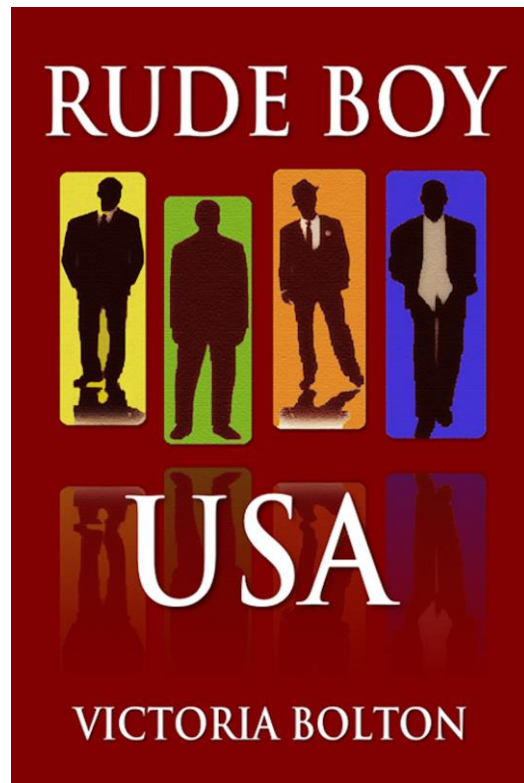


RUDE BOY USA

(Website Sample Chapter)



VICTORIA BOLTON

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First, I would like to thank God for giving me life so I can have dreams that enabled me to put a story like this together. It's finally on paper and out of my head.

To my Mom, I love you. Thank you for making me and giving me your strength. I watch you handle things like a champion every day.

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PROLOGUE

In the middle of the night in a trashy abandoned lot in Harlem, New York, there were four men. Three of them had arrived together as a team. The fourth man, Sammy, was their victim, and they had tied up his arms and legs. Sammy was not associated with the others. He had stolen money from the leader of the group. Sammy would not divulge details of the theft. His silence did not help his situation as each of the three men took turns beating him until they got him to talk. One of the three men turned to the others. "He looks young. He looks very young."

One of the men responded, "He looks old enough to go to war. Nobody cares how young you look when you are in a war."

Sammy continued to taunt them back. "You guys are fucking trash," Sammy said to the men, and he spat on one of them.

The man Sammy spat on told him, "Watch your goddamn mouth!" Sammy ensured them that they would never get information from him and said they could kiss his ass. The three men looked at each other. They began torturing and pistol-whipping Sammy in return. Irritated, the man who Sammy spat on got the idea to stuff money in Sammy's ass and mouth for being greedy and talking too much shit. He had warned the tied-up man to watch his mouth, and this was the consequence of ignoring that warning. Once they were finished with him, they put a plastic bag over his head, tossed him in the trunk of an abandoned car in the lot, and closed the trunk.

A fifth man rode up in a car. He got out to see the damage that the three men had produced. They opened the trunk to show him. The fifth man's face showed his objection. "Was this necessary? Are we wasting money now?" the gentleman said to his three associates.

One of them said, "It's theater."

Another associate added, "He asked for it. He asked us to do this. He told me to kiss his ass. He likes money, so..." He shrugged.

The last associate added, "It's only two hundred dollars in singles. It looks like a lot, but it isn't." The fifth man looked down at the body and slammed the trunk shut.

"Fine, we will discuss this back at the office," he said. He and his three associates got in the car and headed back to Midtown Manhattan.

Chapter 1

In the middle of a block in busy Midtown Manhattan full of shops and stores stood a silver building just twelve feet wide. Distinctive architecture decked in superior aesthetic treatments surrounded this place. Professional pedestrians, as well as regular shoppers, walked up and down the block every day. The noise of cars, police sirens, fire trucks, ambulances, and human voices filled the street twenty-four hours a day. There was no other place like Nineteen West Forty-Sixth Street. This location was noted not only for its unique size but also for its occupants, the Chimera Group. The Chimera Group consisted of a group of men who many residents, as well as law enforcement in the city, speculated were into organized crime, but this was never outright proven. Their involvement in organized crime may have been true on the inside, and to those who knew the inner workings. The sign on the outside of the building—which bore the Chimera Group’s name and a symbol that consisted of a hybrid animal made with a lion’s head, goat’s middle, and snake’s tail—indicated a high-class and highly successful investment company. The company’s logo confused many people. It represented the people who ran it. It comprised the parts of more than one faction, and the philosophy of such a mixture was wildly imaginative, implausible, and dazzling. Bernie chose the name not only because he found the symbol appealing but also because he wanted to pay tribute to his half-Greek heritage and his obsession with Greek mythology.

