



*Once upon a time,
the Devil fell in love
with an Angel*

BAD BISHOP

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

L.J. SHEN

L.J. Shen is a *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post* and #1 Amazon bestselling author of contemporary and NA romance. Best known for her angsty, dark books and barely redeemable alpha heroes, she writes fairytales with teeth and claws. She lives in a picturesque beach town with her family, pets and inner demons, and enjoys reading, traveling, cooking and spending time with her grumpy cat.

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Truly, Madly, Deeply

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Handsome Devil

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To all the readers who complain that my heroes are always irredeemable jerks...

I'm afraid I have terrible news.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work of fiction includes portions of American Sign Language. Though I tried to remain as true to the language as possible, I took some artistic liberties.

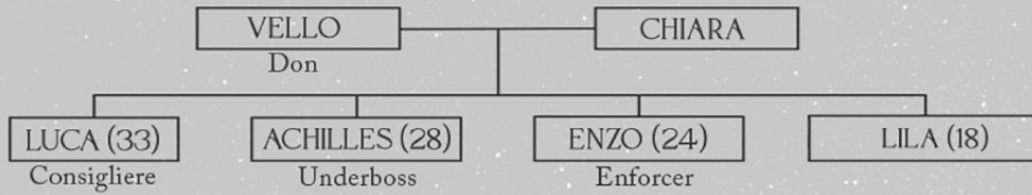
This book is filled with gory descriptions and violent deaths. It is unapologetically dark. If you find morally gray characters hard to stomach, please know that no number of Tums will be able to help you digest this book.

For a full list of the content warnings, visit here:

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SOCIETY OF VILLAINS TREE

HOUSE OF FERRANTE THE CAMORRA



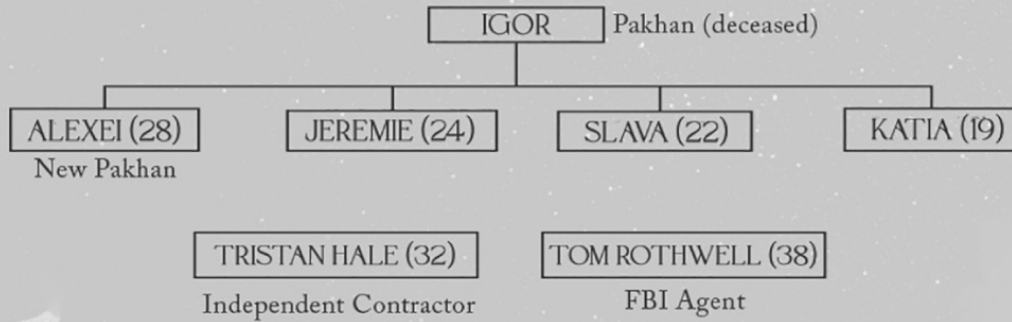
HOUSE OF CALLAGHAN



HOUSE OF BANDINI THE CHICAGO OUFIT



HOUSE OF RASPUTIN THE BRATVA



*Here I opened wide the door;—
Darkness there, and nothing more.*

—*Edgar Allan Poe*

*May the flowers remind us why
the rain was so necessary.*

—*Xan Oku*

term: BAD BISHOP

In chess, a bad bishop is a bishop that is blocked by its own pawns, making its scope and the number of squares it can control very limited.

A bad bishop is considered irredeemable.

PLAYLIST

(Best enjoyed when listening in this order)

“NAnthem Vol 1”—A.M., Shaone & Pepp J One

“SuperVillain Origin Story”—whatyoudid.

“Aria”—Lucariello feat. Raiz

“In A Grave”—notefly, HVLO & IOVA

“Don’t Talk”—Cheska Moore

“Won’t Run Away”—Kaphy & DEIIN

“Animal Instinct”—The Cranberries

“Clubbed to Death”—Skeler & Devilish Trio

“Sugar”—Apollo On The Run & Georgina Black

“Pink Venom”—BLACKPINK

“Seven Nation Army”—The White Stripes

“Shout”—Tears for Fears

“No.1 Party Anthem”—Arctic Monkeys

“As the World Caves In”—Matt Maltese

“Forever Young”—Alphaville

“9 Crimes”—Damien Rice

“Only When I Sleep”—The Corrs

AFTERWORD

Don Machiavelli “Vello” Ferrante was dying.

