



## **That's Amore**

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**That's Amore**

## Chapter One

Donna Gimignano had a chip on her shoulder. And it wasn't a potato chip.

But who could blame her?

During the formative years of her life, her father, The Pizza Prince, Sam Gimignano, spent the vast majority of his life with his hands elbow deep in dough of one kind or another. Everything was about tomatoes, cheese and the right hard winter wheat. When the farmers went on strike and dumped their milk in roadside ditches to make a statement, Sam turned as white as fresh mozzarella and immediately got into a fistfight with the corner grocer.

That was not the first time or the last he had had his picture in the papers. He'd made a name for himself by using his mother's name, Stella.. Stella Pizza: It's Out Of This World. And the logo was a small boy (Donna's brother, Vinnie) riding a slice to the moon.

If anyone dared to suggest this wasn't the best pizza in the Tri-State area, they'd hear from Sam personally. When Ray Bari's was voted best pizza in Manhattan one mistaken year, Sam went right down to that parlor to find out why. Somehow, it was never specified, Ray wound up with a pie in the face. Pizza Margharita because it comprised the colors of the Italian flag and Sam felt they had both been insulted.

Sam Gimignano was larger than life. Or so the newspapers said. And that's why he invented the XXL pizza with its special, bigger box for those larger-than-life appetites.

In New York, the newspapers all had a special reporter assigned to Mafia stories and nothing else. These weasels plagued Donna through her life. Not because anyone had ever proven a connection between Sam and the Mob and that wasn't for the lack of trying. Not because they were interested in Donna. Everyone knows that the women in alleged Mafia families are inherently uninteresting unless they turn state's evidence or if did something tabloid-worthy like becoming an exotic dancer. Reporters did what they were born to do—annoy people.

Donna grew up gritting her teeth over practically everything. When given the choice of attending an exclusive school for girls in Connecticut or staying on the Italian Family track, Donna opted for a new life. She got it, liked it and something happened. She was accepted.

Smart and in an environment where book learning, not street smarts, was prized, she flourished. She never wanted to go home. So she didn't. Donna did everything possible to prolong her educational experience. Sam kept getting tuition bills and screamed while he wrote the checks year after year. BA. MA. Ph.D. And all he had done was finish tenth grade. He had made a fortune with no high school diploma. What good was all this scholarship when all Donna needed was a husband and a child in each arm?

Any number of men would have been glad to marry Donna and take her away from the academic drudgery she desired. For many, just getting close to the flames of the famous wood-fired, and very valuable, oven would make marrying a bitch like Donna Gimignano worth the trouble.

Donna turned down all these matches. The Carmines, the Paulys, the Roccas. She wanted to be an old-maid and remained steadfastly alone.

Except for one brief interlude in which her worst suspicions concerning the untrustworthiness of men were confirmed.

When it became obvious that Donna could resist the inevitable no longer, she left her university research to continue her research in the real world. So she got a job on the docks.

It was late June. Donna was on the hook of a crane being swung from the freighter to the dock. No one was taking any note of her in the midst of a blast from a tugboat's horn, as it made its way on the Hudson, and the cacophony of winches, cranes, engines and motors. The dock bustled with activity as forklifts raced back and

forth trying to unload the freighter.

She wore a muscle shirt like the guys and jeans and workboots. Except for the minimal anatomical differences, she was just like the guys. Donna, it turned out, was not afraid of hard work.

What she was afraid of, and had always been afraid of, was heights. The idea of falling bothered her. Being in a situation where she felt herself being pulled into the morass of real depth made her knees tremble.

Sam had said something once. What makes a man's heart pound is a weakness. Sam had been talking about a woman, as Donna recalled, but the notion of weakness had stayed with her. Now, she forced herself to overcome her fear of heights in the same way as she had managed to learn Aramaic, by doing hand-to-hand combat with it daily.

She waved to the crane operator, pulled off her hard hat, and wiped the sweat from her face. As she walked to an immense forklift she thought: "Not yet."

Two new hires on the dock saw her. They knew prime when it walked in front of them. They regarded her with vast and uncontained appreciation. Seeing as how they had only been there for a couple of minutes, no one had taken them aside yet.

"Joey, will ya look at that!"

"I'm looking! Oh baby..."

