

## The New Maa Boss

\*Domenic\*

For a moment, I believed Mariya was as lthy as everyone else in that glitzy world. I thought she would use her body to climb the ladder of success, much like my ex did. However, when she splashed champagne in the face of that old man, my perception of her changed instantly. I wanted to applaud and cheer for her audacity. Her boldness caught me off guard.

"Miss Leonardi, your brother and father would go to great lengths to avenge what he did to you," I broke the silence, unable to hold my thoughts back.

Mariya had been unusually quiet ever since she got into the car as we made our way to the mall, the next stop on her busy schedule.

But she remained silent, her expression stoic. She had been avoiding me since last night, and although I didn't expect her to engage in conversation, it didn't bother me. I kept my eyes on the road and drove in silence.

"I know, and that's precisely why I never disclosed any of those incidents to them," she murmured in a barely audible voice, surprising me with her response.

That meant she often had to face such things?!

"But why?" I frowned, stealing a glance at her.

"If I let my father and brothers take down everyone in the industry, it would be a total wipeout if they discovered what I had to endure on my journey to success. But I refuse to live in their shadow. I want people to know me as Riya, the supermodel, and not just as someone benefiting from my family's name or favors," she confessed, catching me off guard once again.

This girl was full of surprises. She had the same drive as me, the spirit of achieving everything on her own. Silence settled between us once more.

"Do you have any enemies or anyone who wants to harm you?" I inquired, studying her brie before returning my attention to the road.

"Why should I tell you?" she snapped arrogantly.

There she was! Back to her usual self.

Fiesty and wild!

That was a dangerous combination. I shook my head, preventing my thoughts from wandering in another direction.

"Because your life is in danger, and as your bodyguard, it's my duty to protect you. Without any information, I'll be stumbling around in the dark while the attacker plans their next move. Many lives are at stake here. So, let's put our personal differences aside and cooperate. Share everything with me, every single detail," I urged, trying to reason with her.

Mariya stared at me, her eyes lled with uncertainty, before redirecting her gaze straight ahead as if lost in deep contemplation.

"I honestly don't know," she said, furrowing her brows. "I can't imagine why anyone would want to kill me. I'm not a threat to anyone, and I've never caused harm to anyone that would provoke revenge," she shrugged, lost in her own thoughts.

"Try to think harder. Maybe something or someone rings a bell. It could be anyone—a crazed fan or an ex-boyfriend gone rogue! Have you noticed any peculiar occurrences around you lately?" I pressed, hoping to jog her memory.

Mariya shook her head, initially dismissing my suggestion before giving it a moment's consideration.

"I mean, sure, I've dealt with overzealous fans in the past. But I've never had an obsessed fan or a real boyfriend for that matter," Mariya declared, her tone carrying a hint of frustration.

It was bizarre that Riya never had a real boyfriend. When I delved into her background before becoming her bodyguard, I discovered a trail of paparazzi pictures featuring supermodel Riya with a new beau every few months. Her relationships seemed eating, with reasons for breakups, as per the tabloids.

"At the age of eighteen, I started my career and never looked back. Sure, I've dated some famous or influential men in and outside the industry, but it was all for publicity, nothing serious. And despite the breakups, I've managed to maintain good friendships with all of them," she announced, turning to face me.

I could sense her scrutinizing me, but I maintained a detached demeanor.

So, she had no one to be suspicious of. But everyone connected to her was on my radar.

"What about creepy sponsors or event organizers like Benjamin?" I probed further.

I caught a glimpse of Mariya cringing from the corner of my eye.

"I don't think they'd want to kill or abduct me. They have plenty of ways to make my life miserable. Why go through the trouble when they can simply sideline me, leaving me jobless and without any opportunities?" she replied, sounding somewhat amused.

I parked the car in the mall's parking lot and promptly followed Mariya as she stepped out. She made a beeline for the restaurant where she was meeting her friend. The moment Mariya's friend caught sight of her, she leaped with joy as if it were their rst meeting.

Women! I sighed, rolling my eyes and bracing myself for the impending drama that was bound to unfold.

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\*Mariya\*

"Hey, Riya!" Marie's voice rang out as soon as she spotted me.

"Hi, Marie!" My spirits lifted at the sight of my friend. "You look fantastic!"

I hurried over and embraced her tightly.

"You're late again," she rolled her eyes, pulling away. "I've been waiting for you for half an hour," she complained.

"Sorry, babe," I pouted, and she smiled. "I've had a terrible day, babe," I conceded.

"What happened?" she furrowed her brow, concerned.

I glanced over my shoulder and saw Domenic standing nearby, close to our table. The place was bustling with people, and he seemed to follow me everywhere, like my shadow. He hadn't even left me alone when we were at Benjamin's house, despite Benjamin cruelly insulting him. Benjamin had ordered him to stay outside his lavish mansion since the staff weren't allowed inside. But Domenic had remained calm and politely insisted on not leaving my side. He rmly stated that he couldn't leave me alone because he was my bodyguard. I was grateful to have him there with me.

Shifting my gaze back to Marie, I leaned closer and whispered, making sure Domenic couldn't overhear us.

"I think I'm out of the show and have to head back home earlier," I sighed.

"What?! Why?! I mean, what the hell happened? You were so pumped up and condent about the show. It was supposed to be a game-changer for your career," she asked, her face lled with concern.