The multiracial Chimera Group consisted of four main impeccably groomed men who wore the sharpest of mohair Tonik suits. Each one’s background gave the boss the ability for broad outreach to the city. They were sales representatives, but they were not the typical door-to-door peddlers; they sold futures to the residents of New York City and the surrounding areas. “Give us your money; we will invest it, and you will reap the rewards in due time.” It was hard to believe that many people fell for this line, but they did. The economic environment and future market forecast of the late 1960s did not seem promising. Hard-working, blue-collar residents needed a plan for their future, and these men provided hope, on paper. Wealthier clients had it easier; they were more willing to take risks, as they had more funds to spare.

Bernie Banks (born Bernard Rhodos), the founder and CEO of Chimera, prided himself on the company’s layout, which consisted of four main men: him and three associates who did the footwork while he stayed at the office. At times, the office resembled a boiler room with lots of phone calls, alcohol, smoking and occasional visits from scantily clad women on call. He saw the company’s logo as a representation of the associates who worked under him. Bernie was a tall man in his sixties with short, thinning hair. He had a salt-and-pepper beard that was medium in length. His face was endearing and pleasant with a slight tan. From looking at him, one could not tell his profession. He wore suits and glasses on occasion, and he was of average weight. Still handsome in his advanced age, he had no problems attracting women. Bernie was a World War II veteran who served honorably until he was court-martialed for assault on an English citizen. The Englishman had physically assaulted a fellow black soldier who served with Bernie in the European Theater of Operations. The two beat the guy to a pulp

as a response. The black soldier continued to beat him until the man passed out. The man ended up dying a week later from a brain hemorrhage. The black service member was later convicted of murder and executed at Shepton Mallet. Bernie served two years for assault. He felt that the black soldier had just been defending himself; racism had led to the unjust execution by hanging. He felt that he would have reacted the same if he had been the one attacked.

In the early years, he began his business in his apartment with one helper, and it eventually grew into a multimillion-dollar empire for a time. He had spent his entire life working and saving so that he could attain his current situation. He built his reputation on good communication. He was the one in the company who only dealt with the big dogs. The other three men dealt with the general public unless there was a problem. The other men operated as supervisors, with helpers to assist them. Each man was in charge of a borough. One man worked the Bronx and Harlem. Another man worked in Brooklyn, and one other in Queens and sometimes Westchester. Bernie dealt with downtown and Staten Island. All four also made their presence known in Midtown Manhattan if need be.

Bernie associated with the other Mafia groups, whom he considered lesser to Chimera in their innovation and style. He also dealt with law enforcement, making sure that he kept in good standing with them by paying off large sums of money to keep himself and sometimes his associates out of jail. He also made deals with judges and those involved in the courts. Obtaining funds from the public was not an easy feat, so Bernie had to go through other channels to get money. While the other three men kept their trail clean by working with the mostly legal aspects of Chimera, Bernie headed the illegal part, which included forced protection services, labor racketeering, loansharking, extortion, money laundering, illegal gambling, and, in extreme cases, an occasional robbery. Bernie made sure to inform whoever worked for him that robbery was not a tactic to use unless necessary because it would result in more payoffs to law enforcement for cleanup. That would mean less money for the company. The employees of Bernie's three junior associates split the robberies and other petty crime. Those guys had nothing to lose if they did not complete the assignments; they were the uninformed scapegoats. Those people consisted of young men in their twenties who had no other direction to go but the military. For many of them, it was a choice of organized crime, jail, or Vietnam. Most of them did not do much but sit around all day, play cards, smoke, and drink before they started working for Bernie. No women were working in Chimera. Bernie and the others felt that this setup was no place for a woman, as the environment was incredibly misogynistic and the guys could be assholes with their daily conversations about the opposite sex. Chimera was a male culture based on power.

