

Unscripted

LOVE OFF CAMERA SERIAL EPISODE ONE

BY N.J. ADEL

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Scene 1

Maggie

An ambush, of that Maggie was certain.

She had never been a morning person. Everybody knew that. Dad knew that when he insisted she meet him at eight a.m.

She turned on Ocean Avenue and stopped at a white and blue, ten-story tower. At least this time, she planned to get something in return. But was anything in the world worth walking into this house again?

The doorman greeted her, bringing her thoughts to a temporary halt.

She took off her sunglasses, straining to pop her eyes wider. “Morning.” Her boots echoed on the marble tiles as she ambled to the elevator. *Eyes on the prize, Maggie. Eyes on the prize.*

She slid her hand into the inside pocket of her leather jacket, pulled out a key card, waved it over the keypad, and ascended to the penthouse.

Loretta, the housekeeper, opened the door with a grin on her fifty-year-old face. “Good morning, Maggie.”

There was something kind about this short, plump woman that always made Maggie smile.

“Is she up?” Maggie whispered, taking off her jacket.

Loretta made a funny face as she stowed the jacket away in the coat closet. “I’m afraid so.”

Maggie’s shoulders slumped. “And Dad?”

“He’s waiting for you to join him for breakfast on the terrace.”

Maggie stalked across the living room, heading toward the stellar view of the ocean, Dad smiling at her behind the floor-to-ceiling window.

“Maggie.” A firm voice rang behind her followed by the sound of heels clicking on the floor.

The ambush.

Maggie took a deep breath and spun around. “Andrea.”

It never got old calling her mother by her first name. If she wanted to be called Mom, she’d better earn it. And Andrea had given up that right long ago.

“You cut your hair?” Her mother eyed her from head to toe, her mouth turned down in disapproval. “And what are you wearing?”

Here we go. “What, you don’t like my outfit?” Maggie adjusted the metallic belt against her little, black dress and smirked.

Andrea furrowed her thin eyebrows. “Someone with thighs like yours should not parade them like that. What size are you now? Ten?”

Ignore her. She’s not worth it. You promised yourself. “No. I’m still a six. Same as the past five years.”

Dad stepped into the living room, holding a cup of coffee, a cautious smile on his lips. “Good morning, girls.”

“Daddy.” She hugged him.

He pecked her on the cheek and handed her the cup. “Here, have some coffee.”

She shook her head. “I’m planning to go back to sleep.”

Andrea folded her arms across her chest. “Agreeing to show up here at eight in the morning means you want something really bad. What is it this time?”

Maggie heaved a sigh as she stared at her mother’s hazel eyes. “I don’t want anything from you, thank you very much. I’m here to see Dad.”

“So you ran out of money, and now you need Daddy’s help.” Andrea chuckled. “What do you need the money for? Another one of your aesthetic projects?” She smoothed her skirt as she sat on the couch.

Maggie bit the inside of her cheek, looking at her father. “I’ll wait for you downstairs. We can talk on the way to your office.”

“No, Maggie, wait.” He placed the cup on the glass coffee table, glaring at Andrea. “I’m sure your mother doesn’t mean anything. She hasn’t seen you in a year and is just...interested in knowing what you’re up to these days.”

Maggie's gaze fell on the hardwood floor. "Yeah, right."

He lifted her chin with his finger and smiled at her. "I'll get my things, and we'll head to the office."

Andrea grabbed a gossip magazine from the stack on the coffee table and hid her face behind the glossy paper, while Dad climbed the stairs.

On the cover, there was a bare-chested picture of Mike Gennaro. The taupe brown curls of his hair flowed down to his naked shoulders. His dark brown eyes held a mischievous gaze. A scruffy jaw complemented his strong cheekbones and sculpted lips.

Heat spread under Maggie's skin as she traced down the lines of hairless, chiseled chest and killer abs of the thirty-three-year-old actor. Her eyes landed on the title under the picture.

Mike Gennaro back in L.A.

She stared back at the half-naked superstar, her thumb brushing against her smiling lips.

"He's too old for you," Andrea said. "Nine years too old to be exact."

Eight years and nine months. Maggie cleared her throat. "Who?"

Andrea's head popped from behind the magazine. "Really?"

