

# Turmoil in Savannah

Made in Savannah  
Cozy Mystery Series Book Thirteen

## Hope Callaghan

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## Cast of Characters

**Carlita Garlucci.** The widow of a mafia “made” man, Carlita promised her husband on his deathbed to get their sons out of the “family” business, so she moves from New York to the historic city of Savannah, Georgia. But escaping the family isn’t as easy as she hoped it would be and trouble follows Carlita to her new home.

**Mercedes Garlucci.** Carlita’s daughter and the first to move to Savannah with her mother. An aspiring writer, Mercedes has a knack for finding mysteries and adventure and dragging her mother along for the ride.

**Vincent Garlucci, Jr.** Carlita’s oldest son and a younger version of his father, Vinnie is deeply entrenched in the family business and not at all interested in leaving New Jersey for the Deep South.

**Tony Garlucci.** Carlita’s middle son and the second to follow his mother to Savannah. Tony is protective of both his mother and his sister, which is a good thing since the female Garlucci’s are always in some sort of a predicament.

**Paulie Garlucci.** Carlita’s youngest son. Mayor of the small town of Clifton Falls, New York, Paulie never joined the “family business,” content to live his life with his wife and young children away from a life of crime. His wife, Gina, rules the family household with an iron fist.

## Chapter 1

“I’m sorry, Mercedes.” Carlita shifted slightly as she eyed her daughter apologetically. “I know this is unexpected, and we’re already cramped for space, but I couldn’t tell Vinnie no.”

“Could you at least ask Tony and Shelby if Brittney can stay with them?” Mercedes unplugged her laptop and closed the lid. “They have a spare bedroom. All we’ve got is a sleeper sofa.”

“It’s only temporary until...” Carlita’s voice trailed off. She had no idea how long her pregnant daughter-in-law, who was also the only daughter of mafia boss, Vito Castellini, would be staying with them.

“Until whoever is targeting Vito and Vinnie either burns the casino down, blows it up or kills one of them.” Mercedes finished her mother’s sentence.

Carlita’s oldest son, Vinnie, had called his mother the previous day, asking if Brittney could come to Savannah until what he referred to as a “family situation” had been neutralized. When she pressed for details, her son grew evasive, insisting his main goal was to have his new wife spend some time getting to know his mother and his younger siblings, Mercedes and Tony.

“How long are we bonding?” Carlita had asked, thinking about all she had going on...between running Ravello’s, her new restaurant, worrying about Shelby, her other daughter-in-law’s health, and ensuring Spooky Eats and Inns, a new tourist attraction she’d recently joined with some of the other local business owners, was running smoothly.

Vinnie admitted he had no idea how long she might be “visiting” but promised he would be down to join his wife as soon as he was able. He quickly ended the

conversation after telling his mother that Luigi and Ricco, Vito's "bodyguards," would be accompanying Brittney.

Certain there was more to the story, Carlita let it slide, but after hanging up, she went online to search for recent news stories about Treasure Cove, the Atlantic City casino Vinnie managed.

She was horrified to learn it was the target of several suspicious fires. More than one of the stories hinted at the owner, Vito Castellini's, mafia ties.

"Bite your tongue." Carlita sighed heavily. "I am concerned about Vinnie. If someone from the mafia is targeting Castellini and the casino, who knows what they'll do next."

The outer bell chimed. Carlita darted to the window and peered down into the alley. The familiar hulking figure of Luigi Baruzzo filled the stoop. As if sensing he was being watched, Luigi looked up.

"They're here." She hurried out of the apartment and down the steps. "You made it."

Luigi tipped his hat. "Mrs. Garlucci."

"Hello, Luigi."

"I figured I should make sure someone was home before Ricco unloaded all of Brittney's bags."

Carlita craned her neck, peering down the alley to the parking lot at the other end where Ricco struggled to remove a massive suitcase from the trunk of a car. Several other large suitcases were sitting on the ground next to the car.

"She's got a lotta stuff," Luigi said. "You want us to bring them upstairs?"

