facing the large floor-to-ceiling window that overlooked New York City. The sun was setting, casting an orange glow onto the metropolitan city.

It was always a comforting thought to see the sun setting because I knew a new day would begin tomorrow. That was what he'd told me. *'No matter how low your life gets, tomorrow is a new day, and a new day means a new beginning.'* But that one word coming from his mouth, *'strip'*, killed something within me, and I knew right then that I would emerge tomorrow as a different person. No longer would I retain that youthful, innocent love. No longer would I carry that torch within me, hopelessly clinging on to every word he spoke, or worshipping everything he did. Maybe I was no longer that naïve young girl anymore.

“Strip,” he repeated when I didn't move from my spot or make a move to unfasten my dress. “If you want me to listen to your proposal, then strip.”

I didn't want to do this. But his was a command I dared not refuse. I had no other choice. He was my only savior, and I must comply with his request.

I stared at his cold dark eyes and those stubborn lips. Those azure eyes used to hold me captive with their gaze. Those soft lips used to kiss me, laugh with me, and comfort me back when we used to love each other. Those rough fingers used to embrace me when I sought warmth. We were passionate lovers, our desire running deep, our memories burning hot. I remembered them all. The love he gave to me. The promises he made with me.

But all those sentiments were just distant memories, like a fog that had somehow cast a shadow over my mind. Now it became clear. This man whom I used to love was no longer in front of me.

Who was this man in front of me? He was Justin Valenti, the billionaire who'd stolen my heart when I first saw him in the boxing ring seven years ago. But he wasn't a billionaire back then. He was a poor, simple boy who had a heart of a saint. He used to be my boyfriend, the man I once loved. Now he was cold and ruthless, a billionaire who only thirsted for money and lust.

I stripped, fingers pausing at the button of my shirt, eyes begging him to reconsider. I wasn't embarrassed stripping in front of him. I used to parade naked before his eyes many times in the past. What made this situation different was the shame washing over me.

Not like this. Please not like this. I didn't want to end up in this position. Not like I was some call girl.

But that was essentially what I was. I was here to please him, just so he would grant me that one wish.

But I wanted to make love to him, like when we used to love each other, him bestowing all his trust on me, putting all his pride aside just to be with me.

All I saw was his cold ruthless glare. My request was cut short. He wouldn't be deterred; there was no longer any humane emotion in his eyes now. The past was a thing best forgotten for him.

He gestured for me to come closer. I moved, my feet taking me closer to the man who still made my blood run hot and cold at the same time.

He wound his arm around the small of my back and dragged me into bed. Electric sparks shattered every nerve in my body, and I shuddered. I lay pinned beneath him while he made quick work of removing his clothing.

The Armani suit. The silk tie. Those expensive pieces of clothing that cost thousands of dollars lay scattered next to the clothing I bought from the thrift store.

How well I was aware of the different status between us now. We were like the earth and sky. I was the earth, and he was the sky, so far apart, so far to reach, but yet, here we were, me lying beneath him in bed.

Maybe it was only a fleeting moment, a small desire to conquer that lust riding deep within me, but I was still pleased to be able to lie in his arms.

I watched the way he moved his muscles, contorting at the right angle to accentuate the planes of his chest. That soaring tattoo still mesmerized me, and when he exposed it to me, my world rocked. A sudden flare rushed up my core.

God help me. I still loved him, so deep it hurt.

I shut my eyes, not wanting that burning image of the man I once loved to stay imprinted in my memory. I felt his hot lips on my nipple, clamping on that bud, sucking it so hard I winced.

Forcing my legs apart, I opened my eyes to find I was exposed to his hungry gaze. He wedged himself against me. Rolling on the condom, he slid into me. It was all too quick and fast.

I winced again. He was so big inside me. It'd been seven years since he was inside me, and all those memories came crashing into me again. Those cold windy nights in his little shaggy house while his grandfather slept in the next room, those stolen moments when we used to touch each other when no one was looking. His soft kisses, his lighthearted caresses, they were all beautiful memories that I had catalogued for the rest of my life.

He used to make love to me like I was his princess, the only woman in his world. He put me on a pedestal. He protected me from danger, even when he himself lived in a dangerous world. And when we made love, it was so beautiful that I cried.

But now I also cried, silent tears dripping from the corners of my eyes unknowingly. Not because I wasn't happy to be in his arms again, but because our relationship had now changed.

Seven years ago, I was the one who made the request. Seven years ago, I destroyed his life. And now, seven years later, I came back into his life. Fate had brought us together again, but this time, I must pay the ultimate price. I was no longer his love. I was his toy.

He continued to thrust into me, not knowing of the thoughts going through my head. I realized this was not love.

This was hunger. This was need. The basic human instinct of a man who just needed to fuck another human, to satisfy his lust.

Sweat poured off me. I clung to him. Each stroke brought me back to the surface. I panted, my mind frozen from thinking any further thought. Skin-to-skin, we were meshed together.