"I know, babe," I sighed helplessly. "But what could I do? The organizer wanted me to do something obscene, and I couldn't agree to it. So I grabbed a bottle of champagne, splashed it all over his face, and walked out."

"You did the right thing. Although you should have kicked him where it hurts before leaving," she crinkled her nose in disgust.

A genuine laugh escaped my lips, the rst one I had today.

"I'll keep that in mind for next time," I winked.

We both giggled.

"Now, have you thought about what you're going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know, Marie," I absentmindedly twirled a strand of hair before continuing, "I'm still waiting for Daniel's call. I'm optimistic that he'll give me the bad news," I chuckled awkwardly.

"Wow, girl! So positive!" She teased.

"Oh, shut up!" I laughed. "I just don't want to hold on to false hope."

"Hmm... That makes sense. But let's forget about it for now. You'll get plenty more opportunities to showcase your talent. And mark my words, my dear friend, one day the world will bow down to your talent, and you'll be at the top, supermodel Riya," Marie declared dramatically.

"Oh, how I wish your words would come true!" I sighed hopelessly.

"They are true, actually. Just wait for the right time for them to become a universal truth in the real world," she proclaimed, holding a spoon like a microphone in her hand.

"Oh my God, babe! You know how to uplift someone's spirits, and that's why I love you so much," I said, squeezing her hand as I confessed. Marie blew a playful kiss.

"I have some top-secret news for you," she whispered, a mischievous smile spreading across her face as her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Tell me already!" I urged, eager to know what juicy gossip she had this time. After all, she was my gossip queen and always had the latest scoop.

"Listen!" She leaned in closer, looking around cautiously before continuing. "I overheard something at a family dinner last week. My uncle, who used to be a cop, was talking to my dad. They were discussing a rising new Maa in America."

"Oh my God! A new Maa?! What's happening in this world? It's absolutely terrifying," I exclaimed, placing a hand over my chest and feigning fear.

Little did she know that I came from a Maa family myself. She only knew about our legitimate businesses and companies.

"Oh no, no, Riya! From what I gathered, this new Maa is actually different. They don't target innocent people. My uncle mentioned that the rates of child and human trafficking, as well as drug dealing, have decreased. And the most intriguing part is that nobody has ever seen the new Maa boss. My uncle said he always wears a devil mask to conceal his identity. In fact, no one even knows his name. People simply refer to him as DM," she shared enthusiastically.

I smiled, observing her radiant excitement. It seemed she already had a crush on this mysterious new Maa boss.

"Well, well! The new Maa Boss sounds quite mysterious and even a bit kinky, wearing a mask like that," I chuckled, playfully mocking the masked Maa boss.

Marie continued to ll me in on the gossip surrounding the masked Maa boss. She appeared captivated by him and painted him as a modern-day Robin Hood gure.

Dropping Marie off at her home, we headed back to the hotel. Just as I was lost in my thoughts, my phone chimed, and Daniel's name ashed on the screen.

I cursed under my breath, closing my eyes for a moment.

"What in the world have you done, girl?" Daniel whined as soon as I answered the call.

"Daniel, please let me explain," I sighed, preparing myself to recount the events that took place at Benjamin's place.

"Come on, Riya. You know men like Benjamin are everywhere in this industry. If you keep acting on impulse like this, you'll tarnish your reputation, and they'll cut you off without a second thought. I know you did what you thought was right, but now we're in deep trouble. We lost the show," he muttered with frustration.

"I knew this would happen when I walked away from him. I'm sorry, Daniel. I let you down," I whispered, feeling a wave of sadness wash over me.

"Well, I hope you've learned your lesson and will handle such situations better in the future," he warned before abruptly ending the call.

I let out a heavy sigh, staring out of the car window. Everything around me was moving forward, but I felt stuck in the same place. I longed for an opportunity to showcase my talent, but it seemed nearly impossible for true talent to shine without enduring struggles and making compromises.

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\*Domenic\*

As we made our way back to the hotel, Mariya remained unusually quiet, her usual vibrant self nowhere to be seen.

But when her phone rang, everything changed once again. After the call, she appeared even sadder than before.

"What's wrong?" I couldn't hold back my curiosity.

"I've been taken off the show. We'll be ying back tomorrow," she sighed, her voice lled with desolation and helplessness.

"How can they just remove you like that? Don't you have a contract?" I protested.

"It doesn't matter. They always include a clause in the contract, giving the organizers the nal say and the power to change anything about the show whenever they want," she whispered, her gaze xed empty out of the car window.

"That's outrageous," I grumbled.

"I know, but we can't do anything about it. We have to go along with them if we want to work in the fashion industry," she replied.

"You should ght for your rights," I encouraged her.

"It's pointless. They have inuence, and everyone else is too afraid to support me. They all stick together, knowing that one day they might need the same support. No one here is innocent, so there's no use even trying," she uttered, sinking back into silence.

But anger surged within me, boiling to the surface. Someone had to take a stand and teach them a lesson. Their reign of terror had to end. Only then could people speak freely about the exploitation they endured.

I dropped Mariya off at her hotel room.

"Miss Leonardi, I have urgent matters to attend to. If you need to go out, just give me a call. I'll be there in an instant," I instructed before leaving.

"But where are you going?" she called after me, causing me to pause in my tracks.

I turned to face her and replied,

"Someone needs to learn the hard way."