

Chapter 7

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Leon

One minute I was admiring the oce design; the next, I felt a bolt of lightning go straight through me, traveling through every nerve in my body like electricity. The internal chaos was delivered by way of text message, and I was so thrown off by what I read that I thought it had to be a joke.

Jorge: Mr. Von Doren, I'm currently tailing Ms. Galloway, and it appears that she is going to the doctor's oce. This is the second time she has gone in the last month.

Me: Who is she with? What oce is she going to?

Jorge: She's alone and was alone the rst time too. She's going to Land and Mall Health, the same oce that Dr. Hollands and Malloy own.

I grew as stiff as a corpse experiencing rigor mortis when I read Jorge's response. Sadie, the bane of my existence, was about to waltz in here. I had to avoid running into her at all costs, so I gured using up a good thirty minutes of the doctor's time would be enough to prevent a head-on collision with her. Sadie was the last person on this God-forsaken planet I wanted to see. But why was she coming here of all places? Was she here for Annika? Did she even know about Annika? A sudden knock at the door brought me back to reality, and the most angelic voice I've ever heard greeted me.

"Hi, Mr. Von Doren." I was already in a daze when the door opened in slow motion as Annika walked in and gave me the most innocent and welcoming smile, casting a deadly spell over me and thrusting me into unknown territory. How could a smile cause me to unravel to this extent? I forced myself to swallow the lump in my throat, wondering what the hell was going on with me. I didn't know this woman, yet she was already beginning to consume my entire being. "How are we doing today?" she asked. I shook my head out of my thoughts.

"Pretty good, I guess," I replied. Pretty good, I guess? What the hell kind of response was that?

"Well, I'm inclined to disagree with you, Mr. Von Doren, at least from a medical standpoint. Your blood pressure readings concern me a bit. For someone of your age and body stature, there's no reason for you to be pre-hypertensive. It's obvious you exercise. Do you mind telling me what you do for a living?" Annika asked, maneuvering expertly between sounding stern and sweet.

"I ..." I paused to consider what I should tell her and whether I should be honest or lie again. "I'm self-employed."

"That ... doesn't answer my question. I'm self-employed, but I'm a doctor. I asked what you do for a living, not who you work for," she countered and lifted her brow. It was kind of cute how she did that.

"I'm an executive ocer at Paradox and Co.," I replied. It wasn't a lie, but it still fell short of the entire truth. I wasn't going to tell her that I owned my own company, not yet, at least. Though I was a little disheartened that Annika didn't already know who I was. Everyone in the tri-state area knew who I was or usually recognized me by name.

"Oh, well, that explains a lot. All of you big boy executives are always under so much stress, and your stress levels directly correlate to your elevated BP, headaches, and insomnia. Increased cortisol levels resulting from prolonged stress can lead to many different health problems, but what you're experiencing are some of the most common."

"Is there anything you can do to help?"

"Well, there's always medication, but that's typically for desperate times that require desperate measures. Taking those kinds of medications can cause more problems in the future if taken long-term. Why stick a Band-aid on it when you can remedy the source?"

"So, what do you recommend?"

"In my expert opinion ..." Annika said and leaned in towards me, moving so close that the scent of her perfume engulfed me. It was so sweet and enticing that my mouth watered, and a ve-alarm re blazed within my chest. What was she wearing? "... You need a vacation." She brought me back to reality with her lackluster response.

"Excuse me? That's it, a vacation? You're shifting me, right?"

"Mr. Von Doren, please refrain from using foul language in my practice. Otherwise, I'm going to have to kick your ass." I looked at her and furrowed my brows.

"But you just ..."

"I'm the doctor, so I'm allowed to curse. You're the patient, and you have to do what I say," she replied with a slightly snobbish yet playful tone. Annika winked at me, and that gesture alone had my heart racing. With everything this woman was enduring on the inside, she still went out of her way to make her patients feel comfortable. You would never know the turmoil she's currently suffering.

"So, a vacation?" I asked again.

"Yup," she answered while ripping a piece of paper from her notepad and handing it to me. I looked down, and it was a prescription note with the words "GET SOME" written on it. I looked up at her in shock. "What?"

"This is slightly inappropriate, don't you think, Dr. Hollands?" I asked and lifted a brow.