"Yes...yes. That will be fine." Carlita forced a smile. "I would like to chat with you and Ricco after you finish."

"We won't be long." Luigi stepped off the stoop and trudged back to the car.

Carlita left the door open and ran up the steps. She found her daughter standing at the balcony doors frowning. "Where on earth are we gonna put all of Brittney's stuff?"

“I have no clue.”

“I have an idea. I’ll be right back.” Mercedes strode out of the apartment, leaving the door ajar. She reappeared moments later. “She’s not home.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute.” She disappeared inside her room, returning to the living room a short time later waving her cell phone in the air. “Problem solved. I’m staying across the hall in Autumn’s apartment until Brittney leaves.”

“Mercedes...that’s a great idea.”

“Autumn is at work. She told me where to find her hidden key so I can let myself in. I’m gonna grab some things. Have Luigi and Ricco unload Brittney’s stuff in the hall until I’m done.” Mercedes returned to her bedroom.

*Thunk...clunk...clunk.* The thunking and clunking stopped, and a red-faced Ricco appeared in the doorway. “Hello, Mrs. Garlucci.”

“Hello, Ricco. You can bring Brittney’s bags in here.” Carlita led him to the hallway. Luigi was right behind him, his face the same shade of red and breathing heavily. “I think she’s got a body or pile of bricks in this one.”

“I hope there’s no body.” Despite the chaos of the situation, Carlita smiled at Ricco’s joke. She felt somewhat sorry for Brittney’s bodyguards and wondered how the drive from Atlantic City to Savannah had gone. Maybe she didn’t want to know.

The men lined her bags along the hall wall, leaving a narrow path between the bedroom and bathroom.

The sound of sharp heels clicking on Carlita’s living room floor grew louder and a flustered Brittney, carrying a designer bag and sporting matching sunglasses, appeared in the doorway. “There’s one more suitcase on the back seat.”

“You’re kidding,” Ricco and Carlita said in unison.

Carlita quickly recovered as she tiptoed forward, giving Vinnie’s wife a gentle hug. “Brittney, it’s so...good to see you. How was the trip?”

“Monotonous, long and boring. My back is killing me.” Brittney snaked her hand behind her back, a pained expression on her face.

Mercedes emerged from her bedroom; an overstuffed backpack slung over her shoulder. “It could be the high heels.” She pointed to the ruby red stilettos Brittney was wearing.

“No way.” Brittney shook her head. “These are the most comfortable shoes I own. In fact, they’re designed to prevent an even worse backache.”

“Hello? Anybody home?” A female voice echoed from the front of the apartment. Carlita recognized it as her new temporary tenant, Angelica Reynolds.

“It sounds like Angelica.” Mercedes slipped past her mother. “I’ll find out what she needs.”

“You do that.” Carlita squeezed into the corner of the hall to give her daughter room. “Good luck.”

Angelica was renting the downstairs efficiency on a month-to-month basis and planned to move out at month’s end. The woman, an author from Los Angeles, was in the area assisting with the production of her blockbuster bestseller, “Into the Night.”

To say the young woman was high maintenance was an understatement. Every other day, Angelica was pounding on Carlita’s apartment door with a new complaint. The air was too cold. Her shower water wasn’t hot enough. There was too much noise outside her bedroom window. And the list of complaints went on.

Finally, Carlita put Mercedes in charge of handling her complaints since she was the one who convinced her mother to rent to the woman in the first place, certain Angelica could help jumpstart her writing career.

“We can start wheeling Brittney’s bags into the bedroom.” Carlita reached for a handle as the sound of raised voices coming from the hallway caught her attention. “I’ll be right back.” She held up a finger and hurried into the hall.

“They’re friends of the family,” Mercedes stood close to Angelica talking in a low voice. “I’m certain they won’t bother you.”

“What’s going on?” Carlita joined her daughter and troublesome tenant.