We were so close, but the distance between us could be measured in miles. He embraced me, not with love but with lust. Each stroke he bestowed upon me fired up the forbidden lust within me even more.

I still loved him. I knew that now. I'd never stopped loving him. I was consumed by this love sickness.

But I knew he'd changed. I'd damaged him. I was the reason he'd turned into this ruthless broken billionaire. He was not like me. I was infected by his love. He was immune to my love. In our love story, I was only a mere plaything for him to satisfy his craving.

It was a done deal. He fucked me and left. I woke up naked and cold. Beside me on the table was a note with one single key.

Move in with me. Then I'll agree to your deal.

Two sentences. Ten words. But those words could ultimately change my life. I reached for the key, holding the cold metal in my hand.

It must be his house key. He wanted me to move in with him. Had I sealed the deal by sleeping with him? But this was my only solution.

The lust between us was still as strong as ever. Nothing could compare to the passion flaring between us last night. But would I be satisfied with just being his temporary lover? Could I endure other women entertaining him? Because I knew I wasn't the only one.

Seven years ago, he was mine alone. But I'd destroyed his trust. I'd crush his courage to love again. I was the culprit in this lovesick game of ours.

I couldn't blame him. I could never blame him for what he'd done. He was a man who had endured so much to get to where he was today. I congratulated him for getting this far. Within the span of those seven years, he'd built himself up from scratch and had now become the world-renowned Justin Valenti, the president and CEO of Valenti Real Estate.

But would I be satisfied with the situation I was in? My mind traced back to when this all started seven years ago, when the story of our love began, when I was first infected by his love.

CHAPTER 10 JUSTIN

Seven years ago

There were twenty-four hours in a day. I spent four hours sleeping, seven hours studying for my college degree, and thirteen hours working to support my life. And the morning started now, with the alarm jolting me awake.

I allowed myself a good five minutes of freedom in bed before starting the day. But staying in bed this morning was a luxury that I couldn't afford. The air inside the room could almost freeze a newborn lamb to death. If a healthy twenty-year-old boy like me couldn't even tolerate this cold, then what about a fragile medically compromised sixty-eight-year-old man.

Rubbing my eyes to wear off sleep, I slipped into my three-year-old slippers. It was a well-worn pair, despite it being a little torn, but still in usable condition.

Padding out of bed, I grabbed the blanket off my bed on the way to check on Grandpa, who was in the next room.

I noted the cracked floors and the carpet slightly worn on the way to his room. Just another list of maintenance items to put on my to-do list.

Grandpa was curled up like a little baby on the bed. His shoulders looked tense. I put my blanket on his sleeping form, and when his shoulders relaxed, and he burrowed farther into the blanket, searching for that warmth, I couldn't help but smile. His wheelchair sat on the opposite side of his bed. It must have been Elma, his home aide, who had parked the chair there.

I parked the wheelchair closer to his bed, just so it would be easier for him to get into when he woke up, if Elma hadn't arrived yet.

Walking quietly so as not to disturb his sleep, I closed his bedroom door and got straight to work on the morning chores. Build the fire in the log burner to heat the house, cook Grandpa's breakfast, hit the shower, grab a banana, and off to work. All in that order.

Except it didn't pan out that way.

“Shit!” I forgot to chop the firewood the night before. Grandpa would freeze to death when he woke up.

Slapping on my woolly jacket and work boots, I ran outside to the shed in the backyard. It was pitch-black. Hardly surprising, since it was only three in the morning.

Thankfully, the shed was equipped with a light bulb, so chopping wood was an easy task. Except, by the time I was finished with the job, I could no longer feel my fingers.

Carrying a good few in my arms, I trudged back inside and lit the fire. The heat warmed me up in no time. Once oats porridge was also made, and nicely wrapped in the microwave, I hit the shower.

The hot spray warmed my soul. Loving the feel of the water, but thinking of money wasted, I got dressed, grabbed a

banana, and went to say goodbye to Grandpa. Grandpa was still sleeping in bed, a lot more comfortable than the first time I came to check on him.

“Nonno,” I bent and whispered into his ear. A loud grunt erupted from his mouth. I smiled at that. “You sleep well, all right? I’ve made you breakfast.”

“Porridge again?” he grunted in response, his eyes still closed.

“Yes. Porridge again.”

Grandpa slowly opened his lids, lined with wrinkles, and peered at me through his cataract-filled eyes.

A knife sliced through me that second. Eye surgery for cataracts was in the thousands. I didn’t have that kind of money, yet.

Wait a little longer, Nonno. I’ll be graduating by the end of this year. Then I’ll work even harder and get you that eye surgery.

“I don’t like porridge. I want cake for breakfast. Ask your boss to give me some cake for breakfast.” He shifted on his bed, making the blanket drop below his shoulders.

“No, Nonno.” I shook my head and pulled the blanket up to his neck again. “You can’t eat cake for breakfast. It’s not good for your teeth.”

“Bloody teeth. I ain’t got any. I have dentures.”