"I have a boyfriend." Maggie jerked her head in the other direction. "Mike's my friend."

"No, he isn't. He's *my* friend, and *my* client. That makes him an acquaintance to you. Don't mistake him for anything else."

She darted a baleful look at her mother. A snide comment flashed in her head and almost made its way out of her mouth, but she swallowed it when she glimpsed her father coming down the stairs.

Finally.

Scene 2

Maggie

Maggie slid into the backseat of Dad's black Jaguar. After she greeted the driver, Dad touched her knee to get her attention. "How did you get here today?"

"The bus," she answered, a small smile on her lips.

"Nick Dawson's only daughter is taking the bus?"

"Well, when you make four grand a year, bus is your only option."

"Why are you doing this to yourself? You used to make more than thirty thousand a month when you worked with me."

"Dad, you of all people know it's never about money with me. It's about—"

"Passion," he interrupted. "Yeah, yeah, I've heard that speech so many times before. I never want to hear it again."

The direction of the conversation was taking a wrong turn, so she swallowed her resentment in light of more pressing issues. "Speaking of passion, I'm gonna make a movie."

Dad's eyes crinkled at the corners. "What?"

"I co-wrote a script for a short film with a friend of mine, and I'm gonna direct it."

"Okay. Um... I'm not sure I understand. I thought you quit working with me because you wanted to write...books."

"Yeah. I...thought so, too." A sigh escaped her mouth. "But I wanna try directing now."

He nodded, his brows pulling together. "Have you directed anything before, Mags?"

She stared at him for a moment and shook her head. "I did an internship and helped a few friends who go to film school with their projects. They loved my work."

“I don’t think that’s enough.”

“I know. That’s why I’m making this movie. I wanna show the world what I can do. It’s like when actors have showcases.” She clenched her teeth. “Only a little more expensive.”

“How expensive?”

“Ten grand?” She bit her fingernail.

His lashes fluttered. “What?”

She held up a hand. “I know it’s a bit much.”

“A bit?”

“Okay, it’s a lot,” she admitted. “But not to you. Like you said, it’s only one third of what you used to pay me a month.”

“If you want to make movies, why don’t you ask your mother to help you? She can network you—”

A surge of anger ran through her. “Please don’t ever say that again. You know I’d die before I’d ask *her* for help.”

He set his jaw, his eyes sad.

“Dad, I know it’s a lot to ask for since I don’t make you money anymore, but consider it a loan. An investment. I’ll pay you back as soon as I can.”

“With what? The revenues of your blockbuster?”

“Please don’t make fun of me. I just told you it’s a showcase. There’s no money there.”

He combed his fingers through his gray hair. “How about you come work with me again, just for a few weeks? Consider it a *mutual* investment.”

More like a trap. She was wrong. *This* was the ambush.

She squinted at him as if he’d asked her to sell her soul to the devil. “You want me to design rich people’s houses again?”

“Well, you have the degree for it.” He smiled. “And the talent.”

“And I hated every minute of it. Dad...I thought you supported my decision to quit.”

“I did. I just hate to see you waste another year doing something you’ll eventually get bored with...again.”

Ouch. She expected that attitude from Andrea, but coming from him hurt like a slap on the face. The only reason she’d asked him for help and not anyone else was that she thought he believed in her. It turned out he was only indulging his spoiled baby girl’s whims until she’d come back to her senses. “You don’t think I’m gonna make it in the movie business.”

“It doesn’t matter what I think, baby. Only what you think matters.”

She gazed at him, pursing her lips. Then she inhaled and asked the driver to stop the car.

“Maggie, don’t—”

“Good to see you, Dad.”

“Maggie,” he called after her as she shut the door behind her. “The money will be in your account by the end of the day.” His voice trailed behind her.

“Don’t bother. I’m a bad investment.” She stalked away, her fists shoved in the pockets of her jacket.

Her phone buzzed with an email alert. She swiped the screen and glanced at the subject line: Results of our short story competition - Congratulations!

Her eyebrows hooked as she opened the email.

Dear Maggie,

I'm delighted to tell you that your short story, Shreds, was in the top five in this quarter's competition - congratulations!

