
THE SICILIAN PRINCESS

Picone Crime Family - Book Two

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.

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Chapter 1

Rose

Click. Clack. Click. Clack. The light sound of my mother's high heels covered the thunder of my heartbeat as we made our way to my father's office. Angela Picone was the matriarch of the Picone family. She wore red-bottomed heels, a tight skirt that hit her calves, a classy silk blouse that was buttoned all the way and to top off her ensemble, her long blonde hair was twisted into an elegant chignon. She was the embodiment of a true lady—everything the family wanted me to be. Everything I could have become if I wasn't broken. There was nothing I could do to change. It had been a year since my last incident, and my entire family acted like there was nothing wrong. Sure, I had to keep up with doctor appointments, my medications, and staying away from things that could set me off, but I was twenty-eight years old and ready to be on my own. I didn't want to stay in the compound anymore, around people who either pitied me or looked at me with disdain. I wanted out. I wanted my own life.

I was never going to be Angela Picone. I was never going to be the perfect daughter. I had already let them down.

My mother stopped outside the large oak door. She knocked three times and waited for him to tell her we could enter. The door swung open and there he sat, Giuseppe Picone, the capo famiglia, boss of the Picone crime family. Not that I knew anything of the family business until a few years ago. I didn't ever want to know. I wish I hadn't found out that day. I scanned the room and saw my brother, Vittorio, behind my father, watching me impassively. His arms were crossed and a scowl marred his features. Another typical day then. I noted another man seated on the couch at my left with one leg crossed, covering his portly belly. Two soldiers stood behind him. I felt a sickness brewing in the pit of my stomach. We never spoke family business in front of outsiders. Normally, I wouldn't even be in my father's office. Something was off. Father waved my mother away and the door clicked shut like a tomb echoing in the silence. I tried to look as impassive as Vittorio did, but I doubted very seriously that I pulled it off.

"Sit, Rosalina," my father's voice boomed in the silence as he pointed to the chair directly in front of his wide desk. I sank as gracefully as I could into the seat, keeping my eyes on him. There was nothing that could happen in my father's office without him ordering it. I kept silent just like I had been taught. Do not speak until addressed.

"This is Capo Thomas Romano, from Brooklyn, New York." He motioned to the man seated leisurely on the couch. "Your fiancé." The wind was knocked out of me as my entire world ceased. He was marrying me off—something I had never thought my father would do. Mainly because he was too ashamed of me. I tried to draw in a breath, my eyes searching for help. Vittorio had stepped toward me with concern, but Father stopped him before he could get too far, with just a

hand gesture. Someone was wheezing. It was me. Father just watched me, no concern or care written on his face at all. I finally calmed a little bit and could see the disgust on his face as he sat like a king on the throne looking at me.

"Why?" I whispered. My throat wanted to close on me. I had to count in my head to calm my erratic heart rate.

"He knows of your condition and says it will have no bearing on your marriage, which is perfect. This is the best you're going to get. We are honored to have this union, uniting the families under one syndicate." His tone brokered no argument. Really, it was a wonder why he even bothered to have me brought in. He could've just told me on the day of the wedding. That seemed like something he would do. I glanced at the capo on my left. He was gazing at my chest, licking his lips. I shivered in apprehension. I could tell if I allowed this marriage to happen, I would surely die. That was not an exaggeration. There was only one reason a man would want a woman who was as broken as me. He either wanted me as a show pony or he wanted to break me further. The cold look in his eyes told me that this was going to be the latter. There wasn't anything I could do.

After Father finished explaining about the Falcone crime family in New York, he sent Vittorio to escort me back to my room. Since I was playing an important role in uniting the two families, there was no doubt in my mind that I was going to be under lock and key until the wedding. Vittorio walked beside me quietly. He was the only one who never forced me to trail behind him like a lost puppy. I walked into my room ahead of him and he closed the door behind me with a soft thud. Vittorio leaned heavily against the door, his face finally portraying his feelings. The anger he felt was palpable in the room.

"Rose," he sighed.

I whimpered. My head felt like it was in a fog. My

thoughts scattered at the thought that I was being given away to a man I had never met and made to be his wife. "Vito, I'm scared." Tears threatened to fall down my face from my lashes.

Vittorio rushed toward me and hauled me against him in a big hug. I collapsed against his frame and let go.

"I won't let him hurt you." Vittorio let me cling to him and rubbed small circles on my mid-back.

"No one can save me now," I whispered against him, the fight leaving my body just as quickly as it had come.

"No. I have a plan. Trust me, Rose," Vittorio fiercely stated.