“Well, yes. But I still won’t allow it. Now go back to sleep. Eat your porridge when you wake up. It’s in the microwave. Just heat it up when you want it, okay. I’ll be back before midnight.”

“Will you bring me sweets then, Nipote, if I eat porridge?”

I smiled. “Yeah, Nonno. I’ll bring you your favorite sweets. If you don’t cause Elma any problems.”

“I ain’t causing Elma any problems. She’s always the one who’s complaining about me and not getting paid on time.”

Guilty arrows jabbed at my heart. I couldn’t blame Elma for that. Looking after an invalid, an old man who required full-time care and had a foul mouth, too... It could get stressful. Guess I had to take up that underground fighting match tonight, just to pay for her overdue wages.

“Yeah, well, you behave too. We don’t want to lose her. So, here’s the deal. If you eat your porridge and don’t cause problems to Elma, I’ll bring you sweets tonight. Do we have a deal?”

Grandpa smiled his gummy smile at me, nodded, then closed his eyes and fell back to sleep.

I smiled somewhat strangely at this, my heart a little constricted with pain. But I shoved it aside before it took full form. Taking my bike out, I cycled through town toward the bakery at the other end of the city.

Opening the door to freshly baked breads was one of my favorite moments in the day. Jim, the head boss, was already there, face pudgy and red with the heat from the oven.

“Howdy, Justin. Your loaf is on the cooling rack.”

“Howdy, Jim.” I greeted him and went to the front of the bakery, where several small tables and chairs were situated for customers to sit and eat. I’ve never had the privilege to see the rowdy customers. My work in the bakery usually started at four a.m. and ended right before they opened at seven a.m.

Sitting at one of the tables, I pulled out the banana I got from home, mashed it into the bread loaf, and wolfed down

my breakfast. Water completed my morning meal.

All done with food, I got into my uniform, scrubbed my hands under soap, and—

I paused, taking a second to examine the scar that ran forth from my left wrist. It was a small cut, a small mistake, but also a firm reminder that if I had died that night, then I wouldn't be here today.

Maybe Grandpa knew I was vulnerable at that age. Eleven, parents recently died, and a granddad who was about to leave this world, too, what choice did I have back then, except suicide.

But I had grown past that phase of my life now. And it was Grandpa who had saved me. I must be brave and look forward to the day ahead. Because today was a new day. And a new day brought new possibility.

After washing up, I got straight to work. After a good thirty minutes of silently pounding dough, Jim said his first full sentence to me.

“How's your granddad? His health is on the mend?”

“Yeah. Grandpa is okay right now. Though I worry when the winter comes around. I need to get him more blankets. His joints are going to feel it the most.”

“Yeah, you know what it's like when you age. Once you pass fifty, all sorts of conditions come knocking at your door. The wife was complaining about her arthritis playing up the other day, and she's only forty-eight. But you listen, Justin. We've got some extra blankets if you don't mind secondhand stuff. The wife is planning to redecorate the room for the tenth time, and she wants to recycle some old stuff. We could drop it off at your place tonight if you want.”

I took a deep breath and looked at him. “I—”

“Look,” Jim began, cutting me off.

He knew I was about to refuse. After years of being looked down upon, criticized and bashed in the head during my high school years, I became cautious and withdrawn. And the word pity got tagged along with it, too.

“Look at that poor orphan boy, whose parents had died in a car crash.”

“Look at that poor orphan boy who wore his uniform a size too small.”

“Oh, the poor thing.”

The leers, the jeering, it sickened me to see those looks on their faces. Parents, teachers, classmates, all of them, taking pity on me, yet gossiping about me from behind.

People avoided me. People were scared to touch me. As if one touch would rub my poorness onto them.

I wasn't stupid. I could tell from a mile away I was hated. So, the word pity always came with a sharp warning.

“You don't have to give me that look,” Jim carried on. “I know how you hate it when people pity you. And this is not charity. You're working here for me. Let me thank you by giving you some stuff. Waste not, want not. That's what I say. The blankets are still in good condition. I want to give them to a good home. It's not so bad, is it? That's how life revolves. You help me, I help you.”

I thought about what Jim had said. Waste not, want not. It's not charity. He didn't need those blankets anymore. Grandpa could benefit from them anyway.

“You’re right, Jim.” I smiled, accepting his proposal. “That’ll be mint. Thanks heaps.”

“Not a problem, kiddo. I admire kids like you. Hardworking with a strong sense of perseverance. And you study like Einstein. I wouldn’t be surprised if you turn out to be a millionaire someday. Just as long as you don’t forget me, that’s all I ask.”

“Jesus, Jim.” I rolled my dough and pounded it a bit more, using all the strength in my muscles to produce the result. “You make it sound like I’m some privileged kid here.”

“Well, it’s the privileged blue-blooded kids I don’t give an ass about. They think they got gold in front of them, so they don’t work to preserve those golds. You, my boy, you know the secret to being a millionaire. You know how to manage time.”

