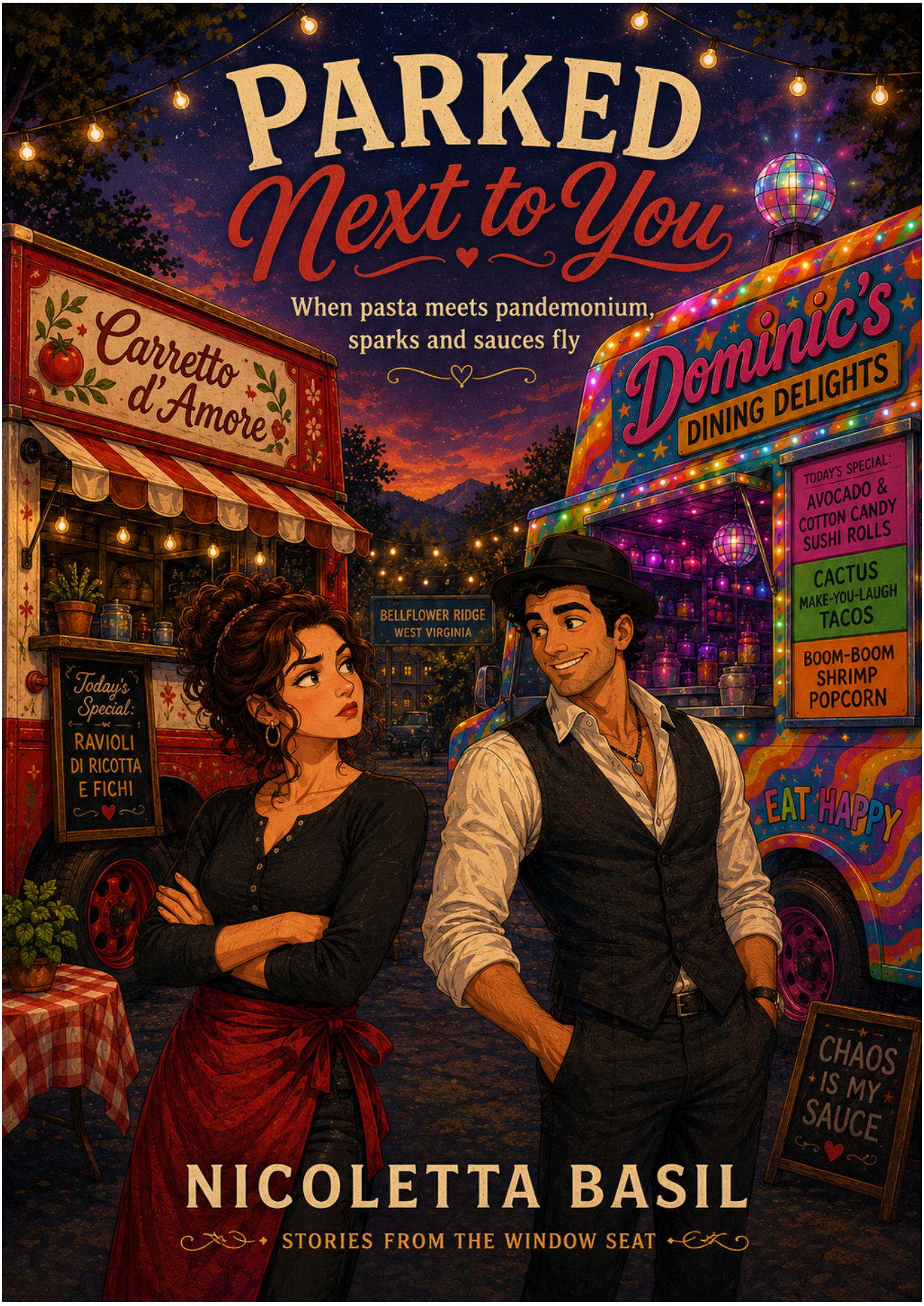

PARKED
Next to You
When pasta meets pandemonium, sparks and sauces fly
Carretto d'Amore
Today's Special:
RAVIOLI DI RICOTTA E FICHI
Dominic's
DINING DELIGHTS
TODAY'S SPECIAL:
AVOCADO & COTTON CANDY SUSHI ROLLS
CACTUS MAKE-YOU-LAUGH TACOS
BOOM-BOOM SHRIMP POPCORN
EAT HAPPY
BELLFLOWER RIDGE
WEST VIRGINIA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

Dear Food Lovers and Fellow Truck Enthusiasts,

Sometimes, when the cloud's part and the morning air smells like simmering tomato sauce and forgiveness, you begin to believe that the chaos has passed.

And then Dominic Winslow shows up. Again!!!