Due to their unique racial makeup and financial success, Chimera became so successful and popular that people in the underground began to refer to the group as the Rude Boys. Their style was a tribute to the most sophisticated subculture of the young street gangsters popular in the United Kingdom and Jamaica. The States had seen nothing like them before now. They were clean-shaven and debonair, with their Ray-Ban sunglasses, immaculate loafers, and sometimes porkpie or trilby hats. When trends turned more to longhaired, Afrocentric, and club flashy, they kept their suited style. Visually,

Chimera comprised the coolest people in town. In name recognition, they were second only to the Ambrosino family in New York, the highest ranked crime family. The Ambrosinos had thirty crews and over a thousand members. They ran a dangerous operation. To them, murder was just part of the business and life. To date, it was rumored that the family as a whole had committed over one hundred and fifty murders, all ordered by their boss, Enzo Ambrosino.

Ben Berardi, a second-generation Italian American, joined Chimera because he just needed a job. He had served in Vietnam briefly before coming to work at Chimera full time. Ben was a tall, slim, but muscular man with dark hair, thick brows, blue eyes, and a classically handsome face with a faint scar down his cheek. He got that scar as a child when he fell off a bike and cut his face. Ben's grandparents adopted him because his mother was mentally ill and admitted to an institution, where she could not keep custody of him. His father decided he was not ready for a family and abandoned Ben's mother and him. The details of their relationship were kept secret, but Ben knew that both of his parents had the same last name. When he asked his grandparents about this, they would not give him a clear answer except to say it was a coincidence.

Ben was Chimera's number three man. Bernie considered him special because he had been raised in very similar circumstances, losing both parents at a very young age. Bernie had a way of sympathizing with other people's plight, as his family persecuted his mother. Her sin lay in not being the obedient Jewish woman that her parents wanted and in having a child out of wedlock with a Greek immigrant. Ben idolized James Bond and Al Capone. He saw himself as a hybrid of both men. His job at Chimera involved elements of both. Ben walked like Bond, attempted to act like Bond, and had the mobster ambition like Capone. In his mind, he nailed it, but in reality it came off as trying too hard. The guys would tease him and tell him that he should be Scarface instead because of his old injury. He would quickly correct them and make sure they referred to him as Capone instead because he was the greatest ever to do it, according to Ben. He was sensitive to their taunts, and he felt at times as if he was being bullied.

Bernie also served as a counselor to Ben, who had substance abuse problems. Ben had attention issues as well as mood swings. His grandparents never sought help for these matters when he was a child. They did not want to come to terms with the fact that his mother may have passed on some of her mental-health issues to him. Ben never received a medical diagnosis, although most would consider him bipolar. He dealt with these problems unmedicated. His grandparents felt that seeking divine intervention would better help him. He used alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism for his frustration, as he claimed that they made him concentrate and calm down. Bernie kept an eye on him, knowing a drug user would not make good snap decisions when it came to business affairs and bookkeeping. Bernie considered drugs a nasty business despite other families' active partaking in those activities. Bernie wanted him to succeed, but Ben needed a lot of guidance.

Ben had been jailed for drug dealing, robbery, and petty larceny, which supported his drug habit, and he also got into trouble while serving in the Army. Ben would claim innocence and say that he was just being profiled by law enforcement because he looked like a typical gangster. Bernie had to pull strings to have him released. One such incident involved Ben being arrested for sticking up a shopkeeper in lower Manhattan and beating him with a pistol. The case made it all the way to a jury trial. Bernie had to give kickbacks to several jurors to make sure they found Ben not guilty. Bernie paid some of them off immediately, and others he promised to pay off later. Ben was in charge of making sure the people who helped him maintain his freedom received compensation.

Ben shadowed Bernie in many of his actions on and off the field. Ben was very sensitive about Bernie's criticisms of him. Bernie was not mean to Ben, but if he thought Ben's drinking or actions became a distraction, he would curb him. If Bernie thought Ben was falling off the wagon, he would scorn him. The comments hurt Ben, but he understood why Bernie was criticizing him. If anyone else told Ben something in the same realm, even if it were for his own good, he would tell them to go fuck off. Ben treated Bernie like a father. Ben's desire to inherit Bernie's empire provided the driving force behind his work at Chimera. He wanted to be the one to bring the group to the number one spot. He had always admired the well-known Mafia groups in New York and other cities, and he felt that his Italian heritage was the key to bringing the group higher. The Cosa Nostra in New York was heavily embedded in Sicilian culture and history. They viewed outside groups as frauds and invaders of their culture. Bernie wanted to see Ben succeed, and he would often pull Ben aside for talks. Bernie used his past experiences as a way to get to Ben.

