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# HIS TO LEARN

Sons of Sicily - Book One

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.

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## Prologue

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### *Theresa*

**A**s I pulled up in front of the Falcone mansion, my stomach churned. Attending the wake was a mistake. My instincts told me to peel away from the extensive driveway and head for the safety of home. But the questions that have plagued me since I read of Maria Falcone's death needed assuaging, the foremost playing like a litany of bad music in my head. What if he had moved on without me and all that was left to share was the past?

I told myself to get a grip as my feelings were secondary to my purpose in being at the Falcone mansion. That was a half-truth; I was there for him. I put my car in park, joining the others littering the circular driveway. As I walked up the stone steps, I sighed in surrender. Maria Falcone, the only mother I had ever known, had died. I was here to pay my respects, to say goodbye. Maybe I wouldn't see Jimmy; maybe I was getting myself worked up for nothing.

My stomach roiled at the idea of seeing him as a man, seeing what he had become. I feared what I wanted most and

found myself wavering between my desire to see him and hoping to make a clean exit without seeing him. If I didn't see him, could I push Jimmy Falcone into the recesses of my childhood and pull him out as a fond memory when I needed one.

But even as that thought crested, I knew it was a lie. The ache I felt for Jimmy was not something that would ever go away; it was as permanent as his handprint was all those years ago. Standing on the threshold of the entrance, I tugged my black mini skirt and flicked my hair into place. I reached out my trembling hand for the door handle, and taking a deep breath, I pulled it open and stepped inside.

The great hall of the mansion was filled to capacity for Maria's wake. My social anxiety reared its head at the size of the crowd. Upon further inspection, I noticed the room was predominantly filled with family, and that did not help the urge to flee. Until something else hit me that was just as powerful—the sense that I was being watched.

I stood still, my eyes roving around the room, and then I saw him. The shock to my body was beyond what I could have fabricated based on my memories of Jimmy. My breath hitched and my legs trembled. His tall, over six-foot frame was clear now from the other side of the room. He stared at me so intently that I wondered if I was naked—I certainly felt as though I was.

In a room of Italians with an average height of five foot five inches, Jimmy looked like a runway model. He was gorgeous. His eyes held a predatory gleam. I watched him excuse himself without ever taking his eyes off me.

He stalked toward me, every inch of his form and energy screaming dominant. I realized that my desires were way beyond my comfort zone. Unconsciously, I started to back away, until my butt banged into the door behind me. Oh, my God, my lady parts clenched as he made his way over to me.

Then he was there and stopped directly in front of me. I held my breath.

“Theresa.” He looked me up and down. “Look at you, all grown up.”

“Um, hi, Jimmy.”

He grabbed my arm without another word and stalked away from the crowd, bringing me into what I assumed was his office, tucked out of the way and very private. He pointed at a comfortable wingback while he takes the office chair behind his desk, clearly making a power play.

I giggled nervously and said, “This reminds me of the principal’s office at school. I’m not in trouble already, am I?”

His eyes glittered dangerously. “Do you want to be in trouble, Theresa?”

Damn, the way he drew out my name when he said it had my body sizzling with lust. I felt my chest heave as I sought the oxygen that just got sucked out of my body when he made my lady parts clench. Thank God I was sitting as I couldn’t imagine my legs effectively holding me up. Needing to ground myself, I shifted my gaze from him to the window behind his head. A young girl of maybe twelve who looks an awful lot like Jimmy was standing outside. My stomach flip-flopped. He had a daughter; I should leave.

“Is that your daughter?”

Jimmy turned his head, his expression quickly shifted from predator to displeasure. “Stay here,” he ordered. I wanted to flip him off, but something made me acquiescent. A moment later, I saw Jimmy with his daughter. He whispered something in her ear, and she adamantly shook her head in response. He gave her jean-clad bottom a smack and then quickly pulled her in for a hug.

She buried her face in his chest as he wrapped his strong arms around her. I could see his lips still moving, but I had no idea what he was saying. When she pulled away, she was

wearing a huge smile. I guess whatever he said to her must have been encouraging. She skipped away, both disappearing from my sight line.

The domestic scene I just witnessed triggered a memory—Jimmy and I were hanging out in the treehouse he and his father built for us when we were kids. The memory was based off a habitual scene we played out together hundreds of times, ‘house.’