“I have a major issue.” Angelica pointed a glittery gold fingernail in Carlita’s direction. “The parking situation around here is ridiculous. Last night, I had to park on the street because your weirdo neighbor parked her security van in the way and blocked the empty spots.”

“Elvira?” Carlita asked.

“I don’t know her name. She’s the one with the crazy hair who’s always wandering around out back with her metal detector.”

“I’ll chat with her,” Carlita promised. “Elvira and her tenants have their own parking area. I’ll be sure to remind her.”

“And now...this morning. These two creepy goons Mercedes claims are family friends were hogging two spots instead of pulling into one. When I told them to move, they ignored me.” Angelica rambled on, starting in again about the noise and the temperature of her water.

Brittney tottered into the hallway. “Would you mind running down to the car to grab my last bag?” She jangled a set of keys. “Ricco and Luigi are having a little trouble fitting my suitcases in the bedroom.”

“I bet they are,” Mercedes muttered under her breath.

Carlita jabbed her daughter with her elbow and reached for the keys. “I’ll be happy to.”

“Who are you?” Angelica rudely asked.

Brittney turned her bright blue eyes on the woman. “Who are *you*?”

“A paying tenant, who’s getting tired of subpar apartment conditions. And now I have to deal with a couple of creepy goons hanging around.”

Brittney’s jaw dropped. “Are you talking about Ricco and Luigi?”

Ricco appeared behind them. “The bags are in the room.”

“There’s one of them,” Angelica said.

“Why...” Brittney’s expression morphed from angelic to enraged. “Goons?” she fumed. “Like you have room to talk. Someone needs to buy you a mirror...a nice big round one so you can take in a full view of yourself.”

Angelica reared back, her eyes narrowing to slits. “Are you calling me fat?”

“If the fat fits,” Brittney taunted.

Carlita made a move to step in and defuse the situation, but it was too late.

## Chapter 2

Angelica's hand shot out, and she slapped Brittney's cheek. The force of the strike was enough to create a loud *whack* that echoed in the hall.

Brittney pressed a hand to her cheek as she let out a strangled gasp. Her eyes glittered angrily as she grabbed a fistful of Angelica's hair and pulled.

Angelica clawed at Brittney as she shrieked in pain. "Let go of me."

Ricco, who was standing directly behind Carlita, shoved her out of the way and thundered toward Angelica, a look of impending doom on his face.

Carlita, certain her tenant was mere seconds from death, wedged her body between the warring women. "Stop!"

She said it forcefully enough that even Ricco, who was charging like a bull, slowed, but the murderous expression on his face was still firmly in place. "Ricco, please let me handle this."

It was as if the man never heard Carlita, his eyes on his target, and she wondered if he was deciding whether he was going to fill Angelica full of lead or choke her, a strong possibility judging by the way his fists were clenched.

Carlita swung around to face Brittney. "Let go of Angelica's hair."

"She hit me," Brittney gritted out; her fist still full of the other woman's hair.

"Yes, she did. I think it was a reflexive move. She didn't mean to."

Angelica made a gurgling sound, which Carlita took as an apology. "See? She's apologizing."

Carlita placed a firm grip on her daughter-in-law's arm. "Let go. This isn't solving anything."

Brittney reluctantly released her hold, and Angelica stumbled backward. “She deserved to be slapped.”

“That’s enough,” Carlita snapped.

Mercedes sprang into action, grabbing Angelica’s arm and pulling her toward the stairs.

“What are you doing?” Angelica jerked her arm, attempting to escape Mercedes’ grasp. She was no match for Mercedes who kept an ironclad grip on her as she dragged the woman down the stairs.

“How does a night in jail sound?” Mercedes said the first thing that popped into her head.

“Jail?”

“For assault,” Carlita said. “You assaulted my daughter-in-law.”

“I did not. I merely put her in her place.”

“And left a mark on her face.” Carlita followed her daughter and temporary tenant to the bottom of the stairs. “I want you out. You have twenty-four hours to vacate this apartment, or I’ll contact the authorities and have you arrested.”

“You...you can’t do that,” Angelica huffed. “I have a signed lease.”