"Benjamin, I want you to listen to me. Stop fooling around. It's time to straighten out. Start planning your future. I won't always be here to bail you out," Bernie would often tell him.

"I know, I know," Ben would answer.

"You are causing too many problems, unnecessary problems, all over the place. Here is how you will fail. Control yourself. Jail isn't Neverland," Bernie told him.

"I'm listening. I promise. I am not going back to jail. I cannot fail. I'm here," Ben said.

"Make your promises count. Bernie knows; don't argue." Bernie ended.

Ben walked with a sense of entitlement, and he felt that his fellow associates were secretly holding him back. Because of this, Ben continued with his drug use but hid it cleverly from the others in the group. He went from using lightweight drugs such as cannabis, which was popular at the moment, to taking harder narcotics when he enlisted in the army. When he utilized them, he timed each hit so it would not affect his day job. He graduated from smoke to needles. Despite these issues, Ben was a team player for his protection, and he would be until it was no longer convenient for him.

The number four man was Jerome Dexter. Jerome was a tall, dark-brown, slim black man from Harlem, New York. Jerome came from a two-parent home of respected

members of the local community. Optimistic about his future, his family had sent him to college. His parents started saving for his education once they learned that his mother was pregnant with him. When other black middle-class families were fleeing Harlem for Queens and other boroughs with better education and housing, the Dexter family stayed and saved their money for their investment in Jerome.

Jerome was smart enough to succeed, but he felt that his overbearing parents pushed him into things that he did not want to do. He never had a say in his future. They wanted him to be a scientist because his father, James Dexter, who worked at the Freedom National Bank, felt that the community needed representation that resembled them, and science was the future. He could be a great inventor, they hoped. Jerome was bored with furthering his education by the time he graduated from high school, of which he was valedictorian. He attended Fisk University, but because of a lack of discipline and a penchant for the southern women in Tennessee, he flunked out.

Disappointed in his outcome, Jerome's parents made him leave the family home to fend for himself, and he had to do so until he got his act together. Jerome slept on various friends' and relatives' couches and maintained odd jobs to support himself. At one such job, he worked as a busboy at a diner on 116th Street, where he met John, a gentleman who was already working for Chimera. They hit it off immediately, and John, feeling that Jerome could be a good sub worker for Chimera, sent him to drop off a package. John promised that if he did so and made it back safely, he would receive a generous reward. Jerome did not know what John meant by that, but because he needed the funds, he decided to do the job. That package turned out to be a bomb, which he delivered at a rival's doorstep. It was a Trojan-horse attack. Bernie had friends that were connected to the Weathermen, and he asked John to find someone to do the job. Bernie did not want to put any of his people at risk.

The Weathermen were a group of people whose supporters stretched nationwide. They took their name from a Bob Dylan lyric, "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." They consisted of advocates of the black-power movement and individuals strongly opposed to the Vietnam War. The FBI also knew them as the Weather Underground. The nationwide group was small, no more than five hundred people, but the smaller groups spread throughout the country. They intended to create their separate political party to overthrow the government. They considered themselves the new left. This group was known to use aggressive tactics to get their message across to the media and government. The group felt that America needed to change its values. Male hegemony, white supremacy, fascism, high unemployment, inadequate education, and terrible treatment of blacks and poor women were the real issues, not some unjust war overseas.

The Weathermen also organized some of the anti-Vietnam War protests that occurred on college campuses throughout the country. They bombed a few high-profile government sites as a way to protest the United States' actions in several parts of the world. A private sector of the Weathermen was located in Greenwich Village, where Bernie would go and get help with weapons if necessary, including guns and sometimes

bombs if they needed to send a stern message to a rival. Bernie also had a younger girlfriend, Gina, who was active in the Weather Underground. Gina was a five-foot-eight redhead with feathered shoulder-length hair. Her face had faint signs of freckles, and she kept her eyes lined and lashed heavily and her lips glossy. Gina stood out in not only looks but also personality and skill. She was the local Weather Underground chapter's chief bomb maker. She had a dominant personality, and she idolized Fidel Castro. She was Bernie's direct connection to the group, in which he charmingly referred to her as "Red." The Weathermen and Chimera were secret allies in the local area, and they often used each other's services. Gina partook in her separate activities separate from the underground, and these helped serve her and Bernie's personal agenda. Gina organized a couple of bank bombings and armored truck robberies to obtain funds for the both of them. She had been successful, as she was never caught in these activities. Gina and Bernie dated casually, and he enjoyed her company and sex, but Gina saw Bernie as something to do for the time being. In her mind, he was too old for them to consider having a future as a couple.

