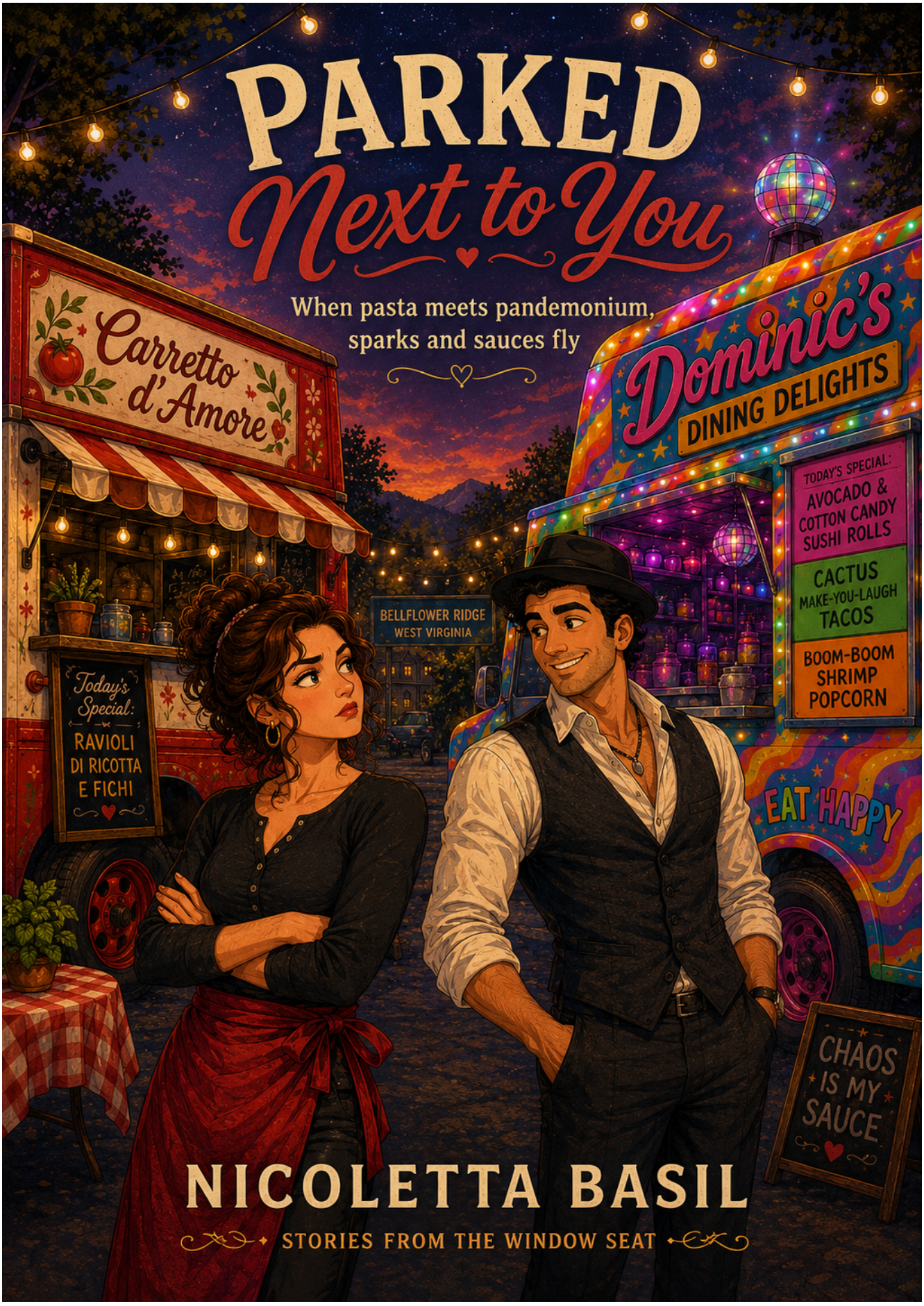

PARKED
Next to You
When pasta meets pandemonium, sparks and sauces fly
Carretto d'Amore
Today's Special:
RAVIOLI DI RICOTTA E FICHI
Dominic's
DINING DELIGHTS
TODAY'S SPECIAL:
AVOCADO & COTTON CANDY SUSHI ROLLS
CACTUS MAKE-YOU-LAUGH TACOS
BOOM-BOOM SHRIMP POPCORN
EAT HAPPY
BELLFLOWER RIDGE
WEST VIRGINIA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

Dear Food Lovers and Fellow Truck Enthusiasts,

By the following week, something was definitely shifting at the food truck lot. Not a storm. Not a scandal. Just… a ripple. The kind that made napkins flutter before the wind even picked up. The kind that made you glance sideways without knowing why.