My mind traveled back to the treehouse, the last time we were in it, just before the Falcone family moved. Jimmy suddenly said, “Wife! Where are my slippers and pipe?”

He’d just shared with me that his family was moving. I was really upset, and he was trying to take my mind off it by playing our old game. But instead of making me laugh, as intended, I got pissed off and answered, “Go fuck yourself, Jimmy, I want a divorce.” I don’t know who had been more shocked, him or me. Then I started laughing hard, like a crazy person.

Jimmy hadn’t thought it funny. He sat down on the only chair in the clubhouse and pulled me over his lap. He pushed my head toward the plank floor so my ass was right in his face. I’d felt so humiliated, but also a little excited. To hide the fact, I had started kicking and he started spanking.

“What the hell, Jimmy? It was a joke, now let me go.” When my words didn’t dissuade him, I tried again, “I swear to God, Jimmy, when I get up, I’m going to—”

“What, Theresa, what are you going to do, hit me with your little girly fists? Don’t you ever say the divorce word to me, Theresa Romano, because it won’t happen. You’re mine.” He punctuated each word with a hard smack to my ass.

“Jimmy, it’s a game; we’re just goofing off.” His answer was to continue to rain blows down on my unprotected ass. “Stop, please, let me up.”

“No.”

Now I was mad, the increasing sting in my backside making me angrier with each crack. “You bastard,” I hissed, renewing my efforts. “Let me up this instant.”

“Oh, ho, ho! You think it’s okay to swear at me, little girl? You’re staying over my lap until you beg.”

I was so engrossed in the memory, I startled when Jimmy perched himself against the edge of the desk, mere inches away from where I was sitting, bringing me abruptly back to the present. My gaze traveled up his chiseled body and rested on his chest. I felt his eyes bearing down on me, too intense for me to investigate, especially after what I’d been remembering about us.

Embarrassment created a heat that bloomed on my chest and quickly spread to my face. Gathering my courage, I allowed my gaze to travel up to Jimmy’s face. His expression reflected sardonic amusement.

“Blush is such a becoming color on you, Theresa,” he said, the meaning of his words clear as his predatory gaze turned into a leer. My blush deepened.

“I bet I can guess what you’re remembering right now.” He leaned forward and reached out his hand to cup my chin. I tried not to moan at the contact. Jimmy’s hand was sending bolts of lightning through me as he ran his fingers gently over my jaw.

“Why are you here, Theresa, why did you come?” he asked. His voice was so sexy my nether region slipped into fast forward. His eyes held me captive, waiting for a response as every nerve in my body was alive and my parts were on fire.

“B-because,” I stuttered. “Because I want to pay my respects to your mother; you know she meant a lot to me.” My voice hiked a bit at the end, my purpose for being there lending strength to my words. At least enough to break the temporary control that Jimmy was easily exuding over me.

“Why did you bring me in here?” I countered, coming

back in control of my faculties. He sighed and dropped his hand from my chin.

“Let’s go see the family.” He wrapped my arm around his and we left his office.

I was unaware of exactly what business practices the family was invested in to have amassed, what clearly must have been, a large fortune. Looking around, I could see my and Jimmy’s childhood homes fitting inside this monstrosity at least five times. I chanced to peek at him from beneath my lashes. The man was at home with his wealth, belonging to this large lifestyle he had created.

Jimmy’s daughter walked down the spiral staircase toward us, now dressed in a black satin dress with ballet flats. Her long tresses are pulled back in a French braid. I glanced at Jimmy; he wore a smile of approval at her appearance. In response, her face lit up until she glanced at me on her father’s arm. I watched her expression change to hostility.

“Daddy?” She stopped on the last stair and lifted her chin as she gazed down at me in an attempt to intimidate. How I admired her spunk.

“Maggie,” Jimmy said, drawing her down the last stair and into his other arm. “This is my childhood best friend, Theresa. And this beautiful young woman is my princess, Maggie.”

“*The* Theresa?” Her eyes grew round. “Finally,” she squealed, stepping out of her father’s arm and into mine. “I have been like wanting to meet you for like ever.”

