

## Blind Date

\*Bella\*

"Mom, I just arrived. Give me a little time," I assured my impatient mother. "I'll update you about everything."

"Have you found him yet?" she inquired, her worry evident in her tone.

"No, Mom!" I let out a sigh with an eye roll, even though she couldn't see it through the phone. Nodding to the gatekeeper, I acknowledged his assistance as he opened the door for me. "I'm still searching for him. Anyway, I'm about to hang up now. Let me locate him first. I'll tell you all about it once this date concludes. Bye, Mom," I concluded the call abruptly, not giving her a chance to continue her anxious questioning. She seemed even more nervous than I was.

Ever since I had begun my new job in Rome, my mom had been tirelessly arranging meetings with various potential suitors. She was determined to see me settled in marriage. While my friends had started getting married, and some had even started families, my mom's concern for my marital status seemed to outweigh everything else. I was only 25 years old, for heaven's sake, and not so old that she needed to be this anxious about my future.

I glanced at the picture of Giovi Amato that Mom had sent me. He was handsome, possessing dark hair that contrasted his striking blue eyes. Taking a deep breath, I surveyed the Michelin-starred restaurant, and there he was, seated at a window-side table.

Suppressing my nervousness and with a confident smile, I made my way toward him.

"Hi, I am sorry for being late," I greeted him with an apologetic smile.

"It's alright," he replied in a voice warm and inviting. "Damn, you're even more beautiful than your picture." His words carried a genuine note of appreciation as he stood, a gesture of chivalry, and pulled out the chair for me.

"Thank you," I said, blushing at his compliment and settling into my seat as he took his place across from me.

"Shall we go ahead and order before we dive into introductions?" he inquired, his smile carrying a certain charm.

"That sounds good," I readily agreed, my stomach rumbling a bit. I had come straight from work, so I was definitely hungry.

He signaled to a waiter, and together we placed our orders.

"Tell me a little about yourself, Bella," he said, tilting his head slightly and resting his hands on the table.

"I'm a doctor, and I work at City Hospital. I've always wanted to be a doctor because I have a passion for helping people," I shared, describing my background and aspirations.

"That's wonderful. You seem like an angel who saves lives," he complimented me, causing a warm blush to creep onto my cheeks. "And if you have any questions about me, feel free to ask anything," he added, giving a nonchalant shrug.

"So, you're managing your dad's business here in Rome?" I asked casually.

"Exactly. It's a family business, and I've been groomed to take it over," he replied, a proud smile gracing his lips.

I nodded, averting my gaze momentarily. He sounded like a typical businessman, and honestly, I found that aspect quite boring. As my eyes wandered, I explored the restaurant's elegant decor. But suddenly, my gaze landed on a tall and prominent figure. I blinked a few times, making sure I wasn't imagining things.

A Greek God strode, each step exuding an aura of authority, elegantly dressed in a dark suit and a white, crisp shirt, with a frown on his incredibly gorgeous face that was almost illegal for a man.

Oh my god! It was actually Vincenzo Leonardi. And he was walking right toward me, his gaze fixed straight on me. Nervous shivers ran down my spine, causing me to avert my eyes and fight with my nerves, a clear sign of my unease.

While Giovi continued to speak, his words were lost on me—I couldn't hear anything over the rush of my own heartbeat. My gaze remained lowered, a shield against the fear of meeting Vincenzo's intense stare again.

"Bella!" Vin's deep and commanding voice cut through the air, causing me to swallow hard in response.

Summoning up a hesitant smile, I dared to look up at him.

"Vin! What brings you here?" I whispered as my voice laced with uncertainty.

"I had a business meeting," he replied calmly before directing his attention to Giovi. "Amato!" Vin's tone dripped with a dangerous edge, his gaze never leaving Giovi's face.

"Vincenzo Leonardi?!" Giovi gritted out, his expression clouded with a frown.