It started with ravioli.



Willa had been tinkering with the recipe late into the night—quietly, without fuss, while Gina taste-tested like a dramatic sommelier on a cooking show no one had asked for. "This batch?" Gina said, eyes closed, chewing slowly. "It's what marriage thinks it tastes like." Willa actually laughed. "Wow. Are you okay? Do I need to check the butter for mood stabilizers?" Then, shrugging: "It's just roasted fig and brown butter." "It's not just anything," Gina countered. "It's rich. It's flirty. It's got the depth of a man who goes to therapy and actually listens." Willa rolled her eyes but wrote the recipe down.

The next morning, she added the new item to the chalkboard menu:
Ravioli di Ricotta e Fichi – Lemon ricotta ravioli with roasted fig brown butter & toasted pine nuts.



No fanfare. No hashtags. Just the name and a little swirl at the end of the line. By lunch, it had sold out. By Thursday, someone posted a photo with the caption: "This pasta made me believe in love again."

Even Gina was stunned. "You did this with figs. Figs, Willa. Not truffle foam. Not a gold-plated poached egg. Just a fruit that looks like it holds ancient secrets and a grudge."

Meanwhile, across the lot, Dominic's truck had gone fully off the rails. His specials changed daily. His chalkboard was now a rotating disasterpiece of sugar and chaos:
"Mango Mac 'n' Cheese Donut Holes"
"Buttermilk Pancake Stack with Sriracha-Infused Maple Whip"
"French Toast Flight (includes Pop Rocks and a disclaimer)"
He'd added a bubble machine. He was serving things in mason jars, flower pots, and one deeply unsettling incident involving a hollowed-out pineapple and a sparkler.

Gina looked across the lot, eyeing the puff of glittery fog rising behind his truck. "He swore off Italian food. Now he's coping through waffles like it's a form of emotional damage control." Willa snorted. "At this point, the waffles need therapy."

Later that afternoon, Dominic strolled over, sunglasses perched in his hair, gold apron flung over one shoulder, looking like the cover of a lifestyle magazine called Unhinged Brunch Monthly.

He leaned on Willa's service window, casual as a cat. "Figs," he said, nodding at the ravioli. "Didn't see that one coming."

Willa kept her eyes on the plate she was finishing. "That's the idea."

"I mean, they're brave. Unexpected. A little dramatic." He leaned in a little closer. "Kinda like you."

She didn't dignify that with a response.

Dominic tilted his head, watching the dish come together with the kind of reverence he usually reserved for crème brûlée or himself in a mirror.



"Okay," he said. "This is the sexiest pasta I've ever seen. And I once watched a guy drop to one knee over fettuccine alfredo. There was a violinist. A single meatball. Alfredo sauce as witness."

He gave a small, nostalgic sigh. "Honestly, it changed my view on relationships. So much flash. So little follow-through. But man, what a presentation."

Willa didn't respond right away. She added a final sprinkle of pine nuts, handed the plate to a waiting customer, and wiped her hands on a towel—calm, measured, unbothered.

Dominic cleared his throat. "I was going to offer you a sample of my new brunch taco. But now I'm emotionally afraid."

Willa turned to him, smirking. "What's in it?"

"Foam. Regret. The ghost of a missed therapy appointment."

"So... your dating history."

Dominic gasped. "Wow. Brutal."

Gina snorted behind her. "That wasn't a burn. That was a cremation."

But Dominic didn't deflect. Not this time. He let the grin slip—just enough to feel real. "Yeah," he said. "Maybe it was. For a while. A lot of flash. A lot of noise. But I think..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I think I want something quieter now. Something that stays." Willa didn't say anything. But something about the way

she paused, the way her hands slowed, the way her eyes flicked toward him, just for a second—said she heard him. And maybe even agreed.

Then, as if remembering herself, she cleared her throat and turned back to the stove.

"Go dice something," Willa muttered to Gina.

Dominic grinned, backing away with his hands up like a man leaving a crime scene. "Brunch taco offer still stands," he called as he walked. "But I make no promises about the emotional fallout." He returned to his truck without another word.

A few minutes later, as Willa plated another round of ravioli, Gina's phone lit up with a ping. She glanced at the screen, then at Willa, then slowly turned the phone around.

Dominic's Instagram story:

A blurry shot of Willa's chalkboard menu, scrawled fig ravioli front and center. Caption: "This pasta just made eye contact with my soul." Sticker: ✨🔥💔🍝



Willa blinked. "He posted that?"

