

## Hero Or Villain

\*Mariya\*

"STOP!" I screamed, my voice piercing through the air, and Domenic immediately slammed on the brakes, bringing the car to a screeching halt.

"What?! What happened?" he asked, his voice lled with concern, his eyes darting around, searching for any signs of danger. But I averted my gaze, raising my chin deantly.

"Go!" I commanded, my voice rm yet soft.

He glared at me, his eyes lled with frustration, but I held my ground, refusing to back down. Though I looked away, I could feel the intensity of his ery gaze on me, as if it could burn through the side of my head.

"I said drive," I repeated, my tone unwavering and stern.

Grumpily, he started the ignition, his annoyance palpable in the air. The engine roared to life, echoing our tense atmosphere.

Ah, that was exactly what I wanted. Now, I aimed to push his buttons even further.

"STOP!" I shouted once more, my voice cutting through the tension like a knife.

"Now, what?!!!" he snapped, his frustration reaching its peak, his hand slamming on the brakes with force.

I pretended to gaze out of the window, my expression unreadable, as I took a deep breath, lling my lungs, and exhaled loudly, my hand pressed against my chest as if to calm my racing heart.

"Let's go," I instructed, my voice dripping with nonchalance, punctuated by a yawn that I exaggerated for effect.

Starting the engine once again, he gripped the steering wheel with fervor, his knuckles turning white from the intensity of his grip. The car lurched forward as he aggressively turned the wheel, his furious eyes xed on the road ahead. It seemed as if he was gripping the steering wheel so tightly as if he was squeezing the throat of someone who had wronged him.

As the car resumed its journey, I couldn't help but chew on the inside of my lip, a mischievous spark dancing in my eyes. Peeking from the corner of my eyes, I observed him clenching and relaxing his jaws, his anger radiating off him in waves.

Suppressing my urge to giggle, I relished in the satisfaction of teasing him. The corners of my lips curled mischievously as I continued to play my game.

"STOP!" I squealed, unable to contain my excitement.

The sudden halt jerked me forward, causing me to clutch the dashboard instinctively. Despite the seatbelt securing me in place, my heart pounded against my ribcage, a reminder of the close call we had just experienced.

My hand pressed against my chest, trying to calm my racing heart. "What was that, dude? You nearly sent me to an early grave," I gasped, my breath coming in rapid pants.

"What's your problem, brat?" he grumbled, his teeth clenched in frustration.

I huffed, turning my head to face him with an indignant expression. "What have I done?" I retorted, my voice laced with a hint of annoyance.

"Don't play innocent with me. I know exactly what you're up to," he glared at me, his gaze piercing and intense. The tilt of his head only added to his imposing presence, causing a lump to form in my throat as I instinctively swallowed.

"Mr. Bodyguard, I assure you, I'm not up to anything," I replied, a slight quiver in my voice. Avoiding his penetrating gaze, I turned my face towards the car window, hoping to evade further confrontation.

"Yeah?" he growled, and in the next instant, I heard the sound of the safety belt ripping apart. His rm grip closed around my arm, forcing me to face him. I could feel his controlled strength, his presence looming over me.

"You enjoy testing my patience, don't you?" he whispered dangerously, his breath minty fresh against my face. The proximity was electrifying, stealing my breath away.

I couldn't form a response immediately. Time seemed to stand still as we locked eyes, a battle of wills and desire. His gaze briedly ickered to my lips, causing my heart to skip a beat. Before I could process the eeting moment, he pulled away abruptly, opening the car door and stepping out with a resounding slam.

The noise jolted me, making me jump in my seat. Panic set in as I watched him stride purposefully onto the dark road, leaving me behind in a whirlwind of confusion and anticipation.

I swiftly stepped out of the car, my heart pounding with a mix of curiosity and apprehension. The desolate road stretched before me, shrouded in darkness, casting an eerie ambiance that sent shivers down my spine. There wasn't a soul in sight, and the silence seemed to amplify the intensity of the moment.

"Wait, where are you going?" I called out, my voice echoing into the night as I hurried to catch up with him.

He abruptly turned, his eyes burning with a ery determination. In an unexpected motion, he tossed the car keys in my direction, causing me to reach out and catch them instinctively, my surprise evident on my face.

"Huh?!" I stammered, bewildered by his actions.

