

## Chapter 8

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Annika

Hearing that my most recent patient was the ex-husband of the mistress of my soon-to-be ex-husband made my brain explode right then and there. So, this two-timing slut was married once before as well. I studied his facial expression and thought back to what that Sadie woman had accused him of. It nally dawned on me that not only had Jeff cheated on me with this woman, but she was also cheating on her own husband with Jeff. As a doctor, I was extensively trained to expect the unexpected, but in what universe would I have been able to predict this situation? Could the world be any smaller? What kind of coincidence was this?

My brain, now hijacked by this sudden epiphany, had turned into scrambled eggs, and my body began to act of its own accord. I leaned forward to consider Leon Von Doren's features and checked him out the same way I did back in the exam room, only through a different lens this time around. He was quite good-looking. Never mind his height and build, which made him tower over everyone as if no mere mortal, his overall physical features resembled a steamy male model who was about to perform at a Thunder from Down Under show. A mental image of Leon gyrating on stage ashed through my mind, and the corners of my lips curved slightly upward. He was quite a ne specimen in the opinion of a medical professional. I continued to ogle my patient in the name of science, forgetting we were still in the lobby of the practice until the rich bass tones of his voice brought my head out of the clouds. "Dr. Hollands, may I have my arm back?" he politely asked. Hearing the word "arm" set off tingling sensations throughout my body, and I retracted my hand as if it were just burnt upon seeing it on his forearm.

"My apologies, Mr. Von Doren," I began to explain, "my sole intention was to assess your pulse rate to ensure it didn't skyrocket after being verbally accosted by that unhinged patient." Cursing myself inwardly for another slip of the tongue, I felt like I was grasping at straws, trying to rationalize my inappropriate behavior while keeping a straight face. Was I, Annika Silverton, really touching him, another man, while evaluating his assets in front of an audience, no less? I was humiliated that something, or rather someone, had managed to override my rigid doctor mindset because even Jeff never had that sort of power over me.

"It's ne. I really am alright. I was married to that vile woman for a year. Biggest regret of my life," he said ever so nonchalantly. I quirked an eyebrow at his bluntness and quietly regarded him for a moment. Something about his devil-may-care attitude reminded me of the phrase, "A lion doesn't concern himself with the opinion of sheep." Given how Jeff doted on said vile woman, it made me wonder if Leon Von Doren knew of his ex-wife's extramarital affairs. The thought of Jeff and Sadie together began to lose its hold on me, and instead of descending into a blinding rage or inexplicable pain, I was now at a point where I could merely smirk and shake my head. I guess scum really does go with trash.

"Annika, we should get back to work," Kenzie whispered in my ear after approaching me. I looked around to see a swathe of patients still waiting to be seen.

"Oh, right. Yeah," I responded, taking a step back from Leon before addressing everyone in the waiting room. "To our esteemed patients and caregivers, Dr. Malloy and I would like to apologize for any inconvenience or discomfort anyone may have experienced during the incident. But rest assured, our oce does not condone or tolerate harassment of any form, and steps will be taken to reduce the likelihood of this happening again. You will all be seen in an orderly fashion without further delay, and I sincerely hope this small hiccup does not deter your choice to seek care from Land and Mall."

I bowed my head slightly after issuing a formal statement, and when I raised my head, I saw nothing but soft smiles and comforting nods from everyone, much to my relief. I then looked at the brooding man to my immediate left since I had started to feel tingles on the back of my neck and noticed he was smirking at me as though he was pleased as punch.

"May I ask what is so funny, Mr. Von Doren?"

"Nothing, Doc. I'll take my leave now, and I also apologize to you and everyone else for my ex-wife's hostile behavior." With those nal words, he stepped back a bit before turning around and leaving through the main doors of the practice. But the look he gave me as he walked backward was something I had never seen before, and it actually made me space out for a second.

"Hey, come on," Kenzie said and pulled my arm, bringing me back to my senses.

"Huh, yeah." I followed her back to the exam rooms, and our clinic nurses started to call patients back one by one again. I returned to the exam room that I had to leave earlier. "I do apologize for the delay," I said as I walked in. "We had a minor disturbance in the main lobby that needed to be addressed. Your time is valuable to me, so you have my full attention."