"Mm-hmm," Gina said. "No tag. No credit. Full emotional spiral."

Willa tried—really tried—not to smile. "I'm still not giving him the recipe." "Obviously." She turned back to the stove, cheeks a little pinker than before, and muttered, "Brunch clown." But she said it softly. And with a smile.

The rush died down by twilight, the sun casting long amber streaks across the lot. The bubble machine behind Dominic's truck gave a final, exhausted wheeze.

Willa stood at the pass, arms folded, watching Dominic wipe down his counter. He was humming—off-key—and dancing a little, badly. Something about the scene made her roll her eyes… and then sigh.

She plated a final ravioli. Just one. Drizzled the brown butter. Added a whisper of lemon zest. It was perfect—frustratingly so.



Gina raised an eyebrow. "Are we delivering now?" "I'm not delivering," Willa said. "I'm returning emotional contraband." She grabbed a fork, balanced it carefully on the plate, and made her way across the lot.

Dominic didn't see her coming until she knocked twice on the metal side panel with her knuckles.

He turned, eyebrows lifted.

"You left this behind," she said, holding out the plate.

He looked down at the ravioli like she'd just handed him a sacred object or a tiny edible truce.

"I... wow. Thank you."

Willa shrugged. "Fig guilt is a powerful motivator."

He grinned, stepping aside. "Want to come in for a second? I have some leftover pancake crumble and a bottle of wine I was pretending wasn't for sadness."

She hesitated. Not for long. "Five minutes," she said. "Ten," he countered. She stepped into the truck, arching a brow. "You negotiate like someone who's bartered with a barista over latte art."

He handed her a cup. "And lost. But with dignity."

They clinked cups and dug in—one fig ravioli, one slow smile, and one very real possibility simmering between them.

They sat in a quiet that was surprisingly comfortable. The fairy lights above them flickered with half-hearted charm.



After a few bites, Willa asked, "Was this always your thing? The chaos? The glitter?"

Dominic laughed under his breath. "You mean the truck?"

"No. The whole… brunch-circus-glitter-mason-jar extravaganza. Has this always been your business model?"

He considered that. "Not always. I used to do more upscale catering. Weddings. Tech events. The kind of gigs where people cared more about buzzwords than taste."

"Dominic Winslow: former minimalist?"

"Briefly. It didn't take," he said. "I wanted to stand out. So, I added things. More color. More sugar. More… everything."

Willa tilted her head. "So why here?"

He paused. Then said it plainly. "Because you were here."

She blinked.

"You're a food truck legend," he said. "People still talk about your carbonara like it paid off their student loans. I figured… if I parked next to someone great, maybe I'd figure out what I was meant to do, too."

Willa didn't respond right away. She just looked at him. Then down at the plate. Her voice was soft when she said, "Dangerously close to flattery."

Dominic grinned, sheepish. "Let me know if I veer into groveling."

The morning after the ravioli, the lot smelled like possibility. And toasted pine nuts.



Willa moved through her prep station with quiet efficiency, sleeves rolled, curls pinned up, a soft smile playing at her lips. She was humming, just a little, as she zested lemons, the tune light and unselfconscious.

Gina didn't miss it. Nor did she miss the swipe of mascara still clinging to Willa's lashes, or the earrings she never wore in the truck. Even her shirt was a little nicer than usual—technically still work-appropriate but suspiciously flattering.

Gina narrowed her eyes. "So... should I alert the press? Or just start calling you Mrs. Circus?"

Willa didn't look up. "It was wine. And conversation. And one ravioli."

"Uh-huh." Gina opened the cooler and peered inside. "Is that why you've zested the same lemon three times?"

"It's called attention to detail."

"Uh-huh."



Across the lot, Dominic emerged from his truck in a blur of gold apron and bedhead, whistling off-key and holding two cappuccinos like a peace offering.

He paused when he caught Willa's eye. Raised a cup. Smiled. Not a smirk, but a smile.

Willa blinked. "Is that... foam art?"

Gina squinted. "Is it supposed to be a heart or a mushroom?"

Willa was still trying to decide when the Health Department showed up. Black sunglasses. Windbreaker. Clipboard with reinforced corners. He looked like the kind of man who alphabetized his vitamins and had a favorite brand of bleach. "Routine inspection," he announced, flashing a badge as though Willa and Dominic were hardened criminals running a mozzarella laundering scheme.