Chuck, the foreman, rushed to their side. He had been through this before. It was his hope that the future wasn't predictable even though the infomercials on WPIX said it was.

Chuck wasted no time and no words. "Shut up, you jerks!"

Joey wasn't about to stop. He was making some predictions of his own about how the evening could end. "Smooch! Smooch! Smooch!" If there had been a course in his high school on how to make sexually suggestive sounds, that was the one he would have passed with honors.

Donna heard Joey.

Everyone on the dock heard Joey.

She stopped with her foot on the forklift. Suddenly it seemed as if all sound on the dock has ceased. The tugs on the river, the jets leaving Kennedy, the fishes in the water, all stopped where they were.

Longshoremen ducked. Others pulled their hard hats over their eyes.

Joey was pleased with himself. He had gotten her attention. Now it was time to use his perfect line. This was the line that never failed. This was the line women couldn't resist.

"God sure was nice to you!"

Donna turned slowly as if she hadn't heard. "Excuse me?"

Now Joey could see her close up and his heart was pounding. This one was more than prime. She was glistening with sweat, streaked with dirt, and looked better than last month's centerfold.

Joey was confident. "Think how nice I could be to you!"

Chuck was appalled. Another incident wouldn't look good for any of them. Reasoning with the new guy was out. He had to appeal to her sensibilities. "Donna, no, please, not again. These are new guys. They didn't mean it."

Donna wasn't buying it.

Chuck turned to Joey. "Say you didn't mean it!"

Joey was offended. This was his first day and he was going to score and now some old duffer was trying to horn in. "Hey, pal, this is my action."

Donna brightened. "You want action?"

"Donna, I'm begging you," Chuck was desperate.

"He wants action," Donna pointed out.

"Give it to him, Donna!" This from a voice high atop a crane.

Chuck knew it was over. Other voices took up the chant and men began to form a circle around Donna and Joey.

"Put him down, Donna! Show him your stuff!"

It was like a cock fight.

"Donna..." Chuck pleaded.

Grinning, Joey gave it his all, just like he had seen at Runway 69. The bumps and grinds were all there. He knew he was the epitome of raw male sexuality. "Yeah, Donna. Give it to me."

Donna wasn't an only child. She had two brothers. Her life had been a melange of men of all shapes, sizes and ages making assumptions about her. Explaining the facts of life to them was nothing new for her.

She took a step back, balled up her fist and delivered a left to Joey's jaw. He reeled back, not only dumbfounded but actually hurt.

A cheer rose up from Donna's co-workers. Joey shook his head and realized he was in a fight for his manhood.

Joey's friend, Billy, immediately sensed the implications of this fight. "Ya gonna let a guidette deck ya?"

It was good to have that reality pointed out for all to hear and enjoy because for a second Joey was groggy. The situation was so unbelievable, so remarkable, that his brain couldn't make the connections, not ever having had much practice making logical deductions prior to this moment.

Joey rushed toward Donna who sidestepped neatly and gave him a chop to the back of his neck as he stumbled by.

Ever the sportsman, Billy opened his wallet and started waving bills around. "Here's \$100 on Joey!"

Chuck stared at Billy. "You friggin' out of your mind? Betting against Donna?"

Off-balance, but with all the right intentions, Joey took a swing at Donna. She countered with a direct hit to his solar plexus leaving him doubled over and gasping for breath.

He struggled to take a swipe at her, but she avoided him neatly. Then in a graceful, balletic movement her private school mistress would have admired, spun as she had practiced through ten years of lessons and performed something of a levade, thumping Joey in the back of the leg.

Joey crumpled onto one knee, clutching his wounded leg. Donna was pumped and moving lightly on the balls of her feet.

"Get up, you macho creep!"

A glance up at the crowd confirmed the seriousness of his predicament. Joey hoisted himself up and tried to grab her leg. Avoiding him, Donna hadn't broken a sweat and was willing to take this to the finish.

A long black limousine drove slowly onto the dock. It came to a halt at the gathering of men. The cheering stopped as a driver, Louie Bartoli, got out and opened the door.

The longshoremen parted like the Red Sea. Joey struggled toward her and managed to grab her shirt. It ripped as he clawed at her. Donna delivered her last blow to Joey and looked up.