“Yeah, whatever you say, Jim.” I shook my head and got back to work.

Don’t tell me the secret to being rich was all about time management? My life was bound to time like a dog bound to a leash. Hell, even a dog got to be free and untied from that leash from time to time to socialize. But me, I didn’t have that privilege. Each second to me was precious. I needed to spend each second in exchange for some form of money or commodity that was of value to me. Sleep in exchange for recovery and energy. Work in exchange for money. Education in exchange for a better future.

Boys my age may have privilege, the life with easy food and good parents. But I didn’t have either. All I had were my own two hands, a mountain of college fees, a sick grandpa, and an old house that required constant maintenance. But

sooner or later, I'd get Grandpa and me out of this hellhole called poverty.

CHAPTER LILY

I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was orientation week and there were many clubs and societies that were out and about in front of the university field park, hoping to capture any interested individuals to join their clubs. I was interested in the art club, so I had applied and asked for directions to the club room. But somehow, my sense of direction in this new profound university had my brain fried, and I ended up in this underground boxing club.

There were people everywhere. Behind me, in front of me, beside me, so many that I could hardly breathe to save my life. This reminded me of one incident from ten years ago, when I was at the zoo. I found myself lost, jam-packed in the middle with all the animals around me, barking, mooing, and hissing at me.

In here, it was the same. There must be about a hundred, maybe more, in a room that should house forty, maybe fifty people max, all packed with some degree of raging hormones, like those animals in the zoo. The only comfort I had was holding on to my precious cupcake in the box, which at least reminded me that I belonged to a real society outside of this door, a civilized society that didn't act like crazy animals.

And their behaviors were crazy. The men were throwing out curses, while the few women were displaying their personal assets to the men across the room. My eyes almost bulged out of my sockets at their acts. It was awkward and bizarre at the same time.

Did college students behave like this after finishing high school? I had attended a Christian school, so bizarre things like flashing your twin assets were not the norm. I should definitely find an exit point and get out of here before the picture got any more graphic.

Just as I was about to wedge my way back out, a deep voice broke through on the speaker, reducing the loud rowdy crowd to a deafening silence. It was possibly the emcee announcing the battle. I didn't get a look, since my mission to exit this place was stronger. But instead, I found myself stuck in between a group of stocky boys.

The air was knocked out of my lungs. I couldn't move. Having nowhere to turn to, I faced the emcee who stood in the boxing ring, while waiting for another opportunity to make an exit.

The emcee was a large built man with stocky shoulders, blond hair, and a face that could cheer anyone up with that wide smile of his. Of course, when he did speak, the atmosphere hyped up.

"All right. That's enough folks," he pacified everyone. "I'm your emcee, Hagen. Let's get to the real deal. I welcome you to O-Weeeeeeeek!"

Instantly, the crowd went wild. It was like a circus show. Some were pounding on the wall. Others were stomping on the floors. While still others were screaming their lungs out. It seemed like their goal was to make the loudest noise possible.

As for me, I was still pawing my way out of this pack of hyenas.

“We have a new contender this year. A freshman. But that doesn’t mean he’s new in this sport. He deserves his own accolade. Our freshman holds a black belt in karate. I welcome you to the boxing ring, Wayne Anderson.”

The crowd instantly quieted down when Wayne walked out.

Wayne was a lanky boy-man, and he was tall. I could even see his head from where I stood at the back. He marched with style to the boxing ring and stood next to the emcee, somewhat embarrassed since there were no cheers for him.

“Now, everyone. This is it. This is the moment you’ve all been waiting for,” our emcee began again. “Ladies. Gentlemen. Boys. Girls. Are you all excited?”

Another cheer erupted. And someone faked a drumroll to dramatize the atmosphere in the background. Hagen lifted his hand, and all was silent again.

“But just a word of caution before we start. Because seriously, I think we all need to hear it. Now, ladies...” He turned his attention to the women around the boxing ring. “You’d better guard your hearts. Even better, lock them away in a safe somewhere and throw the keys out the window. As for you gents, I urge you to protect your girlfriends. Now, for the rest of us. It doesn’t matter if you’re a girl or a guy, that doesn’t change the fact that our next contender will surely steal your heart. Don’t even pretend that he doesn’t affect you. Don’t even pretend that you don’t love him. Because you do. And you wish he was yours, in bed and out. But that isn’t gonna happen, because ladies and gentlemen, he’ll surely

break your heart. And for the first time this year, fighting for a full two hundred in cold hard cash, I give you, Heartbreaker.”

This was it. This was my cue to get out. Fast. But the room exploded in noise again, and I was jostled to the front unexpectedly, stumbling headfirst out onto the open lane, my face aimed for the floor, or possibly my precious cupcake, smashing flat against blood-stained concrete.

Luckily, someone caught me in time, stepping in and twisting my body around in their arms, stopping me from meeting my embarrassing and bloodcurdling fate.