I did trust him. He was my big brother. He was meant to take over the Picone family. He was almost untouchable. Yet he couldn't go against our father. We both knew it. He wouldn't be able to save me. All his promises were just sweet lies.

"Soon," he grumbled and then let me go. He left my room as if he hadn't been there at all. I should have known this was going to happen. Ever since the incident, my father had been planning. I thought he was going to send me away, send me someplace where I could have a normal life, where I wasn't the daughter of a mob boss. How naïve. I knew exactly how this world worked. Even though I was broken, I should have known Father would find a way for me to be useful, a way to show the other families I wasn't a broken waste of space. He wouldn't have made my mother give me forced lessons otherwise. Locked away from prying eyes in this compound, I was forced to know everything that would make me a proper mafia wife—how to sit, speak, eat, and even how to seduce. I figured no one would ever want me. That was made even clearer a few months after last year's incident. When Father started to reach out to other families to find me a husband, no one would take me. The rumor mill had run rampant. Everyone knew there was something wrong with me. I had heard it all,

special needs, promiscuous, even close to death. Each family had an idea of what was wrong with me. Although I knew father hadn't confirmed or denied any of the speculation, I had hoped. I was broken and no one would touch me. I was going to have to stay at the compound forever, but that was a better price to pay. Better than being fostered on a man who would hurt me. Capo Thomas Romano would hurt me. From the brief interaction I had with that man, I knew that his intentions weren't good. One would think that would mean something to my father, but image was everything. Once I signed my life away, I would no longer be his problem. I would be forced to move to Brooklyn. A fate worse than death would await me there. Of that, I was sure. If Vittorio had a plan, I needed to be ready for anything.

I went to my closet and pulled out a non-descript black duffle bag. I packed clothes that were hung in the back of my closet with the tags on them, items no one would miss. I made sure to put something for each season. If I was running, I needed to be prepared. I packed unopened toiletries that were in my bathroom, making sure to grab everything from the back. I even had a small stash of money under the floorboard in the back of my closet. I made sure to pack that and two pairs of dark sneakers. Then I hid what I was now calling my 'go bag' on a shelf next to some older Prada bags. It wouldn't look out of place and conspicuous to anyone looking. I would be able to grab and dash, regardless of the situation. The only smarter place would be under my bed or at the foot, but it would stick out like a sore thumb. I would just need to bide my time so I could run without getting caught. Even if Vittorio couldn't get me out, I would get myself out.

The next few days passed by in a blur. I was not allowed out of my room or off the property. Father had servants bringing my food to my room and left me there with nothing. I hadn't seen Vittorio since the meeting. My other siblings came

to congratulate me, and I couldn't even give them a fake smile. My doctor came and handed me a bag full of my prescriptions with a certain look in his eyes. I waited until he left and checked the bag. It was stuffed to the brim with my medications, enough to last me a full year. Not only that, but he added in a medical pad with a full two years of prescriptions written out so I could get refills. The name on the prescription was different, but tears filled my eyes anyway. This was happening. I put everything in my go bag and tried to act as normal as possible, thinking of the name on the scripts, Rose Thornberry. I needed a new identity. Vittorio was doing what he said he would. The question now was would we get away with it?

In the next few days, my father had left word that my marriage to the scum Capo Thomas was going to take place at the end of the month. Time was running out. I was in a panic.

That same day, Vittorio came to me. "Rose, I finally have it." He handed me a card. I looked down and saw it had a picture of me with lighter hair and the name Rose Thornberry. I was shocked.

"Vito how did you manage to get this?" My hair was lighter. I have never had light hair.

"I have friends with skills. Don't worry, Rose. We'll be making a move tonight, and you are going to get yourself to Texas. I've acquired a car that isn't being tracked. Once I smuggle you off the compound, you'll be on your own. Lose yourself in a city or something. Never tell anyone who you are. Also, take care of your health. You will tell them you are running from an abusive ex, and that will help any doctor keep your medical information hidden. Never tell them the truth. You cannot trust anyone." I nodded that I understood, and he hugged me again.

"I'll be back tonight; try not to worry." As the hours passed, I paced in my room. I double and triple checked my

bag. I tried everything to get my mind off what was happening tonight.

A loud boom sounded, and I rushed to the window. Soldiers were pouring out of the compound. The door to my room opened, and Vittorio was there. He grabbed my arm.

"Let's go, Rose!" He grabbed my bag and we rushed down the spiral staircase, headed toward the kitchen. No one paid any attention to us as they were all rushing to grab their guns and protect the compound. I didn't see my mother; she was probably in the panic room already. I knew my other brothers would all be out of the house.