In the cavernous darkness of the car, there was a frail old man. It was Uncle Fabio, her father's uncle. Second in command of the Gimignano Pizza Empire.

"Come with me, Donna," he whispered.

## Chapter Two

There was a police cordon at the hospital entrance holding back reporters who obviously had nothing better to do.

She wanted to think that all this was because the mayor had stubbed his toe, but she knew it was about them. Donna hated it when she was the center of attention. This went back to her earliest memories of people calling her "The Pizza Princess." She had wanted to disappear because she had known they were judging. They were always making assumptions about her and the family that weren't true, but there was no way to defend herself. And there was no way to get Sam to tone it all down. He liked being the center of attention, like the time he delivered one hundred pizzas to Lincoln Center for the opening night of Pirandello. Front page the next morning.

Donna had been a victim of the trickle-down effect, with her schoolmates either wary or fascinated. Neither made for close friendships.

The street was lined with small satellite dishes perched on top of vans carrying four letter designations. When Louie pulled the limo up to the front entrance of Knickerbocker Hospital, there was a gaggle of reporters of various persuasions. A couple police officers, as stony faced as the guards at Buckingham Palace, were standing at the door to keep back the clamoring mass. They were all vying for position, lights, cameras, boom mikes, all waiting for a word, a shot, a scoop.

Louie hopped out of the limo and rushed to open the passenger door. He helped Uncle Fabio to the sidewalk and Donna trailed reluctantly behind.

Most New York journalists are New Yorkers. They know how to push, crowd and shout. These techniques are valuable while waiting in the line at the deli, jamming into the Red Line at 5 o'clock or getting the week's hot story. Like vultures on carrion, the reporters crushed toward the old man. Donna feared that they would knock him down. At his age, he was hardly steady on his legs. Several years of illness hadn't made him a worthy opponent of these people.

The shouting commenced. The mini tape recorders were held high.

"Fabio! Can you tell us how your brother is?"

"Is he dying?"

Smooth, Donna thought as she took her uncle's arm and helped him navigate the sidewalk.

"Will you take over as Pizza Prince in his place?"

"What about these allegations of numbers running? Will you appear before the Grand Jury?"

"We have nothing to hide," Fabio replied.

"Then why hasn't Sam appeared in court?"

Donna shook her head. He had appeared everywhere else, including Senator Schumer's birthday party and the Mayor's May Day picnic.

What Donna really wanted, as she and Louie guided Uncle Fabio toward the front door, sheltering him from the jostling crowd, was to put a couple of these journalists on their butts.

As the door opened, Martin Costello closed in on Donna.

"Donna, where you been keeping yourself?" This was said conversationally, like a chance meeting on Columbus Avenue and 79th Street.

This had to be a slow news day. It wasn't as though she had never expected to see him again. It was more like she never wanted to see him again. Donna paused for an instant and looked him square in the eye. "You've got the nose for news. You tell me."

A cop stepped between Donna and Costello and the other member of New York's Finest took Fabio. Donna

and Louie went into the hospital and the mechanical doors whooshed shut after them.

A reporter turned to Costello. "Hey, Costello, remind me. Didn't you have a thing with her a couple years back?"

Costello smiled. "I'm Irish. Do you think Sam Gimignano would let his daughter date out of her species?"

The truth was that Costello was as American as Donna. Where his people had come from once upon a time was only a technicality. At least to him.

Sliding his notepad into his pocket, Costello strolled away. There was a story here, but he wasn't likely to get it while standing in the middle of a pack of amateurs.

Costello prided himself on being more creative. It was actually a willingness to get dirty if that's what it took. The way journalism had become a magnet for pretty boys and girls left a lot of room on the fringe to operate in.

When Donna reached Sam's floor, it was obvious the fat lady was singing. As they hurried down the hall, Dr. Wilson fell into step with them.

"I'm glad you made it in time, Miss Gimignano. He's been asking for you."

What could Donna say to that? He hadn't asked for her in years. Now he had changed his mind. Good timing, Sam.

Fabio didn't want to lose his nephew. The dynasty was ending. All that his mother, his sister and his nephew had devoted their lives to—Gimignano Foods— would soon be over. "Is he worse?"

Dr. Wilson shook his head. "I'm sorry."

Sorry. Yeah. That covered a lot of territory.