Maggie’s big eyes and cute dimples were so disarming, I couldn’t help falling in love with her on the spot. “Well, I am very happy to meet you too, Princess Maggie,” I said enthusiastically. She beamed at me before pulling away from our awkward one arm embrace.

A crash from the kitchen startled us. “Excuse me, ladies. I see I’m needed. Mags, please show Theresa around while I’m gone, principessa.”



“Yes, Daddy,” she agreed as he kissed her cheek. Then Jimmy disappeared through the double doors leading to what I assumed was the kitchen.

“How long have you known my dad?”

“Mmm, since forever. Jimmy was two when I was born. We lived next door to each other until the family moved here when he was fifteen.” We took our time moving about the room. Maggie seemed more interested in steering me than in introducing me. I was good with that; just being there stressed me out. I didn’t need to add to it with unnecessary introductions.

“Maggie, how did you hear about me? Was it through your dad?”

She shook her head no. “Nonna—she used to tell me stories about you and my dad. She told me that I reminded her of you. She said you were tough and sweet, and that is why daddy and you were besties.”

I want to ask more, but Maggie brought us to a stop in front of a dense group of men, all of whom seemed vaguely familiar. As they parted, I saw James Senior in the center of the group. He appeared startled to see me.

“Theresa.” He pulled me in, planting a kiss on either cheek. “Let me look at you.” He held me at arm’s length. I knew my five-foot-five frame showed well as I was in good shape. I was a runner, so my legs were shapely and on display in the short skirt I’d chosen.

I admit, that while I was choosing my outfit, I imagined Jimmy salivating over my legs. I added a matching jacket to the form-fitting mini skirt and black wedge heels to accentuate my ankles. James Senior clucked his tongue.

“You’re too skinny, Bella.”

I laughed. “James, you would think a woman weighing in at two hundred pounds was too skinny.”

He chuckled. “Have you seen Jimmy?”

I nodded. “Yes, but I’m not here for him.” I was such a liar. “I’m here to see you and the family and give my condolences. I loved Maria like a mother, you know that. In fact, she was the only mother I ever knew.”

He averted his gaze as he nodded in agreement with my words. He was hurting, so I gave him a hug and then allowed Maggie to move us along. We stopped at a group of women, all looking to be around age twenty. It was hard not to grimace as they spoke, as the stories were way to graphic for a twelve-year-old. I moved us along and asked, “Maggie, is your mother in attendance? If so, I would love to meet her.”

She shook her head. “She died just before I turned one. I don’t remember her.”

I felt like a schmuck. I should have asked Jimmy, prior to asking her. “I’m so sorry, Maggie,” I said as I reached for her hand, holding it between both of mine. “I guess your grandmother was your world?” She nodded, her eyes heavy with unshed tears.

“I lost my mother when I was a baby, too, just like you. And for a long time, your grandmother was like my mother. Jimmy and I, well, we were besties growing up because I was always at the Falcone house. My dad worked hard so we could keep our house, and I have no other family.”

I reached out for her other hand and held them both in mine. “I am truly sorry, Maggie, for your loss.” A large tear that had been hovering finally fell and rolled down her porcelain cheek. I let go of one of her hands and wiped it away and then pulled her in for a hug.

“It will be okay, Maggie,” I crooned. “Let it all out, darling.” And with my words, the dam unleashed. A few minutes later, Jimmy came around the corner and stopped so abruptly that he slid on the Italian marble flooring and landed on his ass by our feet.

Our moment of grieving was over and replaced with

laughter as Maggie and I gazed down at Jimmy. His quick succession of changing facial expressions had Maggie and me in peals of laughter until his resting face morphed into a man with a plan.

“So, you girls think me landing on my ass is funny, do you? We’ll see how funny you think it is when I catch you.”

*Lay, a game*, my inner goddess clapped. Maggie and I ran screeching away, down one wing, and out into the backyard. Jimmy followed, making monster sounds as he chased us. We giggled in anticipation of being grabbed by the monster. This was just like when we were kids, except now, I was hobbled by my heels. “Help,” I screeched as Jimmy caught me.

“Maggie,” he growled. “I caught your friend. What should I do, eat her?”

I pretended mock fear of being eaten.

Maggie popped her head out from behind a rose bush. “Kiss her, Daddy.”