"What are you doing here with Bella?" Vin's question hung in the air, and he casually pulled out a chair and took a seat. His assistants and bodyguards, who had accompanied him, stood by his side, their presence reinforcing his authority.

"Vincenzo, you're ruining my date," Giovi's voice brimmed with anger and frustration.

"Date?!" Vin's eyebrows shot up, his gaze shifting between Giovi and me, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"You should consider yourself lucky that I've only disrupted your date and not your life," Vin retorted, his condescension oozing with arrogance. He turned his attention back to Giovi. "The date is over. You can leave now, Amato," he declared authoritatively. My eyes widened in shock at his audacity.

"Bella, you're coming with me. Let's go," Vin's directive was swift, leaving no room for anyone else to chime in.

He rose from his seat, his grip firm as he took hold of my hand.

"Wait, Vin," I protested, tugging my hand, but his grasp remained unyielding.

"Bella, come on, stand up. This guy isn't right for you," he asserted, his gaze a steely glare directed at Giovi. Letting out a resigned sigh, I shot an apologetic look at Giovi, silently conveying my helplessness.

Vin, however, showed no inclination to wait for an exchange of words between Giovi and me. He guided me out of the restaurant as if he had every right over me.

"Vin, where are you taking me?" I whined, quickening my pace to match his long strides.

"I'm taking you home," his response was resolute, his tone carrying a no-nonsense quality.

"You can't do this to me," I protested, frustration edging into my voice. "You don't have the right to decide who I meet or don't meet. My mom wanted me to meet this guy so I could get to know him better. But you stormed in here and acted impulsively. What's your problem, Vin?" My words held a mix of anger and annoyance.

He abruptly halted, turning to face me squarely. His cold blue eyes bore into mine as he responded, unfazed by my frustration.

"Your mom might have seen his public face, but I know the truth about him. Just yesterday, he was with three women in my club, involved in a foursome," he divulged, the revelation hitting me like a shockwave.

What?!

I was taken aback, though I made sure not to reveal my astonishment to Vin. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing he had won this round.

"So what?" I retorted deviously. "I don't mind." I lied, a deliberate provocation to get under his skin and hopefully get him to leave me alone.

"Are you serious?!" His scowl deepened, his disbelief and disapproval evident. "You want to date and marry a dirtbag like him?"

I averted my eyes, my voice carrying a hint of frustration as I responded, "That's not really your concern."

His glare bore into me for a long moment before he spoke again, his words dripping with possessiveness. "You won't see that man again. If you do, he won't be alive to date you."

His dangerously possessive tone sent a shiver down my spine. Who was he right now? This wasn't the tone of my best friend.

"Come on, be a good girl and get in the car," he commanded, his voice softening slightly as he held the car door open for me.

With a huff, I reluctantly complied, getting a gentle nudge from him that prompted me to move into the car. I couldn't help but be annoyed by his overbearing attitude.

I shook my head in irritation as I settled into the car. Vin retrieved the car keys from the driver and took the driver's seat himself. Throughout the entire drive, we remained in silence, my gaze fixed on the passing scenery outside the window.

As the car came to a stop in front of my apartment building, Vin was quick to get out of the car, moving around to open the door for me. He offered me his hand, but I chose to ignore it as I stepped out of his car.

"Vin, you really don't need to worry about me," I huffed, my tone edged with annoyance as I conveyed my exasperation.

"It's an old habit. I can't help it," he responded with an air of indifference. Leaning in unexpectedly, his lips brushed against my cheek in a fleeting touch.

My breath caught in my throat, and I gasped in surprise at his unexpected behavior. My heart raced in response to the closeness between us.

"Good night, petal," he whispered, his voice carrying a tender warmth as he used the affectionate nickname he had for me. His gaze held mine intensely for a moment before he turned away, settling into his car.

As he drove off and his car gradually disappeared into the distance, I found my fingers unconsciously touching the spot on my cheek where his lips had touched.