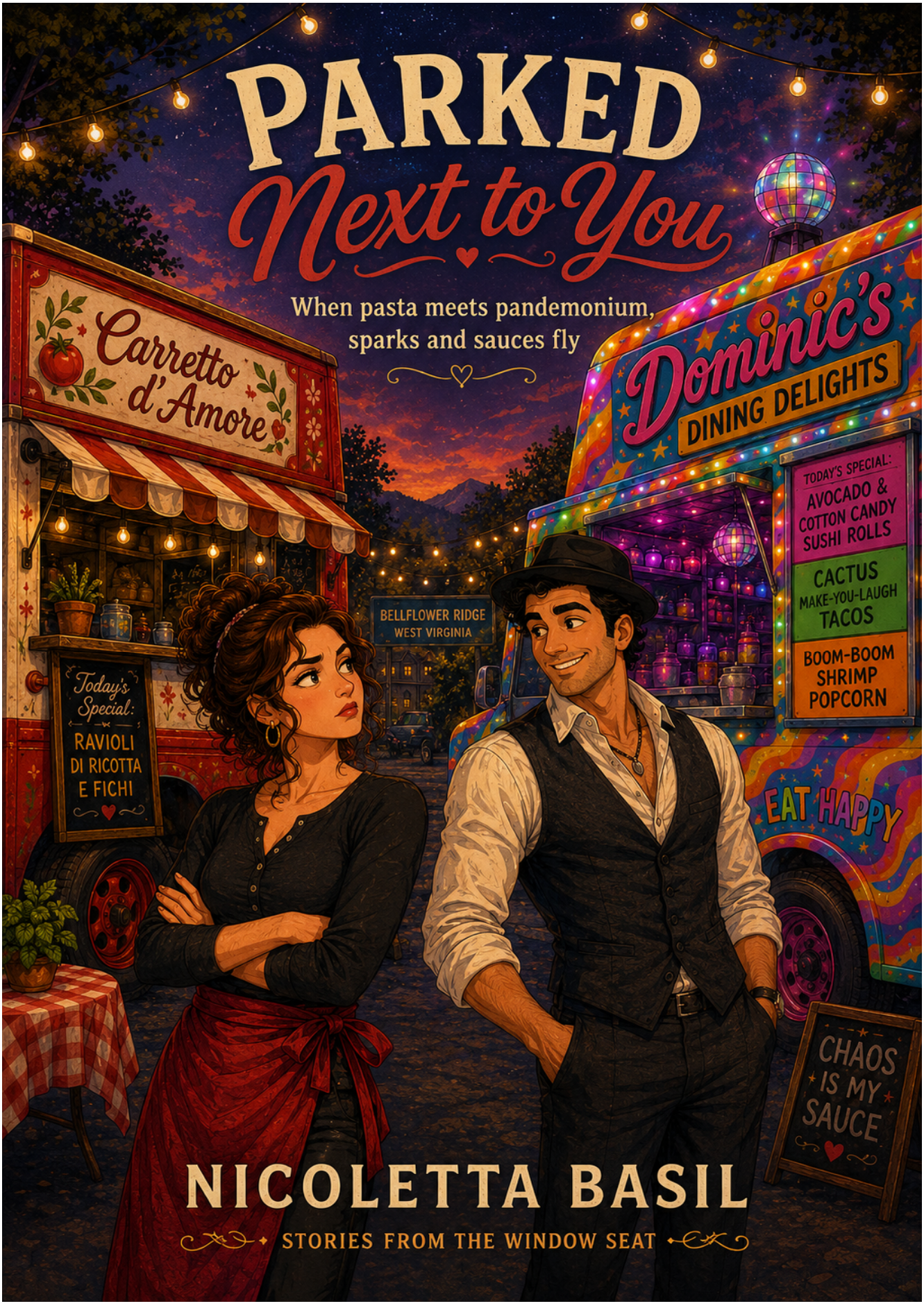

PARKED
Next to You
When pasta meets pandemonium, sparks and sauces fly
Carretto d'Amore
Today's Special:
RAVIOLI DI RICOTTA E FICHI
Dominic's
DINING DELIGHTS
TODAY'S SPECIAL:
AVOCADO & COTTON CANDY SUSHI ROLLS
CACTUS MAKE-YOU-LAUGH TACOS
BOOM-BOOM SHRIMP POPCORN
EAT HAPPY
BELLFLOWER RIDGE
WEST VIRGINIA
CHAOS IS MY SAUCE
NICOLETTA BASIL
STORIES FROM THE WINDOW SEAT