Dr. Wilson opened the door to a private room. Donna stopped and looked from her uncle to Louie. Was she supposed to go in first? What was she supposed to say to this man?

"Donna, go in," Uncle Fabio said.

Donna didn't move. She wanted to buy time. Have a chance to sit down and think about this. Reflect for a bit. Maybe hours, maybe a couple weeks. No point in making snap decisions.

"He's family." Uncle Fabio was leaning against Louie.

"You use that word like a cleaver," Donna replied.

Donna went into the room and the door closed noiselessly behind her.

Sam was lying in bed, hooked up to every device known to medical science. There was a steady beeping, an intermittent flashing of digital readouts. Donna crossed to him. He appeared vulnerable for the first time in her life, but it didn't strike Donna to her very soul. Too much had happened between them to cause a tidal wave of emotion to wash over her now.

"Sam," she said. It had been many years since she had called him "Dad" and a lot more years since she had called him "Papa." as was expected.

Sam's eyelids fluttered then opened. "Donna?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. I wasn't sure you'd come."

"You knew."

"No. Not after our last fight."

She didn't feel competent at this. If Death Bed Scenes 101 had been a course given at any of the institutions of higher learning she had attended, Donna had been too busy to take it. "I'm here now."

Donna sensed that she was supposed to take his hand in hers so she did. It felt like skin without bones. Flesh

but no substance. Had he virtually crossed over already? What chemicals was his brain making right now? Was he in a state of euphoria? Was he in pain or had endorphins flooded his bloodstream? The notion of death and its clinical implications suddenly became compelling, insistent, intriguing, but she kicked her mental self back into the room.

"Donna. I'm dying. I know that. I have things to settle."

This came as no surprise to Donna. Sam had been implicated in the demise of about a dozen competitor's businesses over the years. Nothing proven. This was a legitimate spiritual emergency. "Do you want me to get a priest?"

"A priest can't do what you must do for me."

"Giving you the Final Rites is out of my expertise. I'll listen, but I can't absolve you."

"Donna..."

"Sam..."

"I can't trust the boys. You're smart. You're honest. You can run the business."

Donna dropped Sam's hand. "No."

"You must. It's family."

"Stop with the Family! Sam, you're dying. I'm going to miss you. Yes, even though I've hated you at times. And I don't approve of things you've done. But let it end!"

Sam choked. "The Family must continue."

"Okay. So it continues. Vinnie and Gene will marry someday. Well, not Gene, but Vinnie, anyway. If he can find a woman who can stomach him. And God willing, maybe I'll find a man...someplace...I don't know where...probably not in the city, but Upstate? We'll have children. I'll name all of them Sam! But the business stops here. I'm not taking over!"

Sam seized Donna's hand. The bones were back. "You've heard of Rico Tomba?"

"The cheese importer from Tuscany?"

"I made a business arrangement with him."

Why not? "How many cases of cheese did you buy?"

"I cut the Malgieris out of the primo Parmigiana Reggiano."

"Why'd you do that?"

"Because they abuse it."

"Sam. It's not your cheese, it's world cheese. There's plenty for everyone."

"You don't understand. This is estate cheese. Rare."

Donna closed her eyes. Estate cheese, now. "I'll call him and say due to unforeseen circumstances it's off."

"That's not how it works. He's coming to the city and if you don't go through with the deal, he'll make trouble."

"Is trouble a code word for something?"

"Yes."

"Sam. What did you do?"

"See the deal through."

"I'll go to the cops! I'll ask for protection."

"I spent a quarter million dollars on your education and that's what you think? That the cops are your friends?"

They're your friend if you have a free pie in your hand. If they think there's something going on under the table, you'll be carving your name in the cell next to Jean Harris' in Bedford! Do you understand, Donna? They'll send you to prison. This is the deal that quiche eating DA has been waiting for. He wants to be mayor. He wants to be governor. He wants to be emperor of the Empire State!"

Sam began coughing and in response, the machines began beeping wildly.

Donna stroked his forehead. "Calm down."

"Tell me you'll take care of this."

"This is not my line of work."

"You don't have a line of work. Eighteen years of school and you're not prepared to do anything. I begged you to take a secretarial course."

"I can type. Just not on demand. Look, Sam, I know how important all this is to you, but it's not important to me. It's never been something I've had an interest in. Now, Vinnie, Vinnie is a better person to discuss this with."