My head spun at the great impact. A second later, my bearings came back. But strangely, I became aware of the eerie silence filling the room and the warm hands that were still grasping my arms, keeping me in balance.

I felt awkward, like I was out of place. Actually, I should rephrase that. I was out of place and out of line in here. With my goody-two-shoes, black polished pumps, a creamy white dress, and black cardigan on, I was like a little dove, roughly shoved into the nest of the gawking crows. It was fine before, since I was camouflaged among the crowd, but now, all eyes were on me.

Still trying to breathe and remain calm, my eyes searched for my savior. Judging by the grip on my arms, my savior was a man.

My gaze slowly took in the sight of his hands on my arms. His fingers were big and rough, the skin chipped and cracked, the knuckles hard and worn. His grasp alone swallowed the whole circumference of my arms. I assumed he must be a big man.

Moving my gaze farther up, I sighted his upper biceps, all firm and tight, all the way to his deltoid muscle, where the image of a soaring eagle was tattooed.

The eagle tattoo was large, with one side of its wing extending to cover a quarter of his chest. The vibrancy of colors fused together to create one beautiful-looking masterpiece.

I had never thought about getting a tattoo before. It had never crossed my mind. To me, a tattoo was the epitome of all things of badness. But somehow, I found this piece almost inspiring, like there was a story behind it.

Traveling farther south from his shoulders, my eyes finally locked on to his chest. The man was shirtless, and he was covered in sweat, like water droplets running off a showerhead all the way down his body, accentuating the contours of his six-pack abs, which were so flat they eventually narrowed down to...

Oh, God. I felt my muscle clenching at the center of my core. Which only meant one thing. I was aroused.

Oh, God. No man with a half-naked self like this could make me aroused. But maybe it was because I was immersed in a room filled with men raging with testosterone, *hence*, why my hormones were playing havoc in response.

I shouldn't do this. I should stop staring at his chest. I should stop staring at his abs. They are too smooth, too taut, too...

God. No. Stop thinking about it, Lily.

Thank God, his shorts were a decent size that it covered up his package. I didn't want to imagine what lay between his legs.

Snapping my eyes up to face him, to stop myself from thinking disastrous thoughts that could rouse my body further, I looked straight into his eyes. And I drank in his whole profile.

Thick black hair hung a little too long over his shoulders in naughty waves. His sharp jawbones only served to accentuate the curvature of his neck. And with his high bridged nose, and large blue pupils with long black lashes that fanned along the arch of his eyelids, he could be the next high fashion model. I could understand why they dubbed him the heartbreaker. He could break any woman's heart with just his face alone. And that's ignoring his body.

With the unthinkable force of AA batteries, his crystal-blue eyes pierced me then, and my whole body went berserk. Especially my heartbeat, which pounded like Japanese drums, a different beat than the one before. And then my hands had to act in accordance to that, too. I accidentally held out my precious cupcake box in front of me, like I was making an offering to the almighty God Zeus for saving my life.

He looked at me. No, stared at me. As if seeing a female for the first time in his life. And then he sniffed the air. Or was it my hair? I wasn't sure anymore. My heart was pumping too fast. I couldn't speak. Let alone think. Because now he was beside my ear, sniffing my shoulder and around my head.

He was strange, but he was what dominated my mind at that moment. Forgotten was my fear of small spaces. In its place was my fascination with this man. So, I continued to stand still, staring at him, mesmerized by his aura, while he in turn continued to look at me and smell me, assess me, to determine whether I was a friend, foe, fan, or food. Just as

swiftly, those crystal-blue pupils shifted to the cupcake box in my hands. Slowly, he shifted his gaze back to me again.

His black sooty eyebrows shot up, as though querying me about something, then back to the cake box again. Suddenly, an expression of hunger flashed across his eyes. Then he did the unthinkable. He took the cupcake box out of my hands, opened it, fixed his eyes on my beautifully decorated golden cupcake for half a second, then popped the whole thing in his mouth.

I was so shocked that I couldn't do a thing. All I did was watched him chew my cupcake, watching how his Adam's apple bobbed up when he swallowed.

"Thanks," he said once finished, handing me back the emptied box, now devoid of my cake. And then he sauntered off casually, right into the boxing ring.

The audience exploded into full volume again. It was like a live music concert. All the girls were touching his legs and throwing their arms about, as if welcoming an idol.

I was speechless. My cake, which I had spent hours slaving over and pouring my love into, now down the throat of a stranger who was about to start a fight in the boxing ring. My beautifully decorated, handcrafted cake, which I'd made especially for Patrick's birthday.

I should have felt something, a little angry, maybe even a bit annoyed at this whole situation, yet none of those emotions surfaced. In their place was a sense of serenity as I looked at him, at the man who'd saved my life, at the man who was about to fight to earn that \$200 cash.

Tension coiled in my stomach as I watched the two men take their positions. And then, swift as a fly, Heartbreaker's

gaze reverted to me; his focus centered on me.