"Where is your head at!?" she exclaimed. Annika took the paper and showed me what was written on the paper. At the bottom, it read, "Vitamin D." I frowned. "Is that the only thing the male species thinks about?" she joked again. "Leon, I get that working is important, but take some time for yourself. Go out, have fun, and meet with friends. You're young and active. So, go be active. Work can wait a few days. I doubt that Paradox would crumble to the ground without you." If she only knew.

"What about you, Dr. Hollands?"

"What about me?"

"Do you take vacations? I'm sure, as a doctor, you're also very busy." I said. She stiffened a bit and cleared her throat, seemingly taken aback by my question.

"I, well ... I haven't needed one."

"Don't be a hypocrite, Doc. You just said work could wait a few days. I doubt this practice will crumble without you," I sneered, teasing her back.

"Well, unfortunately for you, that's where you're wrong. Land and Mall is my practice, so it would indeed crumble without me," she replied and smiled proudly.

"Ah, so you're telling me it's okay for the bosses to be stressed and do all work and no play?"

"That's not what I was implying, Mr. Von Doren. Please don't put words in my mouth," she snapped while pointing her nger at me. By this time, I had stood to my feet, and she was poking my chest. The height difference between us was astounding. "My goodness, how tall are you?" she asked while looking back down at the chart in her hands.

"I'm well over 6 feet," I answered.

"Well, no s**t," she cursed again. I raised an eyebrow at her, and she stared back deantly. For some inexplicable reason, her deant stare had my palms sweating, heart beating, and d**k straining in my dress slacks. What was this young woman doing to me? The top of her head barely reached the middle of my chest, and she was even wearing heels, but that deance was almost enough to make me submit.

"Doctor Hollands, how tall are you?" I asked without even realizing it.

"Short," was her curt reply.

"Well, no s**t," I threw back. Annika glared at me, and I smirked. "You never answered my question, Doc."

"Which question?"

"The one about bosses and taking a vacation. Is it okay for bosses to work all day and have no play?"

"No, but it doesn't mean that a boss can take a vacation at their whim. Bosses are bosses for a reason. They have to maintain order and functionality. Unlike some Wall Street knuckleheads who play all day and don't work a day in their lives because they think they can, this is precisely why this country is in shambles. Those politicians who sit behind a desk without knowing how the world works are why our country is failing. Trillions of dollars in debt with nothing to show for it. War, famine, disease, and disaster all around us because we put our faith in a bunch of suit-wearing nimrods who forget what it's like to be an actual human being the moment they take oce." Her rant was very calculative, and you could hear the obvious sneer in her tone. Though, I was shocked that she would openly say all of this to someone who was actually wearing a suit.

"I'm going to pretend that I didn't just hear you say all of that."

"Why? I specially said because of you," she retorted without care.

"Excuse me?" I was rendered speechless by her bluntness. Does this woman not have a lter on that mouth of hers?

"Mr. Von Doren, I was raised to say what's on my mind, regardless of anyone else's feelings. I may be a doctor, but being a doctor also means being an honest person. I can't very well lie to my patients to spare their feelings, can I? Lying would cause tragedy in my line of work. I'm not heartless if that's what you're thinking. I just can't afford to be nice and sugarcoat everything, unlike some others in the world," she replied while eyeing me up and down. If I didn't know that she was sizing me up for being a businessman, I would have mistaken her actions for checking me out instead. "It's sad, but it's true. So, as I said, I don't have the luxury of taking time off for a vacation, at least not at the moment. I have a lot to deal with, and not just how this oce is run. I do have other patients to tend to, so, if you would please?" she continued while opening the door and gesturing for me to leave. I grabbed my suit jacket off the chair in the exam room and made my way back to reception. "As I said, I recommend taking some time off and trying to control your stress levels naturally. If you can manage that, medication intervention will not be necessary for normal blood pressure levels and adequate sleep. Manage your stress to improve your blood pressure, and you should be right as rain. I would like to see you back in a month to check your progress," she concluded and walked away without a second glance. I watched as Annika hastily walked down the corridor to another room, a new chart in her hands before the door shut.

"Mr. Von Doren?" I looked back down at the receptionist. "Dr. Hollands would like you to schedule a follow-up in about a month. What days work best for you?" I gave her my answer and was immediately provided with an appointment and a reminder card. I scanned the lobby for Toby so we could head back to the oce, still optimistic that I wouldn't have to suffer the displeasure of running into Sadie. Unfortunately, luck wasn't on my side.

