

Son *of* *the* mob



Gordon
Korman

CHAPTER ONE

THE WORST NIGHT of my life? My first—and last—date with Angela O'Bannon.

Here's how it goes down:

Five o'clock. I'm already nervous by the time Alex drops by to go over the checklist. Alex is always pretty skittish around my family because of what my father does for a living. Especially since my older brother Tommy, who works for Dad, is hanging around. Tommy's on the warpath, storming through the house like a caged tiger, and ranting about how Benny the Zit is supposed to be here to pick him up for some business or other. Real pleasant.

Once I shut the door to my room, though, Alex is all calm efficiency.

"Car keys?" he barks.

"Check."

"Money?"

"Check."

"Blanket?"

That's for Bryce Beach, where, if all goes well, and with a little help from above, I'll be able to maneuver Angela at the end of the night.

"It's in the trunk," I assure him. "Everything's going to be fine."

"Don't get cocky!" he snaps at me. "This is my love life we're talking about!"

That's Alex's new thing. Since he has no love life, he wants to score vicariously through me. Except I have no love life either. Until tonight, maybe.

Alex's probing eyes fall on the neatly folded sweater on my bed. Every article of clothing in my closet has the same preppy look—my mom's idea of what I should appear to be. Appearances are big with her. Understandable, under the circumstances.

"Vince, you're not wearing *that*?" he says.


"Yeah. Why?"

He slaps his forehead. "It's wool! Scratchy! You're taking her to a horror movie! She's going to be all over you! We need one-hundred-percent cotton, or maybe a nice linen-silk blend. . . ."

By the time we pick out an appropriate outfit and go over the last few rules of engagement ("Don't order the chili! All our hard work falls apart if your stomach's gurgling with swamp gas!"), it's almost six. Alex takes off, and I run down to the basement for a quick workout on the Universal gym. Don't get me wrong. I'm no musclehead. But I kind of enjoy the exercise when I've got something on my mind. Your brain shifts down, narrowing its function to the tiny task of lifting the weight from *here* to *there*. It's like therapy. And it wouldn't hurt to grow myself a pair of shoulders, for God's sake. The Lucas are built like trucks. How did I come out a beanpole, especially when Mom cooks from the *How to Feed an Army and Still Have Leftovers* recipe book? Once, I tried to get her to admit I was adopted. After all, wasn't I the only Luca male with no interest in the family business? But she assured me I was legit—which is more than she could say for the family business. Not that she ever admits to that.

Anyway, I shower up and hit the road. Even from the driveway I can hear my windbag brother inside in the den tearing a strip off Benny the Zit, who finally showed up, I guess. What I don't know at that point is that while I was working out, Tommy got sick of waiting for Benny, borrowed

A reluctant Mafia prince . . .



Vince Luca is just like any other high school guy. His best friend, Alex, is trying to score vicariously through him; his brother is a giant pain; and his father keeps bugging him to get motivated. There is just one thing that really sets him apart from other kids—his father happens to be the head of a powerful crime organization.

Needless to say, Vince's family's connections can put a serious crimp in his dating life. How is he supposed to explain to a girl what his father does for a living? But when Vince finally meets a girl who seems to be worth the trouble, her family turns out to be the biggest problem of all. Because her father is an FBI agent—the one who wants to put Vince's father away for good.



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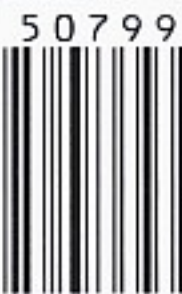
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