This was no surreptitious action, no small steps of caution. It was a straight on stare, like he was still hungry, even when he'd just eaten my cake.

Way across the room, our eyes continued to lock in a trance. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a hand flew forward, smashing straight into Heartbreaker's jaw. The impact was so strong blood sprayed out of his mouth.

My heart jumped at the gruesome impact. I gripped my fingers into tight fists until my nails dug into the palms of my skin. But still I didn't relent. My attention was only on Heartbreaker.

I realized this wasn't a good sport where one fought the other with dignity and rule. This was a bloodbath. Wayne just kept on pounding Heartbreaker, and I was about to faint from the sight of blood staining their white cloth-wrapped hands.

Suddenly Heartbreaker had his eyes on me again. Didn't he feel any pain from that attack? Why was he looking at me again?

I looked back at him, giving him a small weak smile, my little encouragement for him. And suddenly, it was like he'd been transformed into a rhinoceros. With the sugar in my cupcake, it must have worked its magic, because now, he was the one who was giving all the punches. Which only made me feel bad, since now poor Wayne was at the receiving end. And the impact wasn't like what Wayne had given to Heartbreaker. Heartbreaker was going for the kill.

Punch after punch, blow after blow Heartbreaker bestowed on Wayne. And Wayne was gifted with bruises all over his face. Finally, after enduring what seemed like centuries of

punches, backwards and forwards, mainly from Heartbreaker to Wayne, one of them fell. It was Wayne.

I almost followed Wayne, too. My body was so tensed and stressed out from being in this crowd, from witnessing this scene, from not being able to breathe proper air, that I caved in.

But my body didn't hit the floor. I was cushioned against Heartbreaker's chest. Somehow, Heartbreaker had me in his arms, which I found strange, because wasn't he supposed to be in the boxing ring fighting?

Heartbreaker picked me up. I looked at him fuzzily. He really was handsome up this close.

"Don't follow," he barked at the oncoming crowd, who came to view the unscripted commotion.

The words 'bitch' and 'ho' were thrown at me by the girls on the sidelines, but collectively, their voices were drowned out by the men shouting and cheering Heartbreaker, just as Heartbreaker carried me to who-knows-where.

But by then, I'd completely lost it. I closed my eyes, feeling my head spinning in a black void.

I couldn't make sense of anything anymore. I wanted to go home. Needed to go home. So I fluttered my eyes open again and looked up at Heartbreaker, whose eyes were now directed straight at the path in front of him.

"Heartbreaker, put me down," I said, feeling uncomfortable in his arms.

His eyes immediately jerked to me, as if he didn't expect me to call him by this name. But still, he didn't speak. He just kept walking. And looking at me.

Heat infused my face the longer he stared at me. I felt hot all over. Like I was on fire in his arms.

“Heartbreaker. Please. Let me down. I’m feeling bet—”

“No.” He cut me off. “We’re almost there. You’ll feel better in a bit.”

I stayed silent in his arms, my whole body rigid as he climbed up some stairs.

I was not used to anyone carrying me. But being carried by a man I found attractive, somehow my heart fluttered a bit. Maybe this was the freedom I’d sought.

Maybe...

[Book 1: Completely Breathless](#)

Preorder Available Now

Release Date: 15th September 2020

HER MAJESTY & THE FOUR KINGS
CLARISSA ROSE'S REVERSE HAREM LOVE
STORY



[Book 1: Her Majesty is Here](#)

Free to download through online stores



Getting crushed under a monster truck is never a pleasant feeling. If I could relive that moment, I would never have taken that route. But we never really get a second chance at life. Or do we?

I want to say I died a noble death. And for that reason, I was given a second chance at life. I don't hesitate to take the offering, outlining the criteria on my wish list.

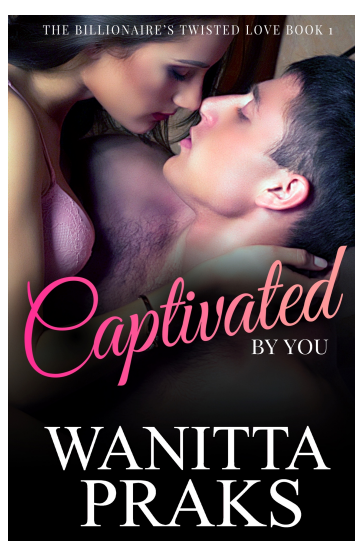
1. Enjoy life to the fullest
2. Fall in love with a man
3. Would like to have a warm, loving family
4. Eat plenty of delicious food as I was starved for most of my life growing up

All is well and good, until I open my eyes to a strange new world, with four strikingly stunning men staring back at me. They said they were the four kings, in charge of governing the four nations of Alyria, and I am their queen, the overall ruler of their kingdom.

But it isn't just pretty flowers and wispy daisies. They suspect I'm not who I say I am. I live under their watchful eyes, as they literally, and figuratively, peel away every layer of my clothing to get to the real me. Trying to keep my real identity under wraps is one thing, but getting tempted by the four kings is another matter, entirely. How am I to survive in my new world?