Dear Food Lovers and Fellow Truck Enthusiasts,

The day began like any other over the past six years, with Willa Rossetti's food truck, *Carretto d'Amore*, reigning at the heart of the lot across from the Kingdom Hall on Clementine Avenue in Bellflower Ridge, West Virginia. Her red-and-cream truck stood polished and proud—part shrine, part stronghold—for anyone who believed in the sacredness of pasta done right.

The cracked asphalt shimmered under the early morning sun, already scented with fresh basil and simmering tomato sauce drifting from Willa's open window. Inside, she moved with practiced precision, arranging trays of handmade pasta and wiping down the counters with a cloth as worn and loved as her aunt's recipe book. This was her territory—comforting, familiar, and built on years of loyal customers and quiet, delicious routine.

Gina, her ever-cheerful helper, was already bustling around, refilling napkin dispensers and humming off-key Italian tunes while juggling orders and wiping stray flour from her apron. She was a whirlwind of energy and good humor—the perfect counterbalance to Willa's steady, no-nonsense rhythm.

And this morning, like most, Willa felt... settled. Maybe even content. The sauce was perfect, the forecast was clear, and the line had started forming before the espresso finished brewing. Bellflower Ridge might be small, but in this little corner of it, Willa had carved out her version of heaven.

Until today.

A low rumble grew louder, shaking the quiet calm beneath Willa's feet. She glanced toward the entrance just in time to witness a spectacle that looked like a carnival had exploded onto the lot.



Dominic Winslow's truck skidded in like a roller coaster careening off the tracks. Neon stripes flashed wildly in the morning sun, zigzagging like

a child's attempt at abstract art. The paint job was so loud it practically had its own soundtrack- buzzing neon signs, flashing LED hearts, and a blinking "Eat Me" marquee that flickered like a slot machine on its last spin.

From the back, a fog machine hissed, sending clouds curling over the cracked asphalt like the misty climax of a mystery novel. Crowning the roof was a spinning disco ball surrounded by flashing multicolored lights, casting shimmering reflections that danced across the lot like a party that had arrived without warning.

The side window was festooned with a chaotic jumble of menu signs—handwritten on neon poster board, some slightly crooked, others held together with more duct tape than adhesive. One proudly boasted "Avocado & Cotton Candy Sushi Rolls," right next to a hastily drawn cartoon of a sushi roll wearing a party hat.

Suddenly, the lot filled with a burst of jazzy brass and percussion, a funky, upbeat tune that bounced off every building on Clementine Avenue. The music was impossible to ignore, mixing circus fanfare with a disco groove that set the whole scene buzzing.

Dominic stepped out of Dominic's Dining Delights with an easy smile and effortless charm. He wore a crisp white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a tailored charcoal vest, and a jaunty fedora tilted just so. His dark eyes sparkled with mischievous energy, and his grin could probably sell burnt toast as gourmet.

With a theatrical leap, he climbed onto the roof of his truck and started tap dancing, his shiny shoes clicking out a fast-paced rhythm on the metal. The crowd paused, captivated by his showmanship as he twirled and tapped with the energy of a seasoned performer.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Dominic's voice rang out, smooth and confident. "Welcome to the one, the only—*Dominic's Dining Delights!* Where your taste buds come to party and your expectations come to be dazzled!" I am Dominic and I will be your conductor on your flavorful food journey.