“And you broke the lease,” Carlita said. “You’re disturbing the peace of other tenants.”

“We’ll see about that.” Angelica stormed down the hall, flung her apartment door open and marched inside. She slammed the door so hard it rattled the hall window.

“I’ll handle this.” Mercedes followed Angelica into the apartment and closed the door behind her.

Carlita slowly turned her attention to Ricco and Brittney, who stood watching from the top of the stairs.

“Why did you stop me from poppin’ the putz?”

“Because you can’t go around killing people. You want the heat on us? You start offing people and what’s happening in Atlantic City will be the least of your worries.”

“Yeah. I guess you’re right.” Ricco relaxed his stance. “A body right now could be somewhat problematic.”

“I’m evicting her...pronto.” Carlita climbed the stairs and approached Brittney, the outline of Angelica’s hand clearly visible on her cheek. “I’m sorry, Brittney. Angelica is a troublesome tenant. I’ll need to give her a couple of days to move out. In the meantime, I think it’s best if you avoid her.”

Brittney placed a light hand on her injured cheek. “I...I will. It’s a good thing Daddy wasn’t here. We would already be dragging her body to the car.”

Visions of Vito Castellini offing her tenant filled Carlita’s head. And for the umpteenth time, she wondered why on earth her eldest son had become entangled so deeply in “the family.”

Mercedes exited Angelica’s apartment and sprinted up the steps. “She’s on the phone trying to find a place to go. At first, she kept threatening us for breaking her lease, but after I reminded her that Brittney has every right to press charges, she realized she could be in trouble and agreed it’s time for her to leave.”

“See?” Carlita forced a smile. “Problem solved.”

Ricco took the keys from Carlita and returned downstairs to grab Brittney’s last bag. Carlita trailed behind. “Where are you and Luigi staying?”

“I dunno. We weren’t plannin’ on makin’ this trip. It was kind of spur of the moment. We’ll probably end up sleepin’ in the car.”

“No.” A sudden thought popped into Carlita’s head. “If you can make do for a day or two until Angelica moves out, you and Luigi can move into her furnished efficiency.”

“Are you sure?” Ricco eyed Carlita. “That’s mighty kind of you, Mrs. G.”

“Yes.” Carlita warmed to the idea. If someone was targeting Brittney, the closer Ricco and Luigi were, the better. “Absolutely.”

“I appreciate the generous offer.” Ricco removed the last bag from the back seat and shut the car door. “We’ll stay on the down low. You won’t even know we’re around.”

They began strolling toward the apartment when a movement from the building on the opposite side of the alley caught Carlita’s attention. Dernice, Elvira’s sister, stepped onto the stoop and pulled the door shut.

Carlita slowed, motioning to him. “Go on ahead. I’ll catch up.”

He returned inside, and Carlita waited until Dernice noticed her.

“Hey, Carlita.”

“Is Elvira around? I want to talk to her about the parking situation.”

Dernice’s eyes slid to the side in the direction of the back door. “She’s...kind of under the weather. Yeah...she’s caught some terrible virus. I don’t think you should be around her right now. It could be some sort of plague.”

“Plague?” Carlita wrinkled her nose. “Is she all right? Has she seen a doctor?”

“No. I mean, I think she should, but not yet. Is there something I can help you with?”

“One of my tenants is complaining about your security services van parking in our lot and blocking the parking spots. I know parking is tight, but I have out of town guests who just arrived. I’m going to need all of my spaces for my tenants and company.”

“I understand. I’ll move the van, and we’ll start parking them on the street.”

“Thanks.” Carlita turned to go. “Tell Elvira I hope she’s feeling better soon.”

“I will.” A troubled look crossed Dernice’s face, and she opened her mouth to say something.

Carlita waited, but the look passed and Dernice gave her a half-smile. “See you later.”

“Later.” Carlita returned to her apartment building. She could feel Dernice watching her and turned back. A sad expression flickered across the woman’s face. She eased the back door open and disappeared inside.

