

A woman in a white dress is sitting on a light-colored sofa. She is holding a martini glass filled with a yellow liquid. She is wearing a gold chain bracelet on her right wrist, a diamond-encrusted bracelet on her left wrist, and diamond-encrusted high-heeled sandals. A small tattoo is visible on her left ankle. To her right, a dark round table holds another martini glass filled with a yellow liquid. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

JULIA'S BED

A TREVOR GANTT MYSTERY

GEMMA STONE

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Julia's Bed
A Trevor Gantt Erotic Mystery

by

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Chapter One

A Plan

Julia Spoleto had a dream. Since she was a little girl, she had wanted to open a fine dining restaurant, showcasing the regional cuisine of the Umbria region of Italy, from which her family had emigrated, bringing the Spoleto name with them. She wanted to serve the dishes her grandmother served on Sundays and special occasions when the family gather. She longed for a white-tablecloth restaurant serving dishes like porchetta, imported Chianini beef, raised in Umbria for two millennia, squab, Casteluccio lentils, prosciutto di Noria, thick strangozzi pasta with truffles or porcini mushrooms, and of course chocolate from Perugia. To her, the possibilities were endless.

Julia had had the dream since she was eleven. Now at thirty-two, she had the wherewithal to bring it to reality. She not only had a dream, she had a plan. There remained hurdles, though. She needed to import a trained chef from Umbria. She needed to find a space that met her precise requirements. And she needed to find just the right women.

Women? Yes. Julia had found a way to combine her two abiding passions—food and sex. She planned a restaurant for an upscale clientele to introduce them to Umbrian cuisine and wine. Elsewhere on the premises, she would cater to an exclusive group with more specialized tastes.

The first step was to find the real estate and build it out to her specifications. Now she stood in the living room on the parlor level of a four-story Victorian brownstone on West 71st Street between West End and Riverside. It was a beautifully restored space with wood paneling, two chandeliers, floor-to-ceiling built-in bookcases with a library ladder, and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking 71st Street. Off living room was a similarly appointed formal dining room with a high ceiling, another chandelier, and a gas fireplace.

Beyond that was a spacious eat-in kitchen with state-of-the-art appliances. There were hardwood floors throughout.

“What is your first-impression, Ms. Spoleto?” the realtor asked.

Julia surveyed the space. “It’s lovely,” she replied. “I understand that they opened it to the adjacent brownstone to make a single residence.”

“That is correct. It’s total of ten thousand square feet with twelve bedrooms.”

Julia thought it sounded ideal for her purposes. Restraining herself from betraying her enthusiasm, she asked only, “May I see the master?”

“Of course,” he said.

The master bedroom had an eleven-foot ceiling, three tall windows, and another gas fireplace. The large ensuite bathroom was all-marble with a large Jacuzzi. *Better and better*, thought Julia. During business hours the parlor level would be used, but after-hours it and this bedroom would be her apartment. “As I mentioned to you, Mr. Parker, I plan on opening a restaurant. Is there space for that?”

“The garden level of the two townhouses would be ideal dining space. And the basement could be built-out for a professional kitchen. As for the twelve bedrooms, you could use eleven of them for Airbnb.”

“Mr. Parker, thank you for the advice. But I value my privacy, and I entertain a lot. I’ll of course, want to tour the rest of the home, but assuming it suits my purposes, what is the asking price?”

The realtor looked at the elegantly dressed woman in front of him. He turned so she would not see him gulp. Though she looked wealthy and his initial research on her confirmed this impression, he thought, *This is where I lose this sale—and my commission*. “They are asking fourteen-point-five million. The property, as I am sure can appreciate, is a unique opportunity, but it has been on the market for a year. There have already been two price reductions, totaling

five hundred thousand. I would guess you can get it for somewhere in the twelve million range.”

By any estimation, Julia was a beautiful woman, 5’9” in her bare feet, slender but buxom, with raven hair, dark brown eyes, and a light olive complexion, reflecting her Italian ancestry. She had begun modeling at sixteen. Her exotic good looks and her poise helped her rise to the top ranks of her profession. With her figure, she got the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit cover twice. She made a lot of money. She was frugal and saved as much as she could.

Much to Mr. Parker’s relief, the woman standing before him did not blanch or seem to balk. “Assuming the rest of the building is up to the standards of what I’ve seen so far, that should be satisfactory. The type of reduction you suggest would be helpful. I will have signification build-out and start-up costs associated with the restaurant and kitchen.”

“I understand, Ms. Spoleto. As I suggested, I think we have a motivated seller here.”

As she toured the rest of the property with the agent, Julia’s plan began to clarify in her mind. For two townhouses built in 1893, the eleven remaining bedrooms were spacious and airy. They had been updated, and all had closets rather than depending on armoires. Not every room had its own bathroom, but there were six full baths and two half baths. To her, it seemed perfect for her designs, but she did not want to seem too eager. “Assuming you have the papers with you, I am willing to make an offer today. Do you think an offer of twelve million, as you suggested, would scare the owners off?”

“I don’t think they’d reject it out of hand.”

The house had no furniture in it. The owners, eager to get out of a forty-thousand-dollar-a-month mortgage payment for a house they obviously no longer lived in, countered with twelve and a half million. In the end, they went to contract for \$12,250,000.

Though the cost outlay was far from insignificant, Julia considered herself lucky to have found such a large and well-appointed space ready for occupancy, though there would still be construction delays. She hoped she was as fortunate finding a chef. She placed ads in the restaurant trade magazines and got several responses, but one rose above the others.

Paolo Martini was an Italian-American. He studied at the Culinary Institute of America and then travelled to Italy to train at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Perugia, so he knew Umbrian cuisine. He now worked at one of the best Italian restaurants in the city as *sous-chef*.