We'd like to publish your piece in the next anthology, which we're hoping to bring out in mid-November. If you're happy to be a part of the collection, just get back to us and let us know before Wednesday 25th October so that we can announce the winning entries, then we'll send you a check with your \$1,000 prize.

Congratulations once again!

Stephen

Maggie froze for a moment, and then she lifted her head to the bright sky, tears burning her eyes. This was neither the first time she had won a writing

contest, nor did she care much about writing now, but winning at this particular moment meant the world to her. It was all the validation she needed after her most important supporter told her she was doing nothing but wasting her life.

She would make her movie. At any cost. She just had to figure out how to come up with nine more thousand dollars.

Writing a few more pieces here and there wasn't going to cut it. It barely paid for groceries.

The phone buzzed again in her hand, this time with a text message alert. She wiped her face when she saw the name on the screen. Mike. The text read: "Morning, Kiddo. Back from Berlin. Scheduled 4 photo shoots till 3. Call me when u r up. TC."

She sniffled as she tapped the dial icon, and then she placed the phone on her ear, expecting voicemail.

"Carolina, how're you doing?" Mike answered, his voice cheerful. "Why are you up so early?"

The way his Italian accent popped as his rugged voice said her middle name warmed her cheeks. "Um... I haven't slept yet." She ran her finger across her eyebrow. "What're you doing answering your phone? I thought they were getting you dolled up for pictures."

He laughed. "They will...in thirty minutes."

"Okay. How was Berlin?"

"Was all right. Shoot. Promote. Fest. Same old stuff. Anyway, what's up with you, Kiddo?"

"I'm not a fucking Kiddo."

He chuckled. "Missed your potty mouth."

"Really?" She rolled her eyes.

His laughter continued. "No, not really." He paused for a couple of seconds. "But I sure missed you."

"I missed you too, Superstar."

"So what are you up to?"

She took a long breath. “Guess what? One of my short pieces of shit’s just won an award.”

“First, don’t call your stories that. Second, get the fuck out of here! That’s awesome.”

“Thank you,” she muttered.

“Have you told your parents yet?”

“Nope. You’re the first one I told.” Her voice cracked.

“Maggie, you’re all right?”

“Yeah,” she lied. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Why do you sound so upset? You gotta celebrate, not brood.”

“Sure. The award comes with a social media party and everything.”

“Not your kinda party, I know. But I’m sure you won’t have a problem stumbling on one that matches your taste.”

“You know me too well, Superstar.” She puckered her lips. “Any chance I’m gonna see you soon?”

“Er... Yeah. I haven’t seen you in like what, eight months now? Let’s meet at your parents’ place. I have something very important to discuss with Andrea this week anyway.”

What the fuck? “Whatever.”

“Listen, I gotta run now. I’ll text you the day. Take care, Kiddo.”

“Fuck you.”

He cackled. “Love you.”

Scene 3

Mike

Mike slid behind the wheel of his silver Porsche, his sunglasses tilted enough to hide half of his face. Like it was going to work. Fans and paps had already gathered along the street. He nodded and smiled through the glass as he slowly moved forward among the waving hands, bouncing bodies, and popping flashes. His foot went gentle on the gas until he eased through the madness and made the turn.

It'd been fifteen years since he'd decided not to become a chef and made his first movie. He was used to the madness. The attention, the love, the lights, he appreciated. It meant he was still hot, desired, and successful; there was still time before the crowds didn't remember his name.

“Good evening, Loretta.” He took his shades off when she greeted him at the door, giving her his perfected, fan-mode smile.

She didn't smile back. She never did. The old woman hated him for a reason he never cared to know.

She escorted him to the living room and asked what he'd like to drink.

“I'm good.” He sank onto the couch and placed his sunglasses on the coffee table.

“Mrs. Dawson is expecting you. She'll be down any minute.”

He nodded at her and spread his arms along the back of the couch. A chuckle escaped his mouth as she stalked away, murmuring in gibberish.

The lights were dimmed, casting a beautiful hue on the hardwood and glass interior. The room and décor were all shades of brown. Warm. Welcoming. The air smelled like the jasmines adorning the antique vases.