"Not Vinnie!"

Donna felt herself quake like she did when she was five. "...this is too much to ask."

"Make things right. Tell me, Donna!"

Dr. Wilson and a team of doctors rushed into the room.

"Yes, Papa, I'll take care of it."

"Good girl..."

The medical team pushed Donna out of the way and she crossed to the door. There was the shrill, insistent buzz of the cardiac machine as it straight-line. Donna looked back. Dr. Wilson shook his head and began pulling the sheet up over Sam's face.

Downstairs, the reporters were getting impatient. If they didn't get a story soon, they'd miss the five o'clock news. Something was better than nothing, so they crushed toward the door as a hospital spokesman came out the door and held up his hands for silence. Everyone with video capability started running tape.

Before the man could utter a word, the shouts began.

"What's the status of Sam Gimignano?"

"Mr. Gimignano is in very critical condition."

"Why can't we talk to the family?"

"That's all I'm at liberty to say at this time."

"Then what'd ya come outside for?"

"What about our story?!"

Waiting for a story was not Costello's M.O. On the eastern side of the building, Costello ran up the fire escape. He believed in himself. And his deadline didn't come till midnight.

Fabio had feared this day for most of his life. Sam had been his pride and joy, a dynamo. Fabio had been content to let his nephew run the business, make all the decisions and advise him when asked. His own poor health had never allowed Fabio to lead the kind of life he would have liked, but it had all worked out. Between them they had continued in the Gimignano tradition, building on what Stella had left them.

Now that was a woman, Fabio's sainted mother, Stella. She made mozzarella by hand in the kitchen. She made huge pots of ricotta on the kitchen stove. And raise eight children while creating the most glorious meals. She commanded respect because she knew how to feed people. Stella had left them quite a legacy to

live up to. Fabio always felt they had done well. Sam had been flexible, progressing with the times, diversifying. The import business was straight and doing well. Their products--extra virgin olive oil, biscotti, specialty pastas were carried in all the gourmet shops now.

Fabio wished he was strong enough to take over for Sam but he wasn't. He had only stayed in New York because Sam had wanted his uncle beside him. Fabio would have been content retiring to Miami and watching the floor shows with the dancing girls at the Cuban nightclubs.

There was going to be a vacuum of power. Fabio knew nature abhorred a vacuum. In circumstances like that, every upstart jockeyed for position and business was ignored. Sam had too many plans which couldn't be ignored or let slip. There were rival factions waiting for an opportunity to crush the Gimignanos.

All Fabio could hope for was that the tradition would persist. He wondered if it was possible.

He did know it was the end of an era.

Donna left Sam's room and slumped against the wall. "I wished for this moment a hundred times. Now I'm not ready--for any of it."

"Sam wasn't an easy man to love," Uncle Fabio admitted.

"But he's family, right?"

She had heard enough about family to last a lifetime. Several lifetimes if any of what she had learned in Eastern Religions 406 had validity.

Louie was practical. "That's right."

Donna shook her head as her focused drifted. "This'll put a crimp in Vinnie's calzone."

Ever the realist, Louie nodded.

### Chapter Three

The Blue Grotto was a restaurant bar in Little Italy. It wasn't any four star eatery on the map of the City of New York. It wasn't a place for tourists. It was barely a place for anyone who lived north of Houston Street, but it was authentic, family-run for about fifty years.

Vicki Smith (not her real name but she didn't confide her real name to anyone, because Vicki said, like Madonna, she had reinvented herself) was waiting by the bar.

She was the kind of woman who took a great deal of effort with the effect she had on people. Going out on the street was a major production. Going to the supermarket was an event comparable to taking in the opera at Lincoln Center. And she dressed for each and every occasion.

Her blonde hair resembled a double dip of cotton candy and her polka dot dress was so tight if she hiccuped she'd be arrested for indecent exposure. Vicki was the height of fashion (she'd say). Some might say her make-up was applied enthusiastically. Donna had once commented that it looked like she had applied it with a trowel. Luckily, Vicki had a sense of humor. She thought everything she couldn't understand was a joke. And what she understood now was that it was way past her lunch time.

"Vinnie, I'm hungry!"