It was Friday morning, and Willa Rossetti had taken a brief break from the cracked asphalt of the food lot to walk across the street to the Kingdom Hall. Every week like clockwork, she brought a tray of hot meals and fresh pastries for the mid-morning volunteers — a quiet offering of goodwill, carbs, and decency. Today's tray featured rosemary focaccia, mini spinach lasagna cups, and lemon-almond biscotti, each wrapped in wax paper and garnished with the kind of care only Willa (or possibly a sainted Italian grandmother) could muster.

Gina trailed behind her carrying the biscotti tin. "I still think you should've brought the chocolate cannoli. Nothing mends community relations like ricotta and a dusting of cocoa."

"I'm not bribing Deloris," Willa muttered. "This is a gesture, not a PR campaign."

She had just reached the Hall's side door, balancing the tray with practiced grace, when a too-familiar jingle of circus music floated across the lawn like a bad omen wrapped in tinsel.

"Don't tell me," she said flatly, not turning around.

"Oh, I'll tell you," Gina replied. "He's back. And he brought... a balloon."

Willa closed her eyes. Counted to four. Thought briefly about turning the biscotti into projectiles.

From behind, Dominic's unmistakable voice rang out: "Good morning, Kingdom Hall dwellers and pasta purists!"

Willa turned to find him striding across the lawn, a tray in his hands, a wide grin on his face, and — of course — wearing a new fedora. This one had embroidered cutlery on the band.



"I come in peace!" he announced, raising the tray like an offering to the dessert gods. "No fog machines. No glitter. Just food, friendship, and a humble apology for any spiritual panic I may have triggered yesterday."

Trailing behind him like a culinary punchline was a large taco-shaped balloon, complete with glittery lettuce fringe and a face drawn in marker. It bobbed gently in the breeze, smiling smugly.

Deloris, who had been arranging folding chairs on the patio, turned with the air of someone bracing for either a blessing or a lawsuit. She gave Dominic a long look over the rims of her reading glasses.

"I hope," she said dryly, "you're not here to trigger another spiritual rising. We're still calming down Sister Fern from yesterday's fog incident."

Dominic bowed slightly and presented his tray. "Today's penance: espresso-laced mascarpone custard layered with chocolate-dipped wasabi biscotti, topped with smoked sea salt and a dusting of matcha powder I hand-whisked myself under moonlight."

Deloris arched an eyebrow. "Tiramisu?"

Dominic smiled. "Inspired by. I call it *Tira-me-swoon.* Technically illegal in three countries. Spiritually awakening in all the others."



Gina snorted. Willa elbowed her.

Deloris studied the tray with suspicion, then — to Willa's eternal horror — took a fork and tried a bite. The silence was brief. But brutal.

"Well," Deloris said at last, licking a smudge of custard from her fork with alarming enthusiasm, "I do believe this might be better than Willa's."

The universe stood still. Somewhere, a squirrel dropped its acorn.

Willa blinked. "I'm sorry — what?!"

Deloris nodded, completely serious. "His layering is impeccable. And there's a boldness in the salt-to-sweet ratio that borders on… daring."

Dominic beamed. "Thank you, ma'am. I live to serve and seduce your taste buds."

Willa felt something in her soul unravel — like a perfectly al dente spaghetti strand snapping in two.

"Boldness?" she echoed, voice tight. "This man once served popcorn drizzled in squid ink and called it *'midnight cinema noir.'* We're trusting his sense of flavor now?" Deloris took another bite. "Don't be petty, dear. It's delightful."

Dominic turned to Willa and offered a small, utterly fake look of remorse. "We can't all be pasta royalty. Some of us have to win hearts with mascarpone… and light spice trauma."

Willa narrowed her eyes. "Enjoy it while you can, Winslow. Your reign will be short and cream-filled."

Dominic winked. "That's how I like my Fridays."

Willa stared in indignation at him. Then she turned on her heel and stormed off, tray still in hand.

Gina followed, trying not to laugh. "Want me to sabotage his espresso machine later?"

"Don't tempt me," Willa said through gritted teeth. "I'm two compliments away from chucking a biscotti through a stained-glass window."

You'd think that after one tiramisu-induced betrayal and a taco balloon sighting, the day couldn't possibly go further downhill. You'd be wrong!

Because Dominic Winslow — eternal chaos in tailored aprons — had not only returned…He had taken up residence. In her lot! And with him came the sound. A sound that had begun to haunt Willa Rossetti more than honking, more than the hiss of scorched garlic, more even than the whispered phrase *"deconstructed lasagna"* from anyone with an undercut and a food blog.

It was applause. For Dominic Winslow!

It started at precisely 11:03 a.m. One clap. Then a ripple. Then a full-blown cheer, the kind usually reserved for rockstars or surprise marriage proposals, not… men in tunics standing on ladders.