The package delivery that John gave to Jerome was successful. When Jerome later discovered that he had become a bomb-delivery boy, he had second thoughts about associating with John. John was impressed with his work and his attention to detail; to make it up to him, he recruited Jerome to Chimera and offered him a generous salary for his services. It was an offer that Jerome could not refuse since he was working for below minimum wage at the time. Jerome did so well at Chimera that he eventually moved up the ranks. Jerome used his family's reputation to gain the trust of those in the Harlem and Bronx communities. He succeeded enough that, under the guise of working for a reputable company, he was able to get his place. Jerome soon regained the respect of his parents. He was a single guy who enjoyed the ladies and still partook in the nightlife, but with Chimera he became a flashier version of himself. He hung out with John the most, and they formed a brotherly relationship.

Last but not least, John, a tall, slim, and athletic fair-skinned black man, was not only the most popular and most productive of the three associates, but he was also Bernie's favorite. Bernie considers John, a son of his. Bernie championed John because he did not need supervising. He knew how to lead and be productive with high confidence, which also mixed with his moody yet alpha-male traits. Everyone in the public nicknamed him the Conqueror. Bernie saw John as beneficial to the future of the company, and this was how he became a made man. When John entered the room, everyone took notice. He had a signature call of three quick whistles in succession. He used it to let everyone know that he had arrived. John was one of the first people Bernie recruited into his new business. John also hoped to succeed Bernie in Chimera, as Bernie had no heirs to whom he could pass along his fortune. John was never concerned about this, as he was too busy working to be a legend in the city. His name, freedom, and reputation were important to him.

John LeBlanc, a New Orleans native, had moved to New York City a year after high school in search of a different, urban city life. He had recently married his wife, Edina, a white Bronxville socialite who was in her second year at New York University. John left

New Orleans because he felt he needed to get away from the area where he grew up. Downtown New Orleans was a cultural dream, with the many jazz clubs and a great nightlife filled with wealthy whites and rich blacks, but the outskirts homed poverty. Many poorer blacks and those of Creole descent struggled to make ends meet. As a kid, John had a paper route to earn money for himself. His pay entirely depended on tips, as his boss would often not pay him for his work. John had an easier time making small change because of his light skin tone, which made white residents feel at ease with him. John, who had a younger brother from a different father, had to work to help the family when he became a teenager.

Edina was a liberal arts major whose parents sent her to school to find a husband, but until she succeeded, she was to be educated so she could take over the family business. Edina was an average-height, bottle-strawberry blonde with layered hair. She had a high-pitched young valley voice that was typical of the college crowds. The location of New York University enabled Edina to meet those who were outside of the Jewish community in Westchester and, to her family's dismay, experiment with different activities that other students partook in, activities that were not culturally acceptable. Edina was seeing a boy, a fellow Jewish man named David. Both of their families expected Edina and David to marry. Although Edina carried many of the values that her family instilled in her, she was open to experiencing new people. She enjoyed the fact that New York had a vast transportation system, and she often traveled to other boroughs with friends to check out the other spots in the city.

John met her at Half Note, one of the few clubs that safely integrated without too many racial incidents. It had great jazz music. Edina had come in with friends to hear some music when she met John, who was also there to check out the scene. Not having had many interactions with black men, Edina decided to take a chance. She introduced herself to John, whom she felt was the nicest looking black fellow she had ever seen. Not long after meeting and sharing a few drinks, John had her in bed.

That one-night fling resulted in a pregnancy. Edina was not ready to be a mother, but she loved John so much, even after knowing him such a short time, that she decided to keep the baby. Her parents, who were Jewish traditionalists, were outraged that their daughter would commingle with a Negro man, and they threatened his life. Her family demanded that she give this child away and never see him again. She refused, and they demanded that he marry her or else. He decided that he liked living and went on to marry her, to the disdain of his mother back home in Louisiana. She did not attend the ceremony. Shortly after they wed, Edina miscarried, but they remained married. She was never able to conceive again.