He threw his fedora into the air, caught it with a wink, and bowed deeply. At that moment, a loud POP exploded from the truck's speakers, followed by a glitter cannon blasting a shimmering cloud of sparkles that engulfed an unsuspecting patron, leaving them coughing and sputtering as glitter settled on their hat and coat.



From behind the spectacle, a cluster of confused pigeons fluttered away in dismay as the fog rolled over a precarious stack of empty pizza boxes, which collapsed like a house of cards. Gina tried valiantly to sweep glitter from her hair but ended up looking like a human disco ball, much to the delight of two teenage girls filming the entire thing for TikTok.

Dominic caught sight of them and gave a flamboyant wink. "Smile, ladies! I'm about to make your dreams come true. This is social media *gold*."

Willa leaned halfway out her service window, watching the chaos unfold with a hand on her hip and an eyebrow arched so high it practically needed scaffolding. "Gold?" she muttered, unimpressed. "More like fool's glitter."

Dominic, ever the showman, caught her smirk and raised her a grin. "Aw, c'mon, Rossetti. You're just jealous you didn't think of the fog machine first."

"Please," Willa said, folding her arms. "My food doesn't need mood lighting and pyrotechnics to be edible. Some of us let the pasta do the talking."

"Well, some of us prefer a little dinner *and* a show."

She gave him a sweet-but-lethal smile. "And some of us prefer food that doesn't come with a side of respiratory hazard."

"Fair enough," Dominic said, chuckling. "But don't be surprised when your customers start skipping the rigatoni and tap dancing over to my window."

He hopped down from the roof with a theatrical flourish, landing perfectly despite the uneven asphalt. He swept open the service window of *Dominic's Dining Delights* and flashed a grin that could melt butter and probably had.

"Alright, folks, gather 'round! Feast your eyes on today's lineup – a culinary adventure, if you will."

He pulled out a neon-colored menu board covered in quirky illustrations and bold lettering, waving it like a prize-winning ribbon. The menu was a kaleidoscope of flavors and oddball creations, each item more surprising than the last.

"First up Avocado & Cotton Candy Sushi Rolls. Yes, you heard me right. Sweet meets savory in a way that will make your taste buds disco."

He pointed to the doodle of a sushi roll wearing a party hat, complete with googly eyes. The crowd chuckled.



"Next, we've got the Spicy Mac 'n' Cheese Burrito. For those who like to live on the edge but still want comfort food hugs."

Dominic winked, then tapped the board where "Glitter Garlic Fries" shimmered under a small sticker of a glitter bomb.

"And of course, the crowd favorite Glitter Garlic Fries! Crispy, garlicky, and guaranteed to add sparkle to your snack time. Literally."

He leaned in conspiratorially. "Warning: may cause spontaneous dance parties."

His eyes found Willa again across the lot. She was pretending not to watch, wiping down her counter with slow, deliberate focus, but her ears were clearly tuned in.

"Come on, Willa," Dominic called with mock sincerity. "Even your pasta-loving heart has to admit, it's a party on a plate."

She didn't look up. "If I wanted a party, I'd crash a bachelorette weekend in Nashville. What I *want* is for your disco-ball fries to stay on *your* side of the lot."

Dominic just grinned wider. "Challenge accepted."

Just as Willa was plating the Bolognese for the Coach purse lady, a soft cough cut through the music and mist.

"Excuse me."



Deloris Franklin, a longtime member of the Kingdom Hall across the street and unofficial guardian of Clementine Avenue's moral tone, stood at the edge of the lot. Dressed in a beige cardigan and armed with her trusty zippered Bible case, she peered through the rolling fog like someone inspecting for signs of the end times.

Dominic, in mid-squeeze of adding whipped wasabi onto a churro taco, looked up and offered his signature grin. "Good morning, ma'am! Can I tempt you with a sample of today's featured edible confetti?"

Deloris blinked slowly. "No, thank you. I don't eat anything that sparkles on purpose."

She took a small, dignified step forward, eyes narrowing slightly as another gust of fog curled around her sensible pumps.