It was the worst-kept secret in the Mafia.

His diagnosis was a mystery, his decline rapid; death scratched its pointy claws on his door.

Penetrated the paper-thin, yellowing leather of his skin.

Drip-drip-dripped from his dim, dry eyes.

It was pathetic—*unacceptable*, even—that he reeked of it.

The stench of dysfunctional liver and kidneys exuding from his shriveling body.

The putrid breath.

The unraveling of his mortal existence.

Vello hated games, with the exception of chess.

He was a master chess player.

Chess was good. Smart. Strategic.

Chess was *war*.

You conquered and divided. Captured and ruined.

Most importantly, chess was fair.

All of it wouldn't have mattered, if Don Vello wasn't important.

As it happened, he was the big boss. The ruler of New York.

Being the head of the Ferrante Camorra clan meant he was free to choose whoever he saw the most fit to be his successor.

There was Luca, his oldest son and natural heir. Part aristocrat, part horseman. Calculated and quiet. Smooth and cold as marble.

Achilles, his middle son. Feared by all and loved by none. A Greek warrior. A monster that contorted itself into the form of a human, always one moment away from bursting at the seams.

And Enzo, his youngest son. With the warm, whiskey eyes and pliant nature. Far too handsome than any man had the right to be. The charmer. The *persuader*.

Now there was his son-in-law, too, thanks to Lila's marriage. Though he seemed too unhinged to reign over anything that wasn't hell.

And then there was his favorite. His secret son. His golden boy. *Essere il Beniamino*.

Not a high-born Ferrante, but capable nonetheless.

He'd come into play. But not now. Not *yet*.

He had a rook and a knight, a bishop and a king. A few pawns, and a queen.

Vello stared at the Battle of Waterloo chess set in his office, stroking his chin with the little energy he had left.

He could live like this for months. Maybe even years. But he knew when he wanted to die, and how. All he needed was to appoint his successor.

One of them was going to take his place. To lay claim to his blood-soaked territory.

From the entire East Coast to Naples, Italy.

Become the don of the Camorra. The indisputable ruler of the underworld.

But *who*?

Luca

Achilles

Enzo

~~*Tiernan*~~

Essere il beniamino

CHAPTER ONE

TIERNAN

362 DAYS TO SELF-DESTRUCTION

Pain.

It was one of my favorite delicacies.

I savored the hot lick of a sharp knife, the icy kiss of metal shackles, the explosive heat of bones crushing beneath knuckles. Really, there was nothing better than getting a little fucked up to remind me I was alive.

Apparently though, even I had my limits.

I found them in the basement of the Ferrante crime family. Zip-tied onto a wooden chair that reeked of shit, piss, and dried blood. My face was swollen from being beaten to a pulp for the last forty minutes.

The first twenty were enjoyable enough. Fuck, I even got a little stiffy when Achilles took out the brass knuckles. Now, however, I'd overindulged. This was overkill, even for a pain connoisseur like me.

The actual violence wasn't the problem; death was always an option in my line of work.

I just hadn't realized the cause of mine would be boredom.

I was half tempted to finish their job and slit my own throat.

It was better than listening to them droning on about my little...what shall I call it? *Art project*.

"My, my." Achilles drove his fist into my face, sending me careening across the floor. An inferno of blood exploded from my nostrils. "I see why the Rasputins call you Deathless. You refuse to fucking die."

A metallic grunt skulked up my hollowed chest. I shifted my body so as not to crush my wrists under my weight, darting my tongue to catch the

river of blood snaking along my cheek. “Maybe you’re just bad at killing people.”

A forceful blow found my ribs. This time it was Enzo Ferrante, the baby brother. Felt like he ruptured my liver. As if the poor organ didn’t have its hands full as it was. “Zip it before I skin you scrotum to face, Callaghan,” he warned, his voice cheery and cordial.