Willa peered through the service window of *Carretto d'Amore*, expecting the Pope, maybe a flash mob. Possibly a meteor.

Instead, she saw Dominic — yet again — now wearing a Roman tunic with a golden whisk tucked into his belt like a gladiator's sword. He was standing atop a step ladder in front of his truck, which he had rebranded for the day as:

"Gladiator Grub: Cuisine Worth Fighting For."



There were faux stone columns made of foamcore. A banner fluttered overhead. Someone had printed edible scrolls with the day's menu. And to cap it off, a man in a lion costume was handing out candied fennel on skewers like some deranged Renaissance Faire snack vendor.

And the crowd! It stretched down the block. Across the street. Right past Willa's truck — the same truck where she had just plated saffron arancini with the loving precision of a woman on the brink.

"I'm going to need you to breathe," said Gina, her ever-loyal assistant, fanning Willa with a laminated menu. "In through the nose, out through the vendetta."

"I'm fine," Willa replied, stabbing an arancino with her serving fork. "I love this. I love being a backdrop to a one-man pasta-themed circus."

Dominic spotted her and bowed from his perch like the smug ringmaster he was. Somewhere in the crowd, a child shrieked, "Chef, I love you!"

Willa blinked slowly and considered throwing herself into her own fryer, just as Dominic blew her a kiss. A KISS!

Willa was confused and wondered how this had happened to the nice quiet kingdom she had built. To be clear, Willa's food truck was a temple. It was elegant. Classic. Devoted to simplicity and flavor. She made gnocchi stars by hand. Her tomato soup could mend marriages. Her focaccia had once brought a grown man to tears.



Dominic, meanwhile, had just debuted "combat cannoli" — filled to order and tossed to customers like bridal bouquets. When he shouted, "ARE YOU NOT ENTICED?" the crowd lost its collective mind!

A woman named Cherry attempted to get Willa to move her truck so she could get a cleaner shot of Dominic's "Coliseum aesthetic."

Willa told her, quite calmly, that she had three generations of Sicilian women in her blood and was legally allowed to say no. Cherry moved, without another word.

By noon, Willa's arancini remained untouched. She offered espresso shots. A man asked if she had oat milk matcha foam. Willa experienced a brief out-of-body moment where she was floating above the lot with a wooden spoon, smiting everyone.



Then Dominic strolled over. Still in costume. Still grinning. He held a tray of glitter-dusted artichoke hearts like an olive branch dipped in culinary audacity. "For you," he said brightly. "A peace offering."

Willa stared. "Why are they glittery?"

"Because I believe in joy."

"No," she said. "You believe in sabotage."

Dominic leaned in with that maddening twinkle in his eye. "I think someone's a little jealous of my line."

Willa put the tray down. Very deliberately. And then she let him have it.

"Dominic! Why do you have to destroy Italian food? And why here—in my lot, where I've built something real? This is my livelihood. My heritage. My sacred basil-scented space. And you've turned it into a themed dinner theater with fog machines."

He blinked. Visibly taken aback. "I didn't mean to... take over," he said, quieter than usual. "I was just trying to build a following. Make food fun again."





"You turned carbonara into a popsicle."

"That was a one-time thing."

"And you served spaghetti on a stick."

"It's portable!"

Willa narrowed her eyes. "You made a tiramisu that tasted like matcha latte having an identity crisis."

Dominic hesitated. Then let out a very uncharacteristic sigh. "Okay. You're right. I've gone too far. I've abused the ricotta. I've dishonored the cannoli. I used edible glitter on a stuffed artichoke, and I see now that was... probably a line I shouldn't have crossed."



"You made pizza parfaits."

"I am not proud of that one."

Then Dominic raised his hand. Solemn. Almost reverent. "Willa Rossetti," he said, hand over heart, "I swear on the name of Sophia Loren and the memory of a perfect espresso I once had in Florence

and have chased ever since — I will not meddle with Italian food again. Not here. Not within your marinara-scented radius."

Willa crossed her arms. "Not even tiramisu with a twist?"



"Only if Deloris personally requests it," Dominic said solemnly, "and I will set up shop next to the porta-potty while singing an apology in Italian."

Willa rolled her eyes so hard it was a miracle she didn't sprain something.

He offered the artichoke again. She took it. Because she was mad — not a monster. And yes... it wasn't terrible, Willa thought. Not terrible at all. It was, in fact, divine — crisp, tender, laced with lemon and just the right amount of rebellion. But Willa Rossetti would never admit that. Not even under oath.

Will the sparks keep flying... or will Dominic vanish as suddenly as he arrived, leaving nothing behind but glitter, cannoli crumbs, and a very annoyed Willa?



Until next time,
Nicoletta Basil,
From the Window Seat