Jimmy pulled me in tight and kissed me. Not a peck as I had expected, but a deep kiss, his tongue opening my lips, commanding, dominating, drinking deeply. My eyes flew open at the invasion. His were already open, the predatory look in his eyes sealing my future. I tried pulling away, wanting - no needing - to escape from him.

Maggie tapped him on the shoulder. “That’s quite the kiss, Dad.”

Jimmy looked up, stunned, his lips finally releasing me.

Maggie and I laughed again at his expense as we sauntered away, but not before he swatted my ass. It was light, but it seared me with heat. Everything about Jimmy Falcone spoke of possession. If I weren’t careful, I would be his next acquisition.

Jimmy left us then to go and speak with more guests that have arrived during our romp outside. I said my goodbyes to

Maggie and James Senior and headed for the door, hoping to escape before Jimmy noticed me leaving.

I scanned the extensive u-shaped driveway for my car. The new guests had blocked me in. Crap! So much for a clean escape. I took a breath. *Calm down, Theresa*, I coaxed myself. How could I get out of this situation without talking to Jimmy? Being in his presence had set off my lady parts that I'd been purposely keeping shut off for a few years. I hadn't dated since college, and I didn't want to start now. That last experience with Steve had been humiliating and had put me off men.

I remembered I had a change of clothes in my trunk and running shoes. Oh, hurray! I could do this. I got my items from the trunk and snuck down the side of the house, ducking behind a sculptured bush.

I pulled off my wedges and wiggled out of my skirt and jacket. I was in my camisole and G-string when Jimmy and another guy come around the corner. I don't know who was more surprised, them or me. I hugged my clothing to the front of my body in a vain attempt at covering up. Jimmy walked straight to me while taking off his suit coat and covered me up.

"Give me a moment, Al."

"Sure, boss." Al continued around to the backyard.

"Theresa, what the hell are you doing, trying to give the wake an eyeful?"

I was thoroughly embarrassed. "Um, well, uh, you see, I need to leave, but my car is blocked by the new arrivals, so I grabbed a change of clothes so I could, you know, change, and then jog home. I figured I'd get the car later." I had been staring at the ground during this exchange.

Jimmy lifted my chin, gazing into my eyes. "Theresa, that doesn't explain why you are outside, instead of inside in a

bathroom. Why didn't you tell me? I would have retrieved your car."

I tried to look away, but he wouldn't let me.

"Theresa," he growled. "I'm waiting for an answer."

"Um..." I trailed off.

"Geez Louise, woman, it's like being kids again. Do you need me to treat you like a kid, Theresa? Will that get your tongue wagging?" His threat did the trick.

"I'll have you know, James Junior, that I don't need anything or anyone. I was simply being polite and trying to not interrupt the wake."

"I think that you're lying to me, Tesoro. Try again. I warn you, if you lie to me, you'll have another trip down memory lane, only this one facing the ground as you dangle over my knee."

He pulled me closer, close enough that I could smell his scent—Italian coffee, aftershave, and man. Jimmy's scent was so masculine, my lady parts clenched in response.

"Um, well."

He marches over to a large garden boulder and put his foot on top. He was about to pull me over his knee. "Wait, Jimmy, please don't do that."

"Then the truth, amoré."

"I was afraid." My gaze moved from his face to the ground at my feet. "I was afraid of what I might find when I arrived. I was afraid that you had forgotten me or didn't care about me anymore. I was afraid you were happily married. But now I see you remember...many things. I needed to get away, fast. That's why I didn't say goodbye to you. That's why I was changing here, honest."

He took his foot off the boulder and pulled me into an embrace. "Good girl," he crooned. My physical response was at odds with my thoughts. I wanted to tell him to screw off.

My senses, however, were very much enjoying the embrace, and truth be told, being called a good girl was nice, too.

Finally, logic prevailed. “I must go, Jimmy. Do you think you can get my car unblocked?”

“Already done, little girl.”

“Wait, what? And stop calling me that.”

He chuckled. “I saw your dilemma and you sneaking down the side of the house. Al went to deal with it. You can go now.” He stepped away from me in dismissal. I threw on my sports clothes and picked up my suit and heels. I stalked away when I heard, “I’ll see you later, Tesoro.”

I didn’t respond, just kept walking until I arrived at my car. I got in and finally made my escape.