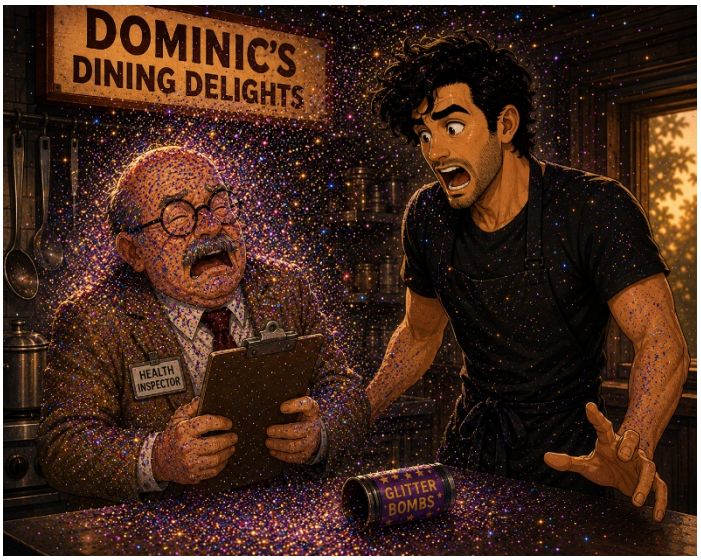
Dominic's whistle cut off mid-note. "Oh good," he said, dryly. "I was just thinking this day was going too well."

Willa felt her stomach drop. Not because she had anything to hide, but because she knew this man. Inspector Donnelly. The clipboard-wielding storm cloud of the food service world. He started with Dominic's truck. Inside, chaos bloomed. The fog machine let out a groan. The fridge was filled with labeled jars of emotional breakfast theory. Donnelly opened one mason jar and asked, "What is this?"

"Unicorn Brunch Punch," Dominic replied. "It's got electrolytes and narrative."

"What is narrative?"

"The emotional arc of the beverage."



Then came the cannon.

PFFFFFT-POP.

Lavender shimmer exploded across the interior. It hit Donnelly square in the face. For a moment, all was still.

Then-shockingly—he laughed.

Just once. Like a man on the brink.

Dominic handed him a towel. "We have a glitter containment protocol. It's... evolving."

Donnelly wiped off his glasses. "Label your sauces. Replace your test strips. And if I inhale glitter again, I'm shutting down brunch across the state."

Dominic saluted. "Understood. Grounded garnishes going forward."

Then Donnelly turned toward Willa's truck. His smile vanished. "Carretto d'Amore," he said. Willa stood up straight. "Right this way." Donnelly entered and scanned the space like he already knew what he'd find.

He didn't smile. "Still the cleanest truck in the lot."

Willa gave a tight nod. "Thank you?"

"It's not a compliment," he said, already opening the fridge. "It's a warning. You know I hold you to a higher standard."

Inside, everything gleamed. Color-coded labels. Dated prep logs. Nothing out of place. Donnelly frowned. "Too clean. Feels performative."

"It feels like hygiene."

He poked a pine nut with a gloved finger. "Over-toasted."

"It's golden brown."



"I said what I said."

He pulled down the spice rack. "Why is the oregano labeled in all caps?"

"It came like that from the supplier."

"Inconsistency is the first step toward chaos."

Gina whispered from the corner, "This man is out here citing font crimes."

Then he ran his finger along the windowsill. A smear. A whisper of flour. He held it up. Willa's mouth dropped open. "Are you kidding me? That's from the morning prep. It's flour. In a kitchen."

"Clean is not sterile. Sterile is not perfect. Perfection... is a mirage."



Willa stared. "You let Dominic glitter-bomb you in the face and I get cited for dust-adjacent."

Donnelly turned without a word and exited. A few beats of silence. Then Gina whispered, "He flour-shamed you."

Dominic reappeared at her window a few minutes later, holding a cappuccino.

"No foam art," he said. "Didn't want to risk a fine."

Willa took it and sipped. "How are you still standing?"

"Good cheekbones. Glitter immunity."

She sighed. "He nearly gave me a violation over a pine nut."

"Same. He said my syrup shelf felt emotionally unstable."

Willa stared. "Did you make that up?"

"I wish."

She looked at him—still a little glittery, still smug—and couldn't help it. She smiled. "Thanks for the coffee."

"Thanks for surviving the clipboard apocalypse."

She raised her cup. "Glitter clown."

He raised his back. "Ravioli queen."

And in the space between them—just for a moment—there was peace. And caffeine. And one very complicated spark, quietly brewing.



Stay tuned.
Nicoletta Basil,
From the Window Seat