Edina introduced John to Bernie. Her family owned a delicatessen in Brooklyn, and Bernie's family owned a small grocery store, Banks Grocers, in Brooklyn just a block from the deli. Edina's family would frequent the store for supplies, and the two families became good friends. Edina had been a very young girl when Bernie, who was in his twenties, worked as a stock boy and kept the store clean. Bernie's family hoped that, if the business became successful enough, they would be able to expand into other areas.

Bernie was training to take over the family business, but he had no real interest in managing a chain of grocery stores. The lifestyle of a store manager was not flashy enough for him. When his grandfather, who owned the Banks grocery store, passed away suddenly, and his grandmother became too ill to run the business, she officially turned it over to Bernie, as she felt confident that he could handle the store. Bernie had other ideas as to which direction he wanted to go, and he decided that he wanted to be just like the men who wheel and deal on Wall Street. He decided to start an investment business in which he would take money, put it in the stock market for other people, and do all of the work for a cut. At the time, the market was still recovering from the crash in the 1930s. It eventually stabilized, so more affluent people were willing to invest in their futures by the 1950s and early 1960s. To start this business, Bernie decided to sell the store, much to the dismay of his grandmother and other family members, who felt that the family had invested too much time and just give it up. The selling of Banks Grocers caused so much discord between Bernie and his family that the stress caused his grandmother to have a stroke. He did take care of her financially until she passed away.

When Bernie moved away for a time after selling the store to a community investor, his and Edina's families did not see each other. The two reunited when they ran into each other at a social event. Edina informed Bernie, much to his dismay, that the old building that once housed the Banks grocery store had been torn down and replaced by a residential building. This was the only time that Bernie felt some guilt over his decision to branch out on his own. He decided to make sure that he worked hard enough that his own business would succeed, as his grandfather had with the store. Edina asked Bernie if he had any connections that could offer John employment as he was just living on her wealth with no direction. She had risked her reputation for him, and she felt that he needed to pull his weight. Bernie had just opened Chimera, and he offered to pay John for his help. Bernie felt that John's look would appeal to a broad range of nonwhite people in New York and could garner him some business, his looks were non-threatening. Bernie hired him as a favor to Edina's family. John and Bernie forged a father-and-son-like relationship as John's ability to appeal to people made him popular, and he became a star in the company. Bernie appreciated that John's popularity resulted in lots of money for the business, so much that they were able to set up shop in Midtown Manhattan, a prime but expensive location.

John spent many hours and days at Chimera as an escape from his home life with Edina. Despite public appearances, John and Edina had marital difficulties. She mourned her inability to conceive and wanted John to show more sympathy for her struggle. John cared for his wife, and he tried his best to show it, but on the inside, he was unhappy; he felt trapped. He never intended his relationship with Edina to go past one night, but because she seemed so enamored with him, had money, and became pregnant (and because her family threatened his life), he stayed with her. This gave Edina a sense of power over John, and she often reminded him of how much he should appreciate her. To win his affection, she often showered him with gifts. One particular gift was a high-powered camera. As a kid, John had loved art and photos. He had wanted to be a newspaper photographer but had never fully pursued it. John would take pictures of

things he felt could double as wall art. He also enjoyed wine. Introduced to it growing up in New Orleans, he had drunk a little on occasion, but he developed a taste for expensive wines once he married Edina and had access to better quality bottles. John wanted to start his own wine business, as he had developed a passion and a small collection of various wines. He wanted to stand out and have his signature flavor, but he had been unable to produce one.