"I came over because your... theatrical mist," she said, waving her hand delicately through the air, "has begun drifting toward our meeting hall. It was during the reading from *Revelation* when the mist appeared, and half the congregation braced for the heavens to split open."

Dominic's grin widened. "Well, in fairness, I was going for divine."

Deloris gave him a dry look. "Unless your menu includes salvation, I suggest dialing it back. Half the congregation thought the Great Tribulation had begun during hymn number four."

Willa stifled a laugh behind her tongs.

Dominic placed a hand on his heart. "Point taken. Fog machine going off now."

He flipped the switch, and the machine gave one final hiss, like it too had been scolded by Deloris.

She nodded, satisfied. "Thank you. We try to keep things orderly over there. No smoke, no mirrors, just scripture and strong coffee."

Willa stepped out to join them, arms folded but her mouth twitching in amusement. Deloris turned to her next.

"And you, Willa dear, still offering the marinara without onions?"

"Always," Willa replied.

"Good," Deloris said. "A woman who respects tradition." She gave a meaningful glance toward Dominic's truck, where a sign now read "Glitter Garlic Fries: May Cause Spiritual Reawakening."

Deloris raised an eyebrow but let it go. "Well. Enjoy your morning. And if you see the four horsemen in the fog, kindly direct them back across the street."

With that, she turned and walked back across the lot, mist parting around her like the Red Sea.

Dominic watched her go, then glanced at Willa.

"I'm 90% sure I just got a prophecy and a weather report in the same conversation."

Willa smirked. "You're lucky she didn't call it a plague."

Just as Deloris disappeared into the Kingdom Hall fog like a judgmental specter, Willa turned to find that her once loyal lunchtime line had thinned. Alarmingly so.

Gina, halfway through plating a tray of arancini, froze. "Uh, Willa... I think they're trying the glitter fries."



Willa's eyes narrowed. Across the lot, the Coach purse lady, her Coach purse lady, was licking cotton candy from her fingers and giggling as Dominic presented her with something that looked like a crème brûlée wearing a masquerade mask.

"Et tu, Carol?" Willa muttered.

More of her regulars trickled over to Dominic's truck, drawn like moths to a sparkly, slightly dangerous flame. Someone was taking selfies with the sushi roll mascot. A child was wearing a tinfoil crown made from one of Dominic's takeout containers. Even Officer Ramirez, who usually came by for her penne arrabbiata on Thursdays, was chewing something suspiciously iridescent.

Willa's nostrils flared.

"That's it," she declared, slamming her tongs onto the counter like she was laying down a sword. "I'm closing early before someone asks me if I can 'infuse marinara with vibes.'"

Gina blinked. "You are?"

"I refuse to compete with a food-themed Cirque du Soleil," Willa snapped, already wiping down the counter with her aunt's battle-worn cloth. "I have some dignity left, and I'm not going to waste it explaining why my pasta doesn't sparkle or come with a musical number."

Gina nodded solemnly. "Do you want me to stash the eggplant parm?"

"Leave it," Willa sighed. "Maybe the fog machine will turn it into avant-garde sculpture."

As they battened down the hatches, Willa peeked out one last time. Dominic was now juggling lemons while explaining the molecular breakdown of a deconstructed lemonade cloud to a pair of teenagers.

Absurd. Completely absurd.

And yet...

She lingered for a beat longer than necessary, watching as he laughed, full and unapologetic, then wiped his brow with the back of his hand. His sleeves were still rolled up, the vest hugging his frame in a way that was... profoundly irritating.

He caught her eye. Winked.

Willa muttered a prayer under her breath, mostly that he'd be gone by morning, or at the very least struck by the ghost of Julia Child.

But as she turned to lock the service window, she found herself smiling. Just a little.

This man was dangerous, not in the fog-machine, glitter-cannon sense, but because he made her pulse quicken in a way she was unaccustomed to.



Until next time,
Nicoletta Basil,
From the Window Seat