When were we getting to the good part? Time was money, and unlike the Ferrantes, I had to earn my keep every night.

Enzo spat on an open wound in my face, his saliva irritating my raw flesh.

In return, I spat a ball of phlegm and blood on his shoe.

“Christ, these Louboutins are hand sprayed by Banksy,” he muttered. “Have you no shame? And to think I send you Christmas cards every year.”

He did. Though I never opened the fucking letters.

The Ferrantes ruled 90 percent of New York. Personally, I wouldn’t put them in charge of an automatic door. I reigned over the remaining 10 percent, and with a deadlier fist. I was the future. They were the past. And they knew it.

Some people collected stamps. Others coins. I collected my enemies’ craniums. It was an economical hobby, if not a little messy. It also sent an accurate message—I wasn’t someone you wanted to fuck with, over, or in general.

Consequently, there was a human skull discarded between us. My little weekend splurge. The skull belonged to Igor Rasputin, the head of the Bratva. Well, *ex-head* now, evidently. This was what got the Ferrantes’ panties in a wad.

“Mind Igor’s cranium,” I said dryly. “I plan to use it as a penholder.”

“Gonna be hard to pen letters without hands, Alexander Hamilton,” Luca tutted.

A flicker of irritation passed over my face. A rare flash of humanity. Luca noticed. He pressed on. “What’d you think was gonna happen when we called you here? You killed the West Coast’s pakhan in our territory.”

“And you’re welcome.”

“Excuse me?”

“If you took better care of said territory, he wouldn’t be coming here, fucking your whores, sampling your drugs, poaching your soldiers.”

Achilles moseyed over to me. His fingers fastened around my neck, his thumbs hiking my Adam's apple up my throat. Choking me to death on my own cartilage? Creative. I despised all things mundane, and that included artless murder. Achilles Ferrante was a cold-blooded monster. But hey, at least he wasn't mediocre.

His brothers pulled him back before he cut off my air supply, slamming him against the wall. The three broke into an argument in Neapolitan, their lips moving a mile a minute.

Waiting for them to stop bickering, I examined my surroundings in boredom.

As far as torture chambers went, this one was adequate. Stone walls bracketed the room. It was dark, cold, and packed with medieval torturing devices. The iron maiden, the rack, the pear of anguish. There was also a generic knife rack, a chainsaw, and a wall of artillery. It was Disney World for psychopaths. And I wasn't allowed to test any of the rides.

The door at the top of the steep stairway was padded with noise-canceling foam. No one was coming to save me.

Not that there was anything to save.

No soul.

No heart.

No conscience.

I was an animated corpse. Bones, muscles, flesh, and menace. Vengeance was my fuel, and it was enough to keep me moving, just about.

At last, Luca broke out of their human circle. He grabbed me by the collar and pulled me back into a sitting position. He popped a cigarette into my mouth, flicking his Zippo to torch the tip.

So we got into the good cop/bad cop portion of the night. Yay fucking me.

"You killed the head of Bratva," he surmised, voice shredded by cigarettes. "We have good business with them. Drugs, weapons, recycling routes. You're costing me money, Callaghan. And I *like* money. You know what I don't like?"

"A clean pair of fucking lungs?" My gaze halted on the cigarette in his hand.

"People who stand in the way to my money. I always find creative ways to get rid of them."

"Send me the bill," I drawled.

“It’s not just monetary.” Luca kicked the pakhan’s skull sideways. “New York belongs to us. When you go around killing people in our zip code, it makes us look like we don’t have a grip on our own ground.”

“Where’s the lie?” My voice was distant and disinterested. “What the fuck was a Bratva boss doing deep in Camorra territory?”

“Family function,” Enzo ground out. “His nephew’s graduation. Igor asked for permission, which I personally granted. You made me look like an idiot.”

He didn’t need me to look like an idiot. He was doing a fine job by himself.

“I found him exiting your club,” I reminded him.

“It was a very emotional ceremony, okay?” Enzo said earnestly. “He took the nephew to have his first drink there. Adorable, if you ask me.”