John let out his frustrations about his home life in the form of extramarital affairs. He went after and had sex with any attractive woman within reason that would let him indulge. His job allowed him plenty of opportunities to meet numerous women, many of them homemakers who were home during the times he would visit. Because John was a handsome man, many women took him up on his offer of his dick for their business. John laid his hat in many places. Women were crazy about John. Part of the reason was his charm. He was rather affectionate when he felt at ease with a person. John made sure to be careful each time he had a fling with a woman. He had mastered burning the candle at both ends. No feelings, and he would not do anything that would make her attached to him. He did not have these rules out of respect for his union; he did not want another Edina. One was enough, and if he could get out of the marriage without things going south for him quickly, he would. At the time, society still considered their marriage taboo and frowned upon it. They would not make everyday public appearances like regular couples. That meant there were no trips to the park, movies, or even extra hand holding in public. He feared verbal and physical attacks, especially after the incident where someone smashed their car window and left a note. They suspected that it had been Edina's ex-boyfriend, whom she left for John. Her ex-boyfriend did not take the split very well. Someone looked through a cracked window and saw John and Edina having sex the night they met, and the person recognized Edina. Word got back to her boyfriend and the neighborhood, and the threats began. All of this stayed with John, and he would admit to friends that despite many years of marriage, he had never been in love. He considered himself immune to real feelings.

When their shouting matches got out of control, John would leave altogether for a few days or weeks at a time. John leased a small apartment in a luxury high-rise on East Eighty-Third, which was cab distance to the office. He found more dignity in sleeping in his separate space than he could get spending time on a couch at home. He forbade Edina from stepping foot in the apartment. He would only return to the marital home when she begged, or they had to make social appearances as a couple.

None of the small issues with the men's personal lives prevented the success of Chimera, which was duly noted by the Ambrosino family. The Ambrosino family felt that Chimera was encroaching on their territory and needed to be kept at bay, as the competition for funds and customers in the city and outlying areas was cutthroat. The Ambrosino family did not like the idea of a group of people they considered mongrels (because of their multicultural makeup) outshining or outselling them in any manner and dividing the profits. Therefore, Chimera was not officially included as part of the Commission. The two groups often exchanged verbal jabs, which became heated at

times. Members of the Ambrosino family would taunt Chimera and call them faux gangsters. John, as the mouthpiece of the group, would inform them that the Ambrosinos were no threat and that Chimera was the real deal. They would do the threatening. Except for when one person from either group stepped out of bounds, then it turned violent. Until then the rivalry mostly stayed verbal.

There were very few conflicts within Chimera. Bernie wanted to keep in tradition with the other five families of New York. Chimera was the unofficial sixth family. Before John, Jerome, and Ben became official members, Bernie introduced each of them in a ceremonial swearing in. John was the first, so his swearing in placed him at the top of the three under Bernie. This made John the official underboss of Chimera. Bernie pricked John's finger and dripped his blood onto a photo of the Catholic Saint John. Bernie then set the picture on fire while John held it. Bernie made John repeat, "I will burn like him if I betray my family." John had to repeat this until he could not hold the paper any longer. The photo continued to burn until it turned into ash. If John betrayed anyone in the family, he would burn like the Saint Bernie had set on fire. When the fire burned out, John took the ashes and rubbed them against his skin. Bernie repeated this ceremony with Ben, with John present. Bernie used a photo of St. Benedict. For Jerome's swearing in, with John and Ben present, Bernie used a picture of Saint Martin de Porres. Bernie made sure the Saints were particular to the men he was swearing in. When the ceremony ended each time, Bernie would tell the new member to be at ease. Bernie considered the three men his sons. He never had children of his own, so he felt the need to keep these men on the right track. They were his legacy and a reflection of all of his hard work. Swearing them in kept things in order. That meant Chimera became their number one priority. They were on call at all hours and would be busy for now on. Whatever each man earned, they earned for everyone. No one was allowed to walk away from Chimera. The only way out of the family was death.

Bookkeeping was always an issue in the company. There was a book for show and a book with real numbers, which Bernie kept to himself. They showed the first book to customers who demanded to see the progress of their investments. John, Jerome, and Ben had copies of this book. Bernie tried his best to make sure the numbers in it made sense. Although the other three knew the majority of the company's workings, Bernie did not divulge all the details, as he felt that some things needed to be secret. He reserved that information for the brain of the operation. Expenses from the business ran high, and often they had to dip into the contributions that clients made, especially during slow periods in the economy. When clients demanded payment, the company paid from this pot. When they ran short on occasion, Bernie went into the gambling profits. He wanted to keep from dipping into the gambling pot as much as possible. For that reason, he asked the guys to push investors not to withdraw their money early. This gave the business time to bring in new customers and new funds to keep the cycle going. This plan worked for years with very few mishaps. Then for some reason, Bernie miscalculated one customer's payback from a gambling bet, and unfortunately, one of his guys paid the price.