His gaze wandered with the ocean waves as he recalled the house where he was born— where Andrea Dawson was still Andrea Marino, and he was Mickey, il bambino dell' autista—the chauffer's kid. He couldn't remember much of that house now, except that it was big. But again, he was almost ten the last time he

went there. He'd been invited to Maggie's first birthday. The garden swarmed with guests and plenty of children to play with. That day, he had seen Andrea for the first time after she got married. She was nineteen then, and God she was hot.

He glanced toward the sound of heels coming from behind him. Andrea smiled from ear to ear when she saw him, her lips a crimson red like the corseted dress that gave him a good view of her cleavage. Anybody else would have been tempted, but he knew better.

He rose, and she folded her arms around his waist, pulling him in for an embrace. "I missed you, Mickey."

He ended the hug fast. "Looking good. Those fillers are really working for you."

She flipped her long, brown hair as she sat next to him. "Thank you. Maybe I should give you the number of my doctor. You're going to need him very soon."

He smirked. "Nah, I'm good." He put one leg on the other. "James called you?"

"Yes, your manager informed me that you don't want to do *Heavenly Kisses*. No problem. I have two more scripts for you to choose from."

"What is it this time? A rom-com or a romantic thriller?" He snorted. "Listen to me. This isn't just about *Heavenly Kisses*. I don't wanna spend the rest of my acting career doing nothing but being some sexy whatever who saves the day and gets the girl. I'm done with that kind of shit. I want to act. So bring me something different. Important."

She sighed. "I understand what you're going through. Believe me. After this long in the business you get bored. You want to try something different, something new, even risky." She leaned forward, her tits on display even more. "But you can't just make that shift all of a sudden. You have to ease your way into it, pave the way for your audience to accept that change, or else everything you've worked really hard for will be at risk."

"Or maybe I just need a new audience. That's the point of change, isn't it?"

"But we—"

"No buts! *Last Resort* is the last movie on my contract with Universal and the last one of this kind I'm ever gonna make. Next year is gonna be different, and you'd better be ready for it."

“I can’t let you do this. This is career suicide.”

“You know what? I just don’t give a shit anymore. If you can’t get me what I want, I’ll find a new agent who can.”

Her eyes flashed at him “Excuse me?” She jumped to her feet. “Have you forgotten what I’ve done for you? What my family did for you?”

He grabbed his shades and stood. “No, I haven’t, and I never will.” His gaze met hers. “I like what we have. Our friendship and partnership have been very successful so far.” He shifted on his feet. “For me and you,” he added. “I don’t want to end this, and I’m sure you wanna keep making the millions I make you.” He glanced down at her. “So get me what I want.”

Scene 4

Mike

“Hey, Kiddo.” Mike snickered as Maggie cursed in response. He could picture her hazel eyes rolling as he adjusted his cellphone on his ear, climbing into his Porsche. “Why didn’t you come to Andrea’s?”

“Ugh! You really don’t know the answer?”

“But we agreed to meet there.”

“No. You made that obnoxious suggestion, and I said whatever,” she corrected. “You know better than anyone that’s the last place I wanna be, even if it’s to see you.” There was an edge to her voice.

He grunted. “Okay. How about I make it up to you?”

“I’m listening.”

He grinned. “I’m having a party tonight at the AKA. Why don’t you come over?”

“You still live there?”

“Si.” He’d been calling his AKA Beverly Hills suite home for the past two years. After his father passed away, the mansion in Bel-Air was too big and lonely for a single man like him.

“Um... You know I never say no to that, but Kyle isn’t in town tonight. He doesn’t like me going to parties without him.”

His face contorted in disgust when he heard the name Kyle. That nineteen-foot bastard with the cheekbones of a model she met a month after Mike had gone to Europe to shoot Everlasting. The one she’d been with longer than all her boyfriends combined. “Kyle? That slick ass broker bosses you around now? What the fuck?”

“No, he doesn’t. He’s my boyfriend, and I don’t like to upset him.”

His fist tightened around the steering wheel. “So you’re not going to a party just to please some insecure boy who can’t trust you to go somewhere without him for a few hours? Is that what you’re telling me?”

“Jealous much? Why don’t you get yourself a girlfriend?”

Fair question. One he couldn’t answer without having to lie to her. “Maggie, I got weed. Loads of it. You coming or not?”

“Well, when you say it that way...”

“I’m sending a car over at 9:30.”

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