“My beef with the Rasputins extends beyond geography and politics. I won’t stop until I kill the entire family.” I spoke around the cigarette. I didn’t smoke. Not very often, anyway. Here and there, and mostly weed. I was far too committed to my other vices—violence and greed—to pick up a third one. “And if they dare set foot in this city, I sure as fuck am going to take advantage.”

“Let’s hope your beef with them extends into the afterlife, too.” Achilles slapped my back, nearly making me cough out a lung. “Because next time you take liberties in Camorra territory, I’ll smoke your ass like a pork’s butt.”

“Considering they’ve been eyeing New York for years now, you’d be a fool to intervene.” Talking sense into the Ferrantes was the equivalent of fucking a roadkill into resurrection, but just like a wayward squirrel, something compelled me to try.

“New York’s ours,” Luca snarled.

“Is it?” I marveled. “I own the Bronx, and the Russians have been buying Manhattan land for years now. What you have with them isn’t business, it’s a hostile takeover.” I spat out the cigarette. “You’ve been losing prestige for a solid decade. Once you lose the Upper East Side, the empire falls. It’s already decomposing. Why do you think your father hasn’t picked any of your sorry asses to replace him yet? You reek of weakness.” I managed to keep my irritation out of my tone. *Just*. “Give me a blank check to finish the Russians off.”

“You want us to think you have our best interests in mind?” Luca took a drag of his cigarette, wafting the smoke sideways. “After all this time?”

I’d known these fuckers since I was fourteen. They aged like a fine corpse.

“I’m killing them because of my own personal vendetta.” I cracked my neck. “Our interests happen to align, that’s all.”

“What business do you have with them?” Luca propped his winged boot on Igor’s skull.

A locked jaw and a jaded stare were my official response.

“You’ll have to kill a shit ton of soldiers before you get to Alex Rasputin.” Enzo tapped his lips.

Igor’s son. Bratva’s second-highest rank. The next pakhan.

“Don’t threaten me with a good time.”

“That’s a big-ass operation you got there.” Achilles scrubbed his knuckles over his cheekbone. “Even if we let you go on your deranged quest, you don’t have the manpower.”

“I could use a helping hand.” I arched a meaningful eyebrow.

“No way are we getting ourselves into a full-blown Mafia war.” Luca shook his head. “Not my circus, not my monkeys.”

“Fine. Stay out of my way, then.”

Achilles mulled my words over, the menacing glint in his eyes sharpening. “My problem with your proposition is twofold.”

I stared at him impassively, knowing another fucking TED Talk was about to ensue. Goddamn Italians and their love for words.

Achilles didn’t disappoint.

“One, we’re the ones who’ll get the brunt of it when Alex gets fished out of the Hudson River,” he said.

That was an easy fix. I could kill him anywhere on the map. “And the second?”

Achilles pushed off the wall, stalking over to me and crouching down so our faces were an inch apart. He was one gruesome motherfucker, with a face even a blind mother couldn’t love. Rumor had it every inch of his flesh was scarred, burned, or both; every part of his body from the chin below was covered in elaborate ink.

“I still haven’t punished you for killing Filippo,” he rasped.

Not this shit again.

Ten months ago, I offed one of the Ferrante soldiers when I kidnapped a woman he was watching over. Pure collateral damage. Nothing personal.

"I already told you. I thought he was cannon fodder, not the family pet."

"Would that have changed things?"

Not really. But people—even sociopaths—liked to play the what-if game. To ponder the alternatives for the path their lives had taken.

"I'd have aimed for the heart, so his face wouldn't look like Irish stew."

The Camorra loved open-casket funerals. Seemed a bit ambitious considering their occupation if you asked me, but no one fucking did.

"*Che palle.*" Achilles slapped me with the side of his gun, sending my face flying sideways. My boredom morphed into impatience. I really needed to go check on my businesses.

"You've been a thorn in our side for far too long, Callaghan." Luca produced his own gun from his holster. Cocked it.

Who was he kidding? If he wanted me dead, I wouldn't be here, listening to their lecture. Death was a luxury they didn't offer me. Instead, I had to watch their meltdowns on loop.