At first, it sounded too good to be true. He was in a stable situation. He had, however, applied. Julia could offer him a promotion to *chef de cuisine* and a substantial pay raise. He'd be able to manage his own kitchen and create his own menu, under Julia's supervision, of course.

Even though the restaurant would not be open for months, Julia put Paolo on payroll to lock him in. As work progressed, he helped supervise the construction of the kitchen. She concentrated on getting the look of the restaurant right and on furnishing the house. With ten thousand square feet, that was a Herculean task in itself.

At last, everything was done, and the restaurant was ready to open. All that remained was hiring a staff. Subject to payroll limits, Julia allowed Paolo to interview and choose his kitchen brigade and the busboys.

Finding the right women seemed to Julia to be the biggest challenge. They had to be beautiful and shapely. That was easy enough. Through her modeling connections, she could find plenty who fit that description in New York, who had modeling aspirations and had never made it in that highly competitive world. There were more in Atlanta and Los Angeles. Whatever modeling experience they had would have given them the requisite "presence." Those she hired, though, had to be willing and eager to buy into Julia's vision.

These were not to be your run-of-the-mill wait staff. They needed to possess a particular skill set. Julia would pay well. The women wouldn't be working for tips, an evil built into the restaurant system, as far as she was concerned—though, if her scheme succeeded, these would be generous. Plus, they would be live-in at the townhouse. And your own rent-free room in a beautiful building in a good neighborhood in Manhattan was in itself a huge supplement to income.

Julia identified two dozen interested women and arranged personal interviews for them. She had moved into the West Side townhouse. She interviewed them in the elegant living room with its natural light and airy feel. The interviews all followed a similar format. She explained the specialized duties and the benefits. She needed ten or eleven, and she easily could fill her needs from the applicant pool. One individual especially caught her eye.

“Rebecca Nguyen. So you are Vietnamese?” asked Julia.

“My grandparents and parents emigrated from Vietnam. I was born here,” the slender but busty woman sitting across from her replied.

“Your resume seems quite suited to my needs. You've done some modeling, and you've been a server in restaurants.”

“You know how it is. When you're trying to establish yourself as a model or an actor, you wait a lot of tables,” she said, smiling. “And although I have nice tits, I'm petite and short for a top model.”

Julia met the woman's eyes and returned the smile. ““Indeed I understand. Let me tell you about my particular requirements for this job and the benefits. You'll be very well paid. You won't be depending on tips to survive, though tips could be significant. You'll live here on premises in your own room rent-free. If you are interested, I'll show you before you leave.” She did not wait for a reply but forged ahead. “During business hours, this floor will be in use, but in off

hours, you are welcome to use the living room and the kitchen.” She paused and contemplated the woman in the chair. “The establishment will be unique, a fine dining restaurant with another special aspect. You and your fellow servers will serve wearing only lingerie. Would that bother you?”

“I’ve worn far less for photo shoots,” she said looking Julia in the eye and smiling again.

Julia once more kept her eyes locked in Rebecca’s gaze and returned the smile. “So you’ve done nude modeling.” It was not a question but a statement.

“Of course. I’m proud of my body, and it’s a job.”

“You’ll be modeling the lingerie, which we’ll sell. Not off your body. Think of every service as a fashion show.” Julia paused again. “You’ve been photographed naked. Have you ever done pornos?”

For the first time in the highly unusual interview, Rebecca registered distress. “I did a couple of adult films, but I didn’t like it. It’s a sleazy business.”

“I mentioned the special aspects of this place. Besides restaurant patrons, we will cater to a select clientele of well-off individuals who will use the upstairs for their own pleasure.”

“So you’re talking about a sex club.” It was Rebecca’s turn to make a statement rather than asking a question.

“I agree with you about porn. Does participation in an enterprise such I discuss offend you?”

“Not at all. I told you I’m proud of my body. I feel it gives me a certain power over men.”

“Our clients may not all be men. How do you feel about lesbian sex?”

“Are you a lesbian?” Rebecca inquired her tone nonchalant.

Julia thought the question the slightest bit impudent, but given the subject of the conversation, it did not strike her as

inappropriate. Besides, she thought, *It might open up an interesting possibility.* “No, I like men. I’m bi.”

“So am I,” answered Rebecca without hesitation.

Julia smiled. “Your health and safety would always be scrupulously guarded. Within those strictures, however, we will cater to fetishes. Do you know anything about BDSM?”

“Just what the letters stand for.”

“That’s not a problem. We can teach you.”

“We?”

“By ‘we,’ I mean me,” Julia said, smiling again. “So do you want the job?”

Rebecca’s smile turned unmistakably lascivious. “May I see my room?” Julia stood and extended her hand to the young woman. They walked to the third floor, hand-in hand.

“The two brownstones together have twelve bedrooms. One of them is mine. But you can have your pick of the rest.” Still holding her interviewee’s hand, she inquired, “Now, would you like to see *my* room?”

When the pair reached the master, Julia leaned in and kissed Rebecca. “Take off your clothes,” she instructed.

“Is this part of the usual interview process?”

“No, the interview is concluded. You have the job, if you want it. Now get undressed.” Julia stepped back to watch and regard the woman before her. Without hesitation, Rebecca began to strip, tossing each item of discarded clothing on a convenient chair. *Obedient*, Julia thought. *That’s a positive sign.*

When Rebecca was naked, Julia instructed, “Undress me.” She again did as she was told. Because there was no handy chair—and the bed seemed inappropriate because it would be needed—she threw the garments on the dresser. When Rebecca pulled off her panties, Julia wrapped her arms around her and kissed her deeply. Rebecca’s mouth opened, ready to receive her tongue. Julia took both her hands and pulled her onto the bed.