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Drop Dead Beautiful

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Chapter One

The house in Pasadena was grand by anyone's standards. Large and imposing. Gated. Immaculate hedges and greenery. An impressive colonial mansion that reeked of money, nothing flashy.

In this mansion resided Mrs Penelope Whitfield-Simmons and her son, Henry. Penelope was the widow of the powerful newspaper magnate Logan Whitfield-Simmons – a Scottish immigrant who'd arrived in America penniless, and gone on to amass an enormous fortune. He'd died at the age of seventy-two from a massive heart-attack while out on a fishing trip with his only son, Henry. Henry, twenty-two at the time of his father's demise, was now thirty, but he still lived at home. Penelope wouldn't have it any other way. She expected Henry to stay, giving him anything he wanted – anything except enough money to leave, because in Logan's will, Henry received nothing until the death of his mother, and Penelope – a healthy seventy – had no intention of going anywhere.

Henry did nothing. He had no drive, no ambition. When he was younger and had just got out of college, he'd decided he wanted to be an actor. His parents had been appalled. "Acting is for pansies," his father had roared. "And I am not having one of those in my family. Besides, your place is in the newspaper business with me."

Henry had immediately appealed to his mother. "Listen to your father," Penelope had said, disapproving expression firmly in place. "Everyone knows that people in the film business are all drug addicts, sexual deviants and perverts. They're not our kind, dear."

Ha! Henry had thought. As if she would know.

Behind their backs Henry tried his best. He'd secretly taken acting classes, found himself an agent, even visited a film set. All of this without his family's knowledge.

One day a fellow student in his acting class had casually mentioned that Alex Woods – the renowned Oscar-winning director – was auditioning young actors for the lead role opposite the very famous Venus Maria in his new movie, *Seduction*.

Henry was excited. He set about finding out everything he could regarding the upcoming film. He even went so far as to bribe his agent's assistant to get him a copy of the script. Once he had the script in his hands he'd studied it religiously, learning the lead role and practising his dialogue and moves in front of a full-length mirror. When he'd considered himself fully prepared, he'd instructed his agent to get him in for an audition.

His agent had looked at him as if he was a mental case, and informed him that getting an audition for an Alex Woods film with an actor who had no prior experience was virtually impossible.

Henry came from a world of extreme wealth and privilege. At an early age he'd learned from his father that in their world nothing was impossible.

With a great deal of manipulating he'd arranged to get himself in for an audition.

The day he arrived for his appointment there were fifteen other young actors sitting around in the cramped waiting room. Henry proceeded to stare them down. They might be good, but Henry was confident that he was better.

The Asian girl behind the desk handed him pages and told him that this was the scene he would be reading. He'd taken the printed sheets even though he didn't need them since he knew the entire script by heart.

Sitting, fidgeting, waiting, he'd imagined his future in his head. He would land the role, tell his parents, and there would be nothing they could do about it.

He, Henry Whitfield-Simmons, was about to become a famous actor, with or without their approval.

It never happened.

And why didn't it happen?

Because of one woman.

Her name was Lucky Santangelo.