"Now drive your own damn car because I'm off duty," he declared, his voice laced with an arrogant tone. He nonchalantly tucked his hands into his pants pockets and continued striding away from me.

My jaw dropped in disbelief as his words sank in. I couldn't fathom the audacity of his demand, leaving me stranded in the middle of the road late at night.

"What?! This can't be serious, dude! You can't just abandon me here, alone." I protested, desperation seeping into my voice.

"I can do whatever I damn well please," he retorted coldly, his steps steady and resolute, taking him farther away from me.

I gazed at him, a mix of shock and anger clouding my thoughts. How could he be so callous? Didn't he understand his role as my bodyguard, entrusted with my safety?

"No! I mean... you can't. You're my bodyguard, and it's your responsibility to ensure my safe return to the hotel," I muttered, rushing to keep up with his relentless pace.

The diculty of walking on the dimly lit road in my elegant stilettos only added to my frustration, but I couldn't let him leave me stranded.

"I'm no longer on duty. So, you can't irritate me any longer," he snorted dismissively, his indifference palpable.

"You can't do this to me!" I whined, desperation lacing my words.

"And... you... can't treat me like I'm your pet," he spat out, his voice dripping with disdain.

"But... you work for me! My father pays you," I argued, desperately grasping at any semblance of authority.

"Yeah? Well, then ask your father's money to drive you back to the hotel because I'm resigning," he red back, his words laced with defiance.

"Wait! Please, just listen! You can resign tomorrow. I can't drive. I've never driven alone in my entire life," I pleaded and couldn't help but feel vulnerability seeping through my words.

Driving had never been a skill I needed to possess, always being escorted everywhere by a dedicated bodyguard.

"That's not my problem, princess," he replied indifferently, turning to face me directly, his eyes holding a cold determination that left me momentarily breathless.

"Domenic, you can't leave..." My words hung in the air, cut short by the sudden arrival of a Jeep, screeching to a halt. Gunmen spilled out of the vehicle, sending a chill down my spine.

"Domenic!" I whispered in horror, my heart pounding in my chest.

His expression remained blank, devoid of any emotion, as he stared at the approaching gunmen. He didn't move, standing there as if frozen in time.

I was baed. What was happening to him?

"Domenic, we need to go, now! They look dangerous," I pleaded, my voice trembling with fear.

But he seemed unaffected, nonchalant even, as if oblivious to the imminent danger. His face was unreadable, making my anxiety soar.

Desperate, I reached out and grabbed his arm, shaking him gently, hoping to break him free from whatever trance had enveloped him. His eyes slowly shifted to meet mine.

A shiver ran down my spine as I caught a glimpse of something primal and menacing in his gaze. Instinctively, I let go of his arm, taking a step back. Meanwhile, the gunmen closed in on us, closing the gap with every passing second. Trusting my intuition, I bolted toward the nearby car.

But they were faster, their strides purposeful and determined. My high heels hindered my escape, and within moments, they caught up to me, their hands gripping me tightly, dragging me towards their waiting Jeep.

"No! Let go of me! What do you want? Let me go!" I screamed, my voice lled with desperation, but my pleas fell on deaf ears.

In my desperation, I looked back at Domenic, but to my dismay, he remained rooted to the spot, his gaze briedly meeting mine.

"Domenic!" an involuntary whisper escaped my lips. I couldn't believe he had abandoned me to face those thugs alone.

Was his anger towards me so consuming that he would leave me to face this danger alone?

The realization hit me hard. Domenic had made his choice, and it was clear that he would not come to my aid. I was on my own.

I, Mariya Leonardi, the daughter of the most powerful man, had to ght for my own survival.

"F\*\*k off, you bastards! You bloody assholes! Let me go!" I screamed, thrashing my body, delivering kicks in every direction. But the gunmen seemed unaffected, their grip unyielding, as if they were made of steel.

Helplessly, I was thrown into the Jeep, trapped between two of the goons, with no way to escape. My gaze remained locked with Domenic's unwavering stare as the Jeep drove past him. He glanced at me one last time before turning his back and walking away, leaving me behind to face an uncertain fate.

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\*Domenic\*

They took her away right before my eyes, and I stood there motionless, a statue frozen in time. I had known it was coming when I stepped out of the car. I was well aware of their plan, their instructions for me to drive down this road. I knew they were coming for her.

They forcefully shoved her inside the Jeep and sped away, leaving me with a maelstrom of emotions.