***Her Majesty is Here* is a reverse harem fantasy romance novel. It is the first book in *Her Majesty & the Four Kings* series. With laugh out loud moments, political intrigue, murder mystery, and steamy romantic scenes, this first book ends in a cliffhanger.**

THE BILLIONAIRE'S TWISTED LOVE
KIMBERLY AND JULIAN'S LOVE STORY



[Book 1: Captivated by You](#)

Free to download through online stores



“I want to be scorched by your flame. I want to be enticed by your touch. Let me in. Open the door to your heart so I can save you.”

What is it about the enigmatic and taciturn Julian Devereux that captivates me so? His kind and selfless acts towards others ignite my compassionate nature to protect him from the bitter onslaught of his brother, Joshua Devereux.

But is it merely my nature to help the weak, or is it simply to indulge myself in pleasure, watching in delight as two brothers battle for my attention and their family inheritance?

Maybe deep down, I already know I love him and am willing to sacrifice and back him up in every ordeal. But I didn't anticipate the path I chose would eventually spiral out of my control, tearing at my heart and tossing me into a labyrinth of illusion.

The Billionaire's Twisted Love series contains content and themes suitable for mature readers. Beware, the love scenes are super hot. This first book ends in a cliffhanger.

BABY BE MINE
CLARICE AND HUNTER'S LOVE STORY



[Book 1: Baby Be Mine](#)

Free to download through online stores



Turning thirty is like a big sale at the meat market. You have to go on discount before someone starts considering you. And that's not the only problem Clarice Mason has to deal with, because right now her biological clock is ticking and she realizes that one morning she might wake up with white hair and a walking cane as her only companion. So to soothe her problem, Clarice has resolved to have a baby.

Enter Anton Silverton, the man that possesses all the traits Clarice has ever wanted in a mate: tall, handsome, smart, and an overall gentleman—all the perfect genes for her baby. All she has to do now is ask him nicely to donate a little sperm so she can conceive. But damn Hunter Silverton—Anton’s smart-mouth, no-good cousin with the title of number one Casanova in Australasia—has to come stirring up trouble. And now, under the influence of hormonal imbalances, Clarice finds her craving for a baby might not be enough, for she is beginning to crave the love of one of these men.

BOSS LADY
WHITNEY AND DARCY'S LOVE STORY



Book 3: Boss Lady.



Whitney, the so-called tyrant boss of E Magazine, is in trouble. Her best friend Clarice is getting married and has asked her to be one of her bridesmaids, which requires wearing beautiful feminine gowns. That's fine by her, but how is she to keep up her persona of the militant boss when Darcy, her submissive personal assistant, will be tagging along too? What makes everything worse is the more she knows Darcy outside of work, the more she realizes that distinct black and white guise of hers is starting to become a blurry grey line.

Darcy is also in trouble. After tasting the forbidden fruit, the hatred he feels for his boss has now somehow turned to heated desire. Now he can't stop thinking about her. But Darcy knows one thing for sure. When it comes to matters of the heart, Whitney may be the dictator in their office, but only he will come out on top in the bedroom.

This story of a tyrant boss and her submissive personal assistant is about to get interesting when mistaken identity and convoluted circumstances take place. In the end, they are left with the question: Who's the master and who's the submissive in this relationship.

Spinsters and Playboys series is set in the beautiful country of New Zealand. Still humorous and steamy, this third book features a new couple, complete with a happy ending. This book can be read as a standalone, but for more enjoyment, it's best to read in the following order:

- 1) Baby Be Mine (Clarice and Hunter book 1)
- 2) Baby I'm Yours (Clarice and Hunter book 2)
- 3) Boss Lady (Whitney and Darcy) A standalone novel

LET ME LOVE YOU
IVY AND ZAC'S LOVE STORY: A YOUNG ADULT
HIGH SCHOOL ROMANCE NOVEL



Let Me Love You



Ivy

I'm good at hiding. I left all those bad memories behind and now am starting a new life in this new town.

A new school. A fresh start. Life is good. Until I meet him. And all my nightmares come rushing back.

Zac, the lead singer of Apollo, with his inky black hair and deep emerald eyes, tempts me in ways no guy has ever done before. He makes me want him, but my past keeps pushing him away.

I keep telling myself it's okay, forget the past and move on. But no matter how many excuses I come up with, in the end, he still is the center of my nightmare.

Zac

Ivy. She intrigues me. She's like a cute little rabbit, always wanting to scramble away whenever I get near her.

Does she hate me?

I don't think so. I can feel this attraction between us when we're together.

But no matter what excuse she has, I'll make her mine.

That is, until I found the reason why.

Let Me Love You is a young adult full length romance novel, centered on first love, and the power of forgiveness. It's a slow burn romance, complete with a happy ending.