"Nah, man. I say if the Irish and Russians want to off one another, we should let them," Enzo suggested gleefully. "*Muoia Sansone con tutti i Filistei.*"

"Enough with the chitchat," I growled. "Just do what you have to."

"Enzo. Knife," Achilles ordered. Enzo glided toward us, disposing of his knife in Achilles's open palm. The latter grabbed a fistful of my hair, tilting my face upward. Our eyes met.

"You know." Achilles pressed the blade to the center of my neck. The tip traveled upward, toward my chin. "The bullet you put in Filippo's head came out of his eye socket. We never found his eyeball."

Eyeball it was, then.

Not a terrible loss. I'd seen enough of this world and hated it and everyone in it.

"Filippo was close to me as well." Luca jammed his fists into his pockets. The blade of Achilles's knife trekked north, sailing across my cheek and toward my left eye. "But you'll be no use to me completely blind. I'll take my favor some other time."

"Your sainthood's in the mail," I drawled, never breaking Achilles's stare.

"Right or left?" Achilles asked.

“Your pick.” I hitched a shoulder up. “But do it in the next five minutes. I have underground casinos to run.”

“Your next stop is the ER, shitbag.”

If I had a sense of humor, I’d laugh. Getting my eye plucked out without anesthesia wouldn’t even rank as the fiftieth worst thing that happened to me in my twenty-eight years on this planet.

“Losing an eye will have its perks.”

“Is that so?” Achilles took the bait.

“For one thing, I’ll no longer have a 20/20 vision of your Freddy Krueger face.”

Achilles’s nostrils flared, rage rolling off him like lava. “*Occhio per occhio, dente per dente*. Open wide, motherfucker.”

I didn’t flinch. Not when the edge of the knife poked the side of my eye, forcing its way into the socket. Not when it pried my eyeball from the depth of my skull. And not when I felt it sliding out of the hollow space. I remained still, muscles lax, posture languid, shoulders rolled back. The picture of calm and tranquil.

That was the thing about me.

I never flinched.

I. Never. Fucking. Flinch.

They called me Deathless for a reason. I enjoyed defying my own demise.

My eyeball was now sliding completely out of my body.

The room was lethally quiet, save for my labored breaths. Achilles held my eyeball between his fingers and cut the six muscles that connected it to my brain, then the sheath of optic nerve attaching it to my brain. He stepped back.

Hot, thick liquid decanted down my eye socket to my cheek. I licked it with an easy smile. Tremors ghosted my spine and arms, my body’s reaction to the shocking invasion, but I welcomed the discomfort, making it a part of me.

I was very good at enduring pain. Very good at distributing it, too. I was going to get Achilles in the next round. Touch something of his and destroy it so thoroughly he wouldn’t be able to recognize it for what it once was.

I had the patience, will, and time. The only thing I lacked was morals.

“*Damn.*” Enzo gave a low whistle. “Glass half full, Callaghan—you’re never gonna have a problem dressing up for Halloween.”

“He was too pretty for his own good, anyway,” Luca spat on the floor. “We did him a favor.”

“I believe this is yours.” Achilles tossed my eyeball into my lap, turning around and disposing of the knife in Enzo’s hand. I could only see shadows through my right eye, probably due to the excessive adrenaline. Nothing a couple pints and a good blowie couldn’t fix.

“We done here?” My tone was cool, neutral.

“Make sure you get rid of the Rasputins’ bodies out of the city limits. No paper trail, Callaghan, and *no* fucking feds.” Achilles picked up his whiskey tumbler from a table midstride, his back to me. “Enzo, cauterize his veins so he doesn’t bleed all over Mama’s new carpets.”

Enzo patched up my eye and cut the zip ties on my wrists from behind.

“Hey, nothing personal, right, Callaghan?” He clapped my shoulder, winking. “We’re still on for that poker night next week?”

“Sure.” I curled my index and middle fingers into Igor’s eye sockets, as though his skull was a bowling ball, tucking it under my armpit. A spider crawled up from one of the sockets, hurrying up my arm, searching for an escape. “Nothing personal.”

Eyeball in pocket, I leisurely stopped to admire their different torture devices on my way out.