"No worries, Doctor, as long as it was minor, and no one was injured."

"None at all," I replied with a smile. I continued per usual, and the day proceeded without further incidents. Though, a part of me couldn't stop thinking about that electric gaze Leon gave me as he walked away. It was irtatious, that I knew for sure, but was deadly at the same time. Considering I was attached to the hip with Jeff since we were 14, I would have no earthly idea how to interpret it. I pushed all thoughts of Leon aside for now and carried on with my day.

After nishing with my last patient on the schedule, I felt drained from the whirlwind of events earlier today and wanted to call it a night. But, upon the realization I would likely be returning to an empty home, I decided to work overtime and organize the patient les. Ever since I kicked out Jeff into the guest room, he has been coming home less and less, which was quite stupid of him. He kept trying to deny the fact that he was having an affair, yet, the moment I gave him a tiny bit of freedom, he decided to stop coming home. I scoffed at how asinine this man was. How could someone with the grand intelligence to become the lawyer he is today be such an imbecile? Did he not realize that this only made him look more guilty? f\*\*\*\*g j\*\*\*\*t.

"Hey, you're still here?" I looked up and saw Kenzie at my oce door.

"Yeah, I have a lot of les to go through," I answered.

"Don't bullshit me. You don't want to go home because it will be empty." I glared at her. Sometimes I hated that Kenzie knew me so well. "I get where you're coming from. The penthouse is so f\*\*\*\*g big that it was just too much room even with you and that sleazeball. Why did you buy such a big ass penthouse anyway?" I looked at her passively and wondered if I should just come clean with her now. Kenzie was one of the few people who knew who I really was and where I really came from, although I never told her myself. f\*\*\*\*g Hunter brought it up when he came upon a family photo from an old Silverton Family Reunion and recognized me.

"What if I told you that I didn't buy it?" I asked her in return. Her eyes widened in shock.

"Wait, what? Are you saying that jagoff bought it?"

"What?! No! He doesn't make enough money to buy that place!" I shouted, feeling aggrieved and annoyed. "How many district attorneys do you know that can afford an eight-gure penthouse in New York?"

"Wait, what? Did you just ... Huh!? Eight gures?!" Kenzie's brain seemed to have short-circuited. Thankfully, the oce was void of any souls other than us two since it was a couple of hours past closing. I deeply exhaled while leaning back in my oce chair and just nodded at her. "If you didn't buy it, and the dickhead didn't buy it, then how—?"

"It was a gift from my parents," I answered before she could nish her question. "Even though they're busy being the tycoons of the construction world, it doesn't mean that they don't love me. When my grandma told them that I graduated early with my medical degree and wanted to open my own practice without using the family name or money, my parents decided to give me the penthouse as a gift."

"Well, damn, way to rub in how spoiled and rich you are compared to me!" Kenzie whined. I smirked and shook my head at her dramatic display of immaturity.

"Please, I grew up in a strict house. Why do you think I had to lie about my identity to Jeff when I rst met him? I may have only been 14, but I knew very well that if anyone knew who my family really was, all the guys would have ocked towards me just to get a taste. The Silverton family name isn't unknown. Everyone who's anyone that works in the corporate world has heard of Silverton International. My family ties don't just run in the U.S., Kenz. It's global. It's why I wanted to break away from my family. I wanted to get out and see the world on my own. Going to boarding school abroad didn't do much for me, so that's why I came back for high school."

"Girl, you're speaking to me as if I don't know any of this. Have you forgotten that we only pretend to be college friends? We've known each other since we were in diapers. My mom is your mom's god-sister. We're family. I just didn't know how rich you really were until you told me back in our med school days. It's not like your family really aunts their riches. Your family home is grand but still doesn't scream "I'm lthy f\*\*\*\*g rich!" I didn't have to pay tuition because of the full ride I received, but you? Oh, Annika Silverton, you, on the other hand, your family ancestors built that damn school. So, you just got to go for free."

"I still had to study as hard as anyone. It's not like I bought my degree in medicine. Plus, that wasn't my doing. That was my parents too," I shrugged my shoulders.