Vicki spoke with that New York accent, unlike any accent in the world. To those beyond the pale, some place west of the Hudson, it might be compared to the sound of a subway making time around a corner and applying the brakes to prevent jumping the track.

Vincente Gimignano was, by all estimations, a good-looking young man of about thirty. He wore his hair

slicked back in the fashion of the day and favored suits that virtually glowed in the dark.

He was at the restaurant to do business. Vinnie had a penchant for the ponies. Bookmaking had come naturally to him. He'd been at it since high school. This facility had come as a pleasant surprise to Sam, who expected a great deal of his eldest son. Unfortunately, disappointment followed because Vinnie soon proved to be singularly incapable of holding any numbers in his head except the odds for win, place and show.

"Can ya wait a minute? This is business!" Vinnie called over his shoulder while studying the Racing Form.

"Business. Business. It's always business with ya, Vinnie. There are other things in life, ya know. I could show them to ya if ya gave me fifteen minutes."

Cosimo Boitano counted out the cash as quickly as he could and stuffed it into an envelope. With a worried glance toward Vicki, Cosimo handed Vinnie the packet. "These are the ponies who ran yesterday."

Vicki fluffed her hair for the sixtieth time. "Vinnie!"

Cosimo leaned over the counter. "You want I should feed her?"

Vinnie slid the envelope into his inside jacket pocket. "Yeah. Tie a goddamn feedbag around her neck! God knows she eats like a horse!"

Vinnie strode over to her, looped his arm through Vicki's and propelled her toward the door. She struggled to keep up, teetering on stiletto heels, which were the height of fashion, but not good for speed.

On the street, blocking a fire hydrant, Vinnie's black town car was parked in front of the restaurant. He opened the door and pushed Vicki inside ass over teakettle. She took no offense. Being a practical girl, she was not without comment on what might be considered rough treatment. "Careful, will ya! I'll break a nail!"

Vinnie got into the driver's seat, gunned the engine and the car screeched away from the curb.

The clock ticking down to their deadlines, the reporters first began grumbling, then outright complaining, which progressed into various expressions derived from both Old English and Old German. They were not without an extensive and worldly vocabulary, but they were without patience. Without planning it at all, something of an expression of a journalistic collective unconscious, they swarmed into the building.

Upstairs, Costello raised a window and jumped inside. He ran up a half flight of stairs and carefully opened the door, just poking his head out. He could see Donna, Louie and Uncle Fabio.

Donna didn't see Costello. She was just trying to gather her thoughts and get through the next couple minutes in an orderly manner. This turn of events couldn't have been more unexpected since she had forcefully remained outside the family for so many years.

"Uncle, you go home. Louie..."

Louie had been with Sam for about twenty-five years and was never at a loss concerning the right action to take. He nodded and took Uncle Fabio's arm.

Costello approached and Donna faced him, surprised and irritated by his presence. She considered his appearance an intrusion. Nothing was private anymore. Not even death.

Louie looked to Donna. It was a question. Did she want him to take care of this guy. Donna lifted her chin slightly. It was an answer. Go. I can take care of him.

Louie and Fabio moved off in the direction of the service elevator.

"What are you doing here?" Donna asked.

"I thought you might want to talk."

"Not to you."

At the far end of the corridor, elevator doors opened and reporters poured forth. "Donna! Can we have a statement?"

With all the finesse of a herd of buffaloes, the reporters stampeded down the corridor. Lights, camera, action. Costello grabbed her hand and ran with her toward the stairs.

Donna didn't want to go with him, but staying to become afternoon tea for the media wasn't on the menu either. He pushed the door open and dragged Donna with him down the stairs.

"Where are we going?"

"You want to get away, don't you?" Costello paused at the open window.

Donna's eyes widened. "The friggin' fire escape?"

Costello climbed through the window and held out his hand to her. "You still afraid of heights?"

The door at the top of the stairwell slammed open and a television crew shone high intensity lights on Donna.

"Time's flying," Costello pointed out.

Donna took his hand and climbed out the window.

They ran down the stairs holding hands.

"You call this a getaway? Any second story man could have come up with this!"

"If your feet would only run as fast as your mouth!"

"You think you're doing me a favor?"

"Yeah!"

"You only want a story! That's all you ever want!"

