



BELLE
AURORA

FRIEND-ZONED

THE FIRST IN THE FRIEND-ZONED SERIES

Friend-Zoned

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SIXTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SEVENTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER NINETEEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY TWO](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY THREE](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY SIX](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY NINE](#)

Chapter One

My name is Tina

Rawr Raaawr.

Damn, forgot to replace the batteries on the doorbell sensor again, I think
Now, instead of the regular Ding Dong most doorbells have mine sounds like a cat in heat.

“Good Morning, Ladies.” I smile and look over to greet my first customers of the day. “My name is Tina. If you need any help with anything, just holler.”

When I see them smile and nod back at me I go to my table of sweaters which have become a bit of a mess from the day before and commence re-folding.

Most people wouldn’t do this with a huge smile on their face but, what can I say?

I take pride in my work.

Rawr Raaawr.

I start speaking cheerfully before I see who comes through the door, “Good Morn...Oh, it’s just you! How’s it going?”

I see my not so cheerful worker girl Mimi walk through the studio and straight to the staff room without so much as a nod.

Ooookay then.

This is not unusual for Mimi. She is super surly in the best way. You can ask her anything, anything at all and she’ll only give you a straight answer.

Everyone needs a friend like her.

She emerges from the staff room, walks across the studio and straight out the door again.

I see her turn left and smile to myself. I know she'll only be a few minutes but will come back with the best Good Morning greeting anyone can get.

Re-commence sweater folding.

Five minutes later I hear the god awful doorbell again and Mimi walks over to me carrying the elixir of life in her dainty hands. I take the cup from her and sip.

Mmmmmm, Caramel Latte. I love you, Meems.

She takes her place behind the counter and logs into the register.

She looks over at me and asks, "What are you smiling at, Atomic?" Surly as ever.

She calls me Atomic because of my surname. I laugh and shake my head at her. I see her lip twitch as she looks over her day's to-do list.

I guess I should introduce myself. My name is Tina Tomic. Actually, my name is Valentina Tomic. But the only time I ever get called Valentina is when I'm in trouble.

I manage Safira Boutique. Actually, scratch that, I own Safira Boutique. None of my workers know this. They all believe I'm the store manager because this is what I have led them to believe. Safira Boutique is my pride

and joy.

I bought it two years ago. The building was in pretty good shape but I put some money into renovating. I made all the fixings more modern and added a small kitchenette in the back which holds a fridge, microwave, small two-burner stove, and a sink to wash our dirty dishes. I also had new signs put up and a brand spanking new front counter put in. It's very modern, shiny black with a high back; this hides our register and computer. There is also a super tiny change room at the back of the store. The store room was in good condition but the overall wiring needed to be re-done. This cost me a packet, but it was *totally* worth it.

Safira's is a narrow building but is long; it looks small from the front but is surprisingly deceptive.

I had it repainted a deep blue color because Safira means Sapphire in Croatian which is my ethnic background.

The store front window holds two mannequins; I change their outfits every week.

I love doing this.

We carry many types of clothing items for several occasions. Clubbing and party clothes, cocktail dresses, formal occasion wear, sexy sleepwear (ooh la la), and a crap load of accessories. Our accessories are our main seller. We have clutches, necklaces, bracelets, bangles, costume jewellery, rings,

and hair accessories. The reason these are our main seller is because they don't cost a lot, so after school hours we are packed with high school and college girls who, unfortunately, can't afford our clothing but go nuts over the affordable things.

I love my job.

Safira has three workers; myself, Mimi, and Lola. I work full time, 9 to 5. Mimi and Lola get three to four shifts a week depending on how busy we are. We'll soon add a fourth to our trio.

My BFF Natalie is coming to live in New York!

Excited, you ask?!

Who, me?

Noooooo... I'm freaking ecstatic!

Although born and raised in California, I moved to New York two years ago. Natalie has been my best friend pretty much all my life. So when I moved away, it broke both our hearts. I had my reasons for moving. She understood why I left Cali but declared she couldn't live without me because she says "Cali sucks without you".

So, this week I'll have a moving truck arrive at my apartment. I'll pack the second bedroom full of her stuff and next week my BFF will not only be living with me but also working with me.

Totally awesome, if you ask me.

Mimi interrupts my thought by nudging me. “There he is again. Damn, that boy is fine. And I mean *fine* with a capital F.”

I look through the shop window, past the mannequins and my heart stutters. This is not the first time I’ve noticed him. And Mimi is right.

He is fine.

Super fine.

So fine he should be on a billboard or a book cover somewhere. But something about him bothers me.

Two weeks earlier...

Great. Just great.

A traffic jam and I have approximately six minutes to open the store. No way am I going to get there on time and this ticks me off. I open the store at nine a.m. and pretty often there are already customers waiting for me.

Ten minutes later I have my car parked at a public parking spot because I can never get a space by my store and I don’t have parking spaces under or behind the building. I’ve tried taking the bus a few times but found I value my sleep too much to get up an hour earlier than I have to if I take my car.

Four customers are waiting on me. Three of them are smiling when they see me running towards them. One of them is scowling at me and it makes her pretty face oh-so ugly.