Carlita started up the steps and changed her mind, making her way into the pawnshop where Tony was helping a customer. He finished and joined her.

“I see Brittney and her entourage arrived,” Tony joked.

“Oh my gosh.” Carlita rolled her eyes. “What a mess. I’ve never seen so much luggage in my life.”

“What’s Mercedes think since she’s being kicked out of her room?”

“She’s moving in with Autumn until Brittney and her bodyguards leave.”

“That’s a good idea. Vinnie called this morning, asking me to keep an eye on Brittney, Luigi, and Ricco.”

“That won’t be hard. They’ll be staying in your old apartment,” Carlita said.

“What about the new temporary tenant?”

“I’m evicting her.” Carlita told her son about Brittney and Angelica’s altercation. “She slapped Brittney. Ricco was ready to snuff her until I intervened. All we need is for one of Vito’s hitmen to take out one of my tenants.”

“And I missed all of the action?” Tony grinned.

“I’m sure there’ll be more. Somehow, I think today’s incident is just the beginning.”

A couple entered the store, and Carlita returned upstairs to the apartment where she found Luigi and Ricco out on the balcony smoking. Brittney was in Mercedes’ bedroom, frowning at the row of suitcases.

“I don’t know where I’m going to put my clothes.”

Carlita placed a hand on her hip. “Our apartment is kinda small and seeing as it’s only a two-bedroom there’s not much extra space.”

Brittney scooted over to the closet. “Do you think Mercedes would mind making a little more room for me?”

“A little more room?”

“Yeah.” Brittney shoved Mercedes’ clothes to the side. “She gets half. I get half.”

“I suppose I can move some of her clothes into my closet.” Carlita eased past her daughter-in-law, grabbed an armful of clothes and carried them into her bedroom. She repeated the process several times until half of her daughter’s closet was empty.

“Thanks, Ma.”

“You’re welcome.” Carlita left her to unpack, deciding she should warn Mercedes she’d moved half of her closet’s contents into her own.

The door to Autumn’s apartment was ajar. Carlita gave it a light knock and then stepped inside where she found her daughter standing at the living room window, staring out.

“What are you doing?”

Mercedes turned. “Something is going on over at the trolley stop.”

Carlita joined her at the window, peering past the courtyard and to the trolley stop on the other side of the street where her friend, Reese, and Reese’s trolley were parked.

“They’ve been parked there for a long time.”

“I wonder if there’s a problem.” Carlita could see sudden movement inside the trolley. The rear emergency door flew open, and a passenger tumbled out, landing face down on the pavement.

## Chapter 3

Carlita raced out of the apartment with Mercedes hot on her heels. They clambered down the steps and dashed out the back door.

When they reached the corner, Carlita could hear people yelling inside the trolley. The passenger the women had seen fall from the emergency exit was lying on the ground. "Call 911!" she yelled.

Mercedes yanked her cell phone from her pocket and began dialing. "Yes, this is Mercedes Garlucci. I'm at the corner of Halston and Mulberry at the trolley stop. We need an ambulance and the police here as soon as possible. There's some sort of fight going on inside the trolley. One of the passengers fell out of the emergency exit and isn't moving."

The dispatcher reassured Mercedes help was on the way. "They're coming."

From the back of the trolley, Carlita caught a glimpse of Reese. She was struggling to restrain a man. Several other passengers surrounded her and were yelling.

"Go get Tony," Carlita gave her daughter a shove. "Reese needs help."

Mercedes ran across the street, returning moments later followed by Tony, gun in hand.

"Reese is in trouble," Carlita said breathlessly.

Tony jogged to the trolley door, quickly assessing the situation. "Hey. Let her go!"

There was so much yelling and commotion inside, Tony's voice was drowned out. He pointed his weapon away from the trolley and fired a shot in the air. "Let the trolley driver out!" he yelled.

At the sound of the gunshot, the fighting stopped. Moments later, Reese stumbled down the steps and onto the sidewalk. There was a large gash on her cheek and a trail of blood.

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