BOOKS BY WANITTA PRAKS

Alyria Kingdom

(Fantasy /Contemporary/Transmigration Romance)

All main characters in these series occur in the same universe

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HER MAJESTY & THE FOUR KINGS

(CLARISSA ROSE'S REVERSE HAREM LOVE STORY)



[Book 1: Her Majesty is Here](#)

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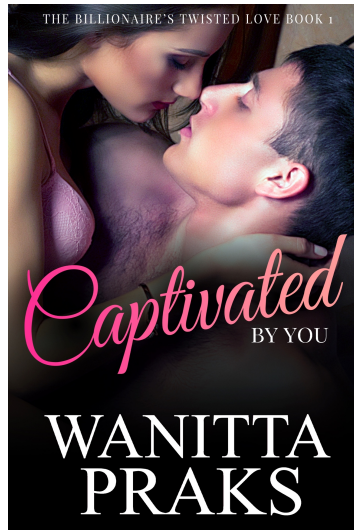
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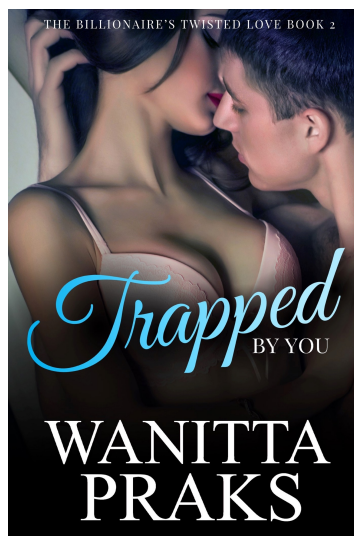
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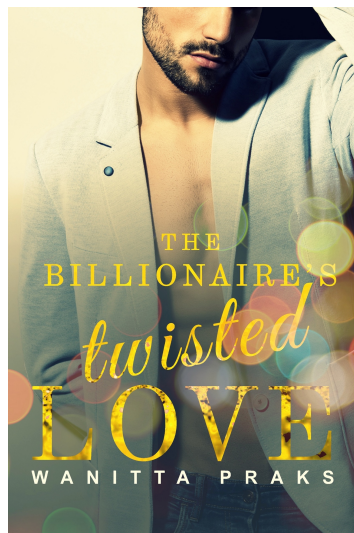
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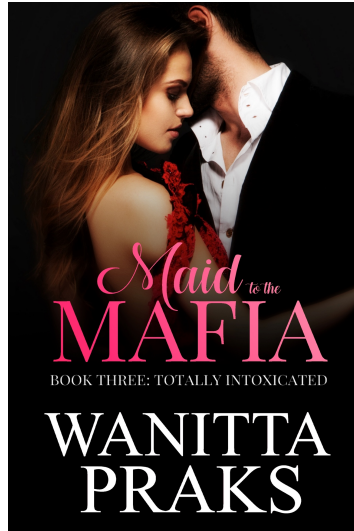


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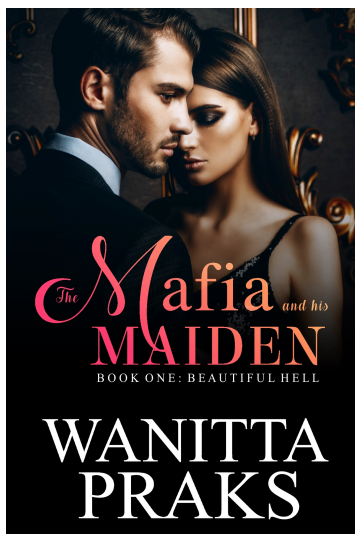
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THE MAFIA AND HIS MAIDEN: THE SERIES

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Spinsters & Playboys

(Steamy Contemporary Romance)

All main characters in this series occur in the same universe



Book 1: Baby Be Mine

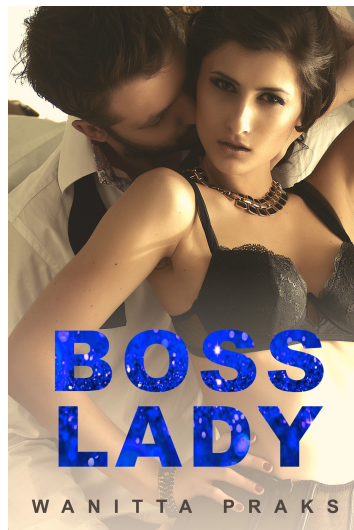
(Clarice and Hunter)

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Book 2: Baby I'm Yours

(Clarice and Hunter)



Book 3: Boss Lady

(Whitney and Darcy)

Stand Alone Novel



[Let Me Love You](#)

Young Adult Romance

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A girl who loves reading, eating and watching practically anything to do with mystery, romance and action. If not writing, she indulges herself in reading boys love romance novels and listening to kpop music.

A hermit who loves to stay at home but also enjoys eating out. Her mind extends as far as her imagination. When she starts writing, she loses herself in that world.

Sign up to her mailing list for updates and notifications on book releases. She promises never to spam.

Get to know Wanitta:

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