Fuck!

Mariya was not my responsibility. I had to save my son, Nic. It was his safety that was paramount.

I did it to save Nic!

The kidnappers wanted Mariya, and she was the price of my son's freedom.

I noticed the car key lying on the ground, dropped by Mariya during her struggle. I snatched it up and swiftly started the engine, my determination fueling my every move. I had to drive away, leaving Mariya with the kidnappers so that Nic could be free and return home unharmed.

I still remembered my son's sad face in that video, the kidnapper had sent me. He wanted me to get him Mariya . So here I was as her bodyguard, not to save her but only to take her to the kidnapper.

Just then, I heard a phone ringing. It wasn't mine. I looked around in the car and found Mariya's phone on the car cor below the passenger seat. I let it ring. It stopped and rang again instantly. Groaning, I picked it up and saw Xavier Leonardi, Riya's father, calling her. I reluctantly answered the call.

"Hello, Sir!"

"Where is Mariya?!" he asked instantly.

"She is not here and left her phone in the car," I replied, making excuses.

"Where is she?!" he asked angrily. "And why the f\*\*k did you leave her alone? You are her bodyguard, for f\*\*k's sake."

"I want to talk to her right now," he ordered.

"Sir, she left with her friends," I tried to evade his questions.

"Domenic, I will kill you if anything happens to her, and I will not stop until I make your soul regret it," he threatened, and I knew he wasn't kidding.

"Sir, your daughter is very stubborn, and she doesn't listen to..." my sentence was cut short because Xavier Leonardi's thundering voice made me pull the phone slightly away from my ear.

"Go and nd her. I am telling you, if I don't get a call from my daughter shortly, you will be nished. Mark my words, Domenic," he angrily declared before hanging up the phone.

Fuck it!

Fuck them!

Xavier Leonardi was another name for the devil, and I knew what he was capable of if he found out I was involved in his daughter's kidnapping.

I groaned with frustration, slamming on the brakes. With another plan in my mind, I yanked the steering wheel, veering the car into another lane. I had to nd another way to get that girl. But today was her lucky day. My foot pressed down hard on the accelerator, racing the vehicle frantically, fueled by a mix of anger and irritation. The Jeep came into view, and I pushed the speed even higher.

Screeching the tires and bringing the car to an abrupt halt, I positioned it right in front of the Jeep, blocking its path.

My grip tightened on the steering wheel as I swiftly retrieved my gun and pulled back the slide, ready for action.

"What the hell, man? Don't go causing trouble. Get lost!" one of the gunmen yelled, his voice laced with irritation.

"Release the girl," I demanded, my voice rm and unwavering.

"What?! Have you lost your damn mind? Do you even know who..."

Before he could nish his sentence and reveal my closely guarded secret, I pulled the trigger, sending a bullet straight into his head. In an instant, he crumpled to the ground, lifeless.

The remaining gunmen scrambled out of their vehicle, opening re in my direction.

Reacting with lightning speed, I dropped to the ground, returning re and taking down two of them in a single, calculated shot. Rolling and somersaulting toward the fallen adversaries, I deftly grabbed one of their guns, swiftly dispatching the last two gunmen from the opposite side of the Jeep. Each shot found its mark, and the threat was eliminated.

I had saved Xavier Leonardi's daughter.

Uttering a frustrated groan, I quickly thought about my next move. Without wasting a moment, I ung open the door of the Jeep and forcefully pulled Mariya out. Her eyes widened in surprise and fear as she took in the chaotic scene unfolding before her. Taking hold of her trembling hand, I hurriedly led her toward her own car.

"Mr. Bodyguard, what kind of stunt was that? I know you may look like a hero, but that was not the time for some movie-style action," she complained while I secured her seat belt.

Time was of the essence, and I needed to hurry.

"For a moment there, I thought you despised me so much that you would leave me to die. But you took care of them all. I mean... wow! Although, you did give me a mini heart attack when you turned around and walked away like that," she continued babbling.

"So, in your world, people express gratitude by complaining?!" I couldn't help but sound a bit harsh as I drove toward her hotel.

"Oops! My bad! Yeah!" she giggled.

"Well, thank you for saving me, my knight in shining armor," she said, and I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

I knew she was mocking me.

But in the next moment, her soft lips brushed against my cheek, and I had to hit the brakes abruptly. If I hadn't, I might have crashed the car somewhere.