"Leon?" I heard that irritating voice and halted in my steps. I gritted my teeth and cursed every deity in the universe for allowing us to cross each other's paths. "Leon, what are you doing here?" she asked, her voice full of spite.

"Mr. Von Doren had a doctor's appointment," Toby answered on my behalf, knowing all too well that I did not want to converse with this two-timing b***h.

"I wasn't talking to you, Timmy!"

"It's Toby, Ms. Galloway. Though, you could never get it right," Toby muttered in utter contempt. He rarely spoke out of turn, but even a stoic man like Toby had zero patience for Sadie.

"What did you just say!?" she shrieked, capturing the attention of everyone in the lobby. God, her scene-causing antics are still intact, I see.

"You're young, Ms. Galloway. I'm sure you heard what I said," Toby replied without hesitation.

"Enough, Toby. Go get the car ready," I said, stopping him before the scene escalated further into ridiculousness. Toby had damn near the patience of a saint, but never with Sadie, and I honestly couldn't blame him. I wasn't sure how I managed to put up with her for so long. What the f**k was I thinking back then? How did I waste a year of marriage on her?

"I asked you a question, Leon! What are you doing here!? Are you following me?!" she shouted, causing even more commotion.

"Will you keep your voice down? I have more important things to do than follow you, Sadie. I had a doctor's appointment."

"You hate doctors! Don't lie to me. Ugh, it seems that you still haven't gotten over the fact that I left you. But then again, you're a cheater, so why the hell would I stay with you?" Sadie continued, spewing her lies to all that could hear as she continued her insufferable display of hypocrisy.

"Sadie, I'm warning you ..." I gnashed my teeth.

"Are you threatening me!? That's all you ever do! Threats upon threats! And you wonder why I didn't want to stay married to you!" she doubled down and kept shouting. People were eyeing me up and down and giving me dirty looks. Of course, they would believe a young woman who was pretending to be a damsel in distress. "I'm warning you, Leon! Stop f*****g following me! I won't hesitate to call the police!"

"Perhaps you're the one that needs to have the police called on," a melodious voice rang out in stark contrast to the noisy mosquito buzzing in front of me. I looked past Sadie towards the door leading to the exam rooms; Annika and another doctor were standing in the doorway.

"Excuse me, but this has nothing to do with you!" Sadie sneered with disdain at Annika. "Mind your f*****g business!"

"This is my business," Annika said with absolute authority. "This is a clinic where sick individuals seek care, and I will not have your childish outbursts causing my patients distress and discomfort. If your appointment has been concluded, please leave the premises before I call security."

"You ... Ugh, Dr. Malloy, I'm your patient!" Sadie shouted at the woman next to Annika.

"You may be my patient, Ms. Galloway, but that does not give you the right to disrespect other patients at this clinic. Your appointment is over. Please leave at once," Dr. Malloy warned her without missing a beat. Sadie glared at both of them, but the glare she gave Annika was something more presumptuous. It almost seemed as if she knew Annika. On top of that, Annika's expressionless stare back at Sadie also suggested that she knew who she was. Holy s**t.

"Ms. Galloway, this is your one and only warning. I will not have your disruptive behavior interfering with the care of other patients. If this happens again, I will have you dismissed as a patient, and you will have to look elsewhere for medical care," Annika stated while asserting her dominance. This side of Annika was quite sexy. I wonder if this side of her was from her background as a Silverton?

"You can't do that!" Sadie cried out, her haughty disposition nally showing cracks.

"Actually, I can. Legally, I have the right to discontinue care to anyone I see t. This is my practice, which makes this my business. And like any place of business, I have the right to refuse service to anyone if deemed necessary. You've been given your ocial warning, Ms. Galloway. Leave now." Sadie mumbled some things under her breath but ultimately left. Everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief, but some still shot looks of disgust my way.

"Mr. Von Doren, are you alright?" Annika asked me while gently putting her hand on my forearm.

"I'm ne," I replied.

"Something tells me that you two know each other more intimately than what's at surface level."

"You're right about that, Doc," I replied and paused a second. I suppose there was no use denying it in front of her since she witnessed everything. "Sadie Galloway is my ex-wife."