"For someone who says she wanted to get out of the Silverton family name, you sure still take advantage of it," Kenzie teased. "Hell, you take advantage of my family name too! Or have you forgotten that you decided to lie to the world and say that your surname was "Hiller?"

"So, what? Are you saying you don't take advantage of the Hiller family name? You openly brag about your family background, you, and Hunter both. The Malloy's are a family of lawyers, politicians, and international scholars while the Hillers are all in the medical eld."

"Well, when you put it that way, I guess I can agree with you and say that Hunter and I are well off because of our families," she said without a hint of shame. I lifted a brow at her. "Don't look at me like that! Oh! Speaking of looks! Who the hell was the tanned, hunky hottie in the oce today!?" I huffed at how she was now bringing up Leon Von Doren.

"He was my patient today. New patient of the practice."

"He's f\*\*\*\*g hot! Are you going to tap that?!"

"Kenzie, can you not talk as if we're still in high school? Tap that? Seriously!?"

"What? We're still young women in our twenties, and we're not working right now. Why can't we gossip like two little schoolgirls about the handsome new guy?"

"I can't with you," I said, putting my right hand up in shock.

"His looks even put Hunter's to shame. And you know better than anyone that Hunter's looks and background aren't one to be compared to. I still have to f\*\*\*\*g bulldoze my way over women trying to take off his pants."

"Please, Hunter is the most honorable guy we know. He'd rather commit murder than cheat on you, unlike someone else we both know," I grumbled after thinking about Jeff all of a sudden.

"I think you should tap that patient of yours."

"Kenziel!"

"What? If your douchebag husband can play nookie with that skanky barbie slut, then you can play nookie with that bronzed Greek god of hunky goodness!"

"I'm still legally married! Or have you forgotten that piece of information?"

"That didn't stop Jeff from swinging his shlong around."

"Do you have to put it that way!?" I was utterly mortied at her vocabulary. This woman in front of me, ladies and gentlemen, is a renowned OBGYN and delivers babies for a living.

"Anni, did you not see how that guy looked at you while he was backtracking out the door!? He looked like he wanted to f\*\*\*\*g eat you right then and there! And let's not forget that that b\*\*\*\*h is his ex-wife. Why the f\*\*\*k would she let that handsome stud go for a puny needle-dick asshole as like Jeff?"

"Why are you asking me? I'm just like her. I chose that puny needle-dick asshole to be my husband."

"Girl, that's different. You didn't have an Adonis-like God chasing after you then. But it seems like you do. What's more, he's her ex-husband," Kenzie dragged out the last word for extra emphasis.

"Your point being?" I asked, not following where she was going with all of this.

"Oh, Anni, you're so meek and naïve. He's her ex. She cheated on him with Jeff. Have you not heard the enemy of my enemy is my friend? You both hate Sadie Galloway. Why not get to know him and work together to bring down Sadie and Jeff? After all, from what I gathered in the lobby this afternoon, I don't think he knows that you know who Sadie is. What if you used the fact that the man his wife cheated on him with is your current husband? He doesn't look like a simple individual. You and I come from a family of rich folk; we know if someone else is rich or not. That guy, back there this afternoon, screams loaded. Maybe as loaded as Hunter's family, or maybe even yours." Kenzie nished her spiel, and I just looked at her, completely dumbfounded. Why hadn't I thought of this? Why hadn't I thought of using this man to exact my revenge? "You know that rich men don't like to be toyed with or fooled. Remember what happened to that fucker that tried to rape my cousin's wife?"

"What guy?" I asked sarcastically.

"Exactly." We both started to giggle. It was true. The richer the family, the more ruthless they were. Though I never condone violence or murder, that doesn't go for the rest of our family. The sad and scary truth is that the richer you are, the more you could get away with. It was no wonder Jeff thought he would get away with cheating on me. If my family knew, they would make Jeff and his entire family disappear. However, I'm 100% certain that Jeff's family has no idea about his affairs. If that were the case, I'd have no problem being petty. I'd make sure to let the entire Hollands family know just who Jeffrey Hollands truly was. But rst, I was going to take up Kenzie's advice. Maybe joining hands with this Von Doren guy wouldn't be such a bad idea.