Vittorio threw the pantry open and shoved me inside. "Listen to me, Rose. I can't stay in here with you, but I'm going to tell you how to get out. I must make sure I'm out there so no one will think anything of your disappearance. You're going to hit the button on the back wall. It leads to the tunnels. Keep left and don't worry; it's well lit. Once you reach the end, there is a car waiting by the grate entrance that you'll crawl out of. The keys are in the ignition already. I want you to drive southwest if you can. There's money in your bag, but you're going to have to give me your phone." I could feel the tears running down my face. This was it.

"You can never come back, Rose. Ever." I was shaking my head but looking into his sad eyes telling me that I would never see my family again. This was permanent. I hugged Vittorio and he whispered, "I love you," against my hair. "Go, now!" He shoved the bag at me and then disappeared back the way we came. I hit the button and watched a panel on the far wall slide open. The tunnels were a straight passage, and I ran through them like my life depended on it, which it did. Who knew how long the attack would last? I had to make it out. I reached the end grate and had to sit on my butt and kick it open with both feet as hard as I could. I'm only 4'11" so it actually took me a good ten minutes to get it to pop off. Not

only that, but it was also heavy as hell and I had to replace it to make sure it didn't look suspicious.

A black Chevy sat idling in front of the grated passageway, and I rushed to it. I threw open the door and tossed my bag on the passenger side seat. Then I buckled up and took off, putting the compound in my rearview mirror as quickly as possible without breaking too many traffic laws. I didn't let out a breath of relief until I saw the sign saying *Now Leaving Pennsylvania* in my rearview mirror. I stopped for gas, coffee, and something quick to eat. Then I resumed my driving. A few states away, I checked the bag for money so I could stop at a hotel. A letter fell out and I clutched it to my chest. I pulled into a Motel 6, the kind that basically took cash and looked the other way no matter what you were doing. The husky guy sitting at the front table had his eyes glued to the television watching some game. He pointed at the rates without looking at me, took my money without checking to make sure it was enough, and felt behind him for a key without removing his eyes from what he was watching. I wished I had that much concentration in life.

I grabbed my bag from the front seat and entered the room I was given, room nine, all the way at the end of the row. The door was red, and the brass number was old and falling apart. Inside, it wasn't much better. There were two beds. I tried not to think about what might have happened on those beds. The bathroom was tiny and there was barely any room to pace. I looked at the beige walls and tried to figure out where I needed to go from here. Then I remembered the letter clutched in my hand like a lifeline. The handwriting was Vittorio's. It wasn't messy, but it was a scrawled loop that looked like he had written it in a rush.

Rose,

The Sicilian Princess

I'm so sorry you had to leave our home, but it was for the best. Father was never going to let you go off on your own. He wanted this alliance too much. I did some digging into the capo father wanted you to marry, and let me say you would not be safe. He doesn't treat women well. He has no respect. More than that, I felt that you would likely die if you were married to him. It may be a few years before I would take over for Father. Therefore, I meant it when I said you can never come home. If I was taking over now, I would just hide you until that time, but I cannot. I'm ashamed to say I cannot protect you. My little sister, my blood, this was the only way I could. Forgive me. In your bag, I left some hair dye. I know you love your hair, but you need the change. New look. New life. New you. Be well. Take your medication and remember that we can't have any contact. If you contact me, I'll assume your life is in danger. If you contact me, your life will be forfeited. If you contact me, the Picone famiglia will be forced to punish you.

Remember that I love you,

Vito

I was openly sobbing. My tears stained the short letter in my hands. We'd never prepared for something like this. I checked the bag and saw boxed blonde dye. I barked out a bitter laugh, thinking back on all the times Vittorio and I made fun of loose women with fake blonde hair. Now I would be one of them. I fingered my locks and noticed a pair of sheers underneath the box. Of course, I couldn't keep my tail-length hair. It would be way too much for one box of dye. I grabbed a ponytail holder and brought everything into the bathroom. Then I focused on getting the job done. I put my hair up and chopped below the band. It fell to my shoulders, the ends as jagged as my new life. I spread the bleach and waited. I must've dozed off because the next thing I knew, my scalp was tingling something fierce. I rinsed my head quickly and looked at the damage. White. My hair was white. That wasn't supposed to happen. I didn't even

think that was possible. How long was I out? I didn't have the brain capacity to deal with this. I took my pills and threw myself on the bed closest to the bathroom, shut my eyes and let myself drift off again. I didn't think of the mafia or what was in store for me at all.