

"DELICIOUS!"
—Cosmopolitan

Jackie Collins

Drop Dead
Beautiful

A LUCKY SANTANGELO NOVEL FROM
THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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TWEET

Chapter 1

Drop Dead Beautiful. The three little words were scrawled on the Cartier card Lucky Santangelo had just opened. Hand-delivered, the note had been brought up to the house in Bel Air by Philippe, her houseman, who'd discovered it in the mailbox at the end of the driveway.

Drop Dead Beautiful. No signature, no return address.

Was it an invitation to an upcoming event too clever for its own good?

Whatever. One quick glance at the card, and Lucky tossed it in the trash.

Lucky Santangelo. A dangerously seductive woman with blacker-than-night eyes, full sensuous lips, a tangle of long jet-black hair, deep olive skin, and a lithe body. Wherever she went, Lucky still brought a room to a standstill, for not only was she wildly beautiful, she was also a powerhouse—a woman to be reckoned with, a force of nature. Street-smart and forever savvy—Lucky Santangelo had it all.

In her past, she'd built hotels in Vegas, owned a major movie studio, and been married three times. She'd also survived much heartache. Her mother, Maria, had been murdered when she was five years old. Her brother, Dario, was shot to death and tossed from a moving car. Then finally her fiancé, Marco, was gunned down in the parking lot of her Vegas hotel.

Eventually Lucky had found out that the man who'd ordered the brutal killings was her godfather, Enzo Bonnatti, a man she had always respected and trusted. The information devastated her. Filled with vengeance, she'd lured Enzo into a carefully planned trap at his home, and shot him dead with his own gun, claiming that he'd tried to rape her. It was deemed a clear-cut case of self-defense.

Self-defense. *Sure.* She'd made it *look* like Bonnatti had been about to rape her, and the D.A. had bought it all the way. No surprise there. Her father, Gino, had major connections.

The real truth was that she'd shot the son of a bitch because he'd deserved to die, and she'd never regretted doing so. Justice had taken place. *Santangelo* justice.

Don't fuck with a Santangelo—the family motto.

Grabbing her purse from a shelf in the luxurious dressing room, Lucky headed for the door. Everything was large and luxurious in Bel-Air—the privileged enclave of the very rich and famous. The house she and her husband, Lennie, were living in was a short-term rental. Recent storms had wreaked havoc on their home in Malibu and they'd been forced to leave while repairs were being made.

The beach was more her style. Bel-Air was too cut off from real life with its winding hillside streets and enormous mansions hidden behind vast gates and high walls of impenetrable greenery. People existed as if they were living under siege, surrounded by multiple security guards and vicious attack dogs. That way of living was not for her. She enjoyed feeling unprotected and free, which was one of the reasons she'd opted out of running Panther Studios several years earlier.

Being the head of a Hollywood studio was no nine-to-five job. She'd found herself working seventeen-hour days, leaving no time for family and friends. One morning she'd woken up and thought, *That's it, I'm out*. She'd had enough of dealing with ego-inflated stars, nervous-for-their-jobs executives, fast-talking agents, neurotic directors, fat-assed producers, and anyone else who thought they could make it in the movie business—which was most people in L.A.

So she'd quit running Panther, and after producing one movie, *Seduction*, starring Venus Maria, and her new discovery, Billy Melina, she'd sold the studio and gotten out of the film business altogether.

Lennie was in the movie industry. That was enough for one family. Besides, Lucky had other plans. She was getting back into the hotel business in Vegas—the place where it had all begun for her. Several years ago she'd put together a syndicate of interesting and colorful investors to develop a huge multibillion-dollar complex called the Keys. She'd been working with architects and planners for the last five years, and in less than a month they were about to celebrate the grand opening. Since the hotel project was her baby, she was beyond excited.

“Mom!” Max burst into the dressing room without knocking. Max, her sixteen-year-old wild child. Tall and colt-like with smooth olive skin, green eyes, an unruly tangle of black curls, and a killer bod, Max was a showstopper. She was also a rebel, playing truant from school on a regular basis.

“Here's the thing,” Max announced, bouncing up and down on the balls of her feet. “There's no way I can go to Grandpa's party.”

“Excuse me?” Lucky questioned, attempting to remain calm.

“Y’see, there’s this big blowout for one of Cookie’s best friends up in Big Bear,” Max blurted, speaking too fast. “A whole crowd of us wanna go, so like I can’t let Cookie down.”

“You can’t, huh?” Lucky said coolly.

“Nope,” Max answered, tugging on a stray curl. “Cookie’s my best friend an’ this is like *essential*.”

“You are *not* missing Gino’s birthday,” Lucky said firmly. “No way.”

Max stared balefully at her mom. “Huh?”

“You heard me,” Lucky said, heading for the door.

“I can’t believe you’d be this *mean*,” Max complained, trailing behind her.

“Mean?” Lucky sighed. This was major *déjà vu*. It reminded her of all the times she and Gino had gone head to head, and there were too many to remember.

“*Why* do I have to stay for Gino’s stupid party?” Max demanded. “It’s not as if he’ll *miss* me.”

“Of *course* he’ll miss you,” Lucky insisted, hurrying down the stairs.

“He’ll like *so* not,” Max grumbled, right behind her.

Lucky turned around, shooting her daughter a warning look. “You’re getting on my bad side, so stop it.”

“But—”

“*No*, Max,” Lucky said, walking out the front door. “I’m not interested, don’t want to hear it.”

And with those words she got into her red Ferrari and roared off down the driveway.

“*Crap!*” Max shrieked as her mother’s car vanished into the distance.

“Whassup?” questioned her younger brother, Gino Junior, rounding the corner from the tennis court.

“Mom sucks!” Max complained, ignoring Gino Junior’s two leering friends, both of whom she knew had a total crush on her.

“What she do now?” Gino asked. He was only fifteen, but he was already six feet tall and built like a football player.

“She won’t let me get out of Grandpa’s lame party. That’s so pathetic.”

Ignoring her, Gino Junior raced into the house, followed by his two friends, who couldn’t take their eyes off her.

“Horny little pricks,” she muttered under her breath. “Go jerk off someplace else. Like *Siberia*.”

Lucky drove like a race car driver, skillfully weaving in and out of traffic. She turned the CD player on full volume—Usher blasting.

Lately Max's behavior was becoming quite a challenge. Everything seemed to turn into an argument. Lucky sighed. It wasn't easy being a parent, especially when in your head you were hardly any older than your own child.

A frosted and Botoxed blonde in a shiny new Mercedes cut in front of her, causing her to hit the brakes. "Shit, lady!" Lucky yelled. "Whyn't you learn to fuckin' *drive*?"

Not that anyone could hear her, but shouting at other drivers eased the tension, although if Lennie happened to be in the car, it made him crazy. "One of these days someone's gonna get out their car and shoot your ass," he was always warning her.

"Yeah, sure," she would reply. "I *dare* them to."

At which point Lennie would shake his head. In his eyes there was no taming Lucky Santangelo. She walked her own path, and that's exactly the way he liked her.

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