Costello stopped dead in his tracks and dropped her hand. He casually removed his notepad from his pocket. "Now, Miss Gimignano. Your family has been allegedly involved in illicit activities for decades, going back to when...the Lansky-Capone days. Wasn't one of your relatives referred to as the Don's Don? Were you named for him? Donna Donna. The prima donna."

Two stories above them, there were footsteps on the fire escape. Donna looked up to see the television crew following them and her finely tuned instinct of self-preservation took over. She pushed past Costello and turned the corner. In that brief instant, she lost the concentration on her mantra that was going something like "don'tlookdown, don'tlookdown, don'tlookdown" and looked down. This was no floor, it was just a grating. Simple metal pieces. Thin ones. Ones spaced so far apart she could see between them to the ground far below. And it was slippery. Donna froze.

Costello let his pad fall from his hands and grabbed her hand. He dragged her down the stairs, going down story after story until the end of the line and the retractable ladder.

Costello pushed on the ladder. It didn't budge. He stomped on it with his foot.

The multitude of media feet thundered down the stairs, shaking the metal skeleton barely bolted to the side of the building.

"Well?"

"It's stuck."

Costello jumped on the ladder with both feet. No better.

"Terrific. Remind me not to invite you on any other escapes."

"You could help!" Costello pointed out.

Donna patted her pockets. "Gee, I must've forgotten my acetylene torch. It was here someplace."

"Get on the ladder and jump!"

Donna hesitated. The reporters were getting closer.

"You don't have time to think about it!"

Donna got on the ladder.

"On the count of three..."

The thundering footsteps closed in on them. Costello glanced upward.

"On the count of one..."

"Jump, dammit!" Donna shouted.

They jumped on the top rung of the ladder in unison.

Costello and Donna gracefully descended on the retractable ladder, he with his arm around her. They jumped to the ground and in a stride, were running full tilt toward his car.

He opened his door. Donna grabbed the passenger side door and yanked it open. "Don't you ever lock?" She asked.

"What for?"

"The city's dangerous!"

Costello stared at her in amazement. "I guess you'd know."

From the fire escape, a television reporter shouted to a crew member on the ground. "That's her! Stop her!"

Donna jumped into the car and closed the door.

The lock for the door refused to be depressed. She looked at him accusingly. Costello shrugged.

As the reporters descended upon them, the car drove off.

Costello was very pleased with himself. He got the story, but more than that, he'd outmaneuvered the two dailies, the national, three networks, two independents, TIME, CNN and WORLD WEEKLY NEWS. That was a good day's work.

"No thanks are necessary." He said as he snaked through traffic.

"For once I agree with you."

It was beginning to rain, as it often did in New York after a long, hot summer day. The smell of rain on the sidewalks drifted into the car.

After a few blocks, Costello found the right words. "I'm sorry about your father."

Sincerity is always good.

"Sure you are."

But it doesn't always work.

Costello wasn't a quitter. "He had his good qualities."

"Yeah. He never trusted you."

Enough with the pleasantries. "Listen, Princess, maybe I wasn't Prince Charming, but I wasn't Rumpelstiltskin either."

"You can always tell a writer by their literary references."

She could make him feel like an idiot with her half-compliments and half-insults.

Donna faced the window.

It made him remember what he missed so acutely about her. "Still live in the same place?"

"You remember?"

"It's not like I didn't try to forget."

He found a parking place near her building and even though they ran through the rain, they were both wet

when reaching the front door. In silence, Costello followed her up the stairs. Donna took the key out of her pocket and held it up.

"Key. Lock." She put the key in the lock and twisted it. The door opened.

Costello shook his head in amazement. "We live in an age of great technological advances. What will they invent next?"

She stepped into her apartment. "Want to come in? Dry off or something?"

Costello glanced inside from the doorway then shook his head. It was the same. Nothing had changed.

He was tempted.

"No. A domani, Donna."

He turned and walked away.

Donna closed the door, twisted the lock and threw the bolt. Beatrice, the huge Italian Mastiff who shared the apartment with Donna, trotted out of the bedroom to see who had entered and decide whether or not they should be rapidly dispatched. She leaped in delight toward Donna, throwing her substantial weight against Donna's legs, wanting to be petted, acknowledged, adored. Donna sank to the floor, buried her head in Beatrice's neck and cried not knowing why.