

## Love Or War

\*Bella\*

"Bella, why do you visit our new managing director's oce every day? What do you do with him daily?" Sarah asked, playfully poking my arm as we all gathered in the cafeteria, which was our usual place to hang out in the hospital.

I rolled my eyes, recalling how Vin summoned me to his oce every day. He seemed perpetually uneasy, insisting on thorough check-ups. Sometimes, he even came up with strange reasons to prolong my stay in his oce.

"I visit to check Mr. Leonard's vitals," I sighed in response.

"Is he unwell? He appears perfectly healthy and t," Olivia chimed in, her expression concerned.

"No, he's not sick. In fact, he's in very good health. He just wants me to examine him daily to ensure he stays that way, I suppose," I mumbled the last part under my breath.

"Well, in that case, I could give him a thorough examination," Olivia said mischievously, a grin spreading across her face.

"I do not like him anymore. He's quite rude, actually. I greeted him with my irresistible smile yesterday, the one that usually melts any man, but he didn't even acknowledge it," Layla, the Radiologist, said, making a sour expression as if she had tasted something unpleasant.

"That's odd. I heard he's quite the charmer," Sarah giggled, playfully tapping Layla's hand as Olivia joined in.

"Yeah, I've heard the same. He's famous for being a ladies' man. Layla, why do you think he ignored you?" Olivia teased Layla, a mischievous glint in her eye.

"Shut up. I'll have him wrapped around my nger in no time," Layla declared condently, a hint of pride in her voice. I widened my eyes in surprise at her bold statement.

"We'll be eagerly waiting for the show," Sarah chimed in, amusement evident in her tone.

I winced inwardly, feeling uncomfortable with their conversation.

"Alright, enough, you guys!" I scolded. "We shouldn't be discussing someone's personal life. He's our MD, and it's important to maintain professionalism."

"What's gotten into you, Bella?" Sarah gasped. "We were just having some fun."

Making fun of him, I corrected silently in my mind. But she was right—I didn't know why, but I had suddenly taken Vin's side.

"Your orders are ready," Ronnie, who managed the hospital cafeteria, interrupted.

"Thanks, Ronnie," I mumbled, offering a small smile. We collected our food and found an empty table to sit at.

"Hey, Bella!" Orlando's voice interrupted our conversation.

"Dr. Costa?" I was surprised by his sudden appearance.

"Orlando," he reminded me with a gentle smile.

"Right!" I chuckled awkwardly.

"God, I've missed you so much," he sighed, his voice a hushed whisper as he drew nearer. His gaze remained locked on me. I was at a loss for words, unsure of how to react.

To be honest, I hadn't missed him. I wanted to say it, but I remained silent. I didn't want to hurt him. If anything, it was Sarah or Olivia whose absence I felt when they weren't on shift.

"Oh, shoot! I've got to run. My duty is about to start," Sarah announced, giving me a wink.

"No, wait," I mouthed, but she only smirked and shook her head, her eyebrows lifting in a gesture toward Dr. Costa.

"Olivia! Layla! I think it's time we make our exit," Sarah suggested, addressing the others.

They exchanged a knowing look and broke into smiles.

"Actually, I just remembered some urgent tasks," Olivia chimed in, her mischievous grin directed right at me.

"Oh, yes. I should leave too. I have an urgent report to prepare," Layla chimed in.

Olivia leaned in, giving me a side hug and whispering in my ear, "Have fun."

These girls! I sighed inwardly.

"Ah, it's such a relief to nally see you after all this time," Orlando exhaled contentedly as he took a sip of his coffee.

"What happened?!" I inquired, furrowing my brows.

"I'm not entirely sure. They kept scheduling me for back-to-back shifts, making me work tirelessly. I hardly had any time for myself. But today, I managed to sneak out just to catch a glimpse of you. A week without seeing you felt like an agonizingly long year," he admitted, his gaze xed on me with intensity.

"But why did they overburden you with multiple shifts?" I muttered, not paying much attention to his attery.

"Perhaps they believe I'm the best doctor they have," he replied with a hint of smugness.

I rolled my eyes at his inated ego. There seemed to be more beneath the surface.

"Doctors, back to work. The hospital doesn't pay you to leisurely enjoy coffee in the cafeteria," a stern voice reprimanded from behind. I turned to nd Vin standing there, his gaze piercing like daggers.

"We're here for our break," I retorted, but he brushed past me as if I hadn't spoken.

"I don't want needy patients to suffer in pain. Get back to work promptly," Vin ordered, his tone icy.

"Fine," I muttered quietly.

"Not you, Dr. Bella," he interrupted me just as I was about to rise from my seat. I furrowed my brows in response while he sported a sly grin.

"I need you to have lunch with me," he demanded, his gaze unwavering and locked onto mine.

"Why, Mr. Leonardi? Am I not supposed to be working?" I challenged, narrowing my eyes at him.

"You're absolutely right. Your duty is to attend to me right now because I'm feeling very hungry," his tone dropped an octave, and his eyes seemed to darken as they roamed over me. "I need you to be there to monitor my diet."

"But I'm not a dietitian," I protested.

"Come on, Dr. Bella. You at least know what's good for my heart," he replied with a irratious tone, causing me to huff in frustration. I truly hated the way his grin widened.

"And Dr. Costa, meet me in my oce," Vin commanded, his gaze unwavering and xed on Orlando.

My eyes darted back and forth between Dr. Costa and Vin. Both men engaged in a silent battle of wills. Dr. Costa didn't respond verbally, but a subtle nod indicated his compliance.

"See you later, Bella," he said with a hint of sadness before leaving.

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\*Vincenzo\*

I was in my oce when there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," I called.

Dr. Costa entered, and I couldn't help but grimace inwardly at his appearance. He was undeniably handsome, and perhaps that was his Achilles' heel.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Leonardi?" Dr. Costa's irritation was evident in his tone.

"Yes, Dr. Costa. Please take a seat," I gestured, rising from my desk. I moved around it and positioned myself at its edge, leaning slightly. He studied me with an intense gaze.

"I strongly suggest you keep your distance from Dr. Bella," I advised, my tone laced with a clear warning.

"Excuse me?!" He seemed genuinely taken aback.

"I don't believe in mincing words. Let's get straight to the point. If you value your position here, keep your distance from Dr. Bella," I threatened, my voice carrying a grave seriousness that made it clear there was no room for denial.

"Mr. Leonardi, you can't dictate my personal life. I work for your hospital, so you have no legal grounds to re me unless I violate a rule. I'm one of the top doctors, and numerous hospitals are eager to have me join them," he retorted, sprawling arrogantly over the chair.

I couldn't help but smirk. He had no idea who he was crossing paths with. One mistake, and he would vanish from this world in such a way that no one could ever nd a trace of him.

"Very clever!" I snorted. "And thank you for your input. I'll be introducing a new rule that prohibits dating among doctors of City Hospital, citing professionalism," I announced suddenly.

He was caught off guard, his eyes narrowing before a wicked smile played on his lips.

"Then, by the same token, you'll have to refrain from pursuing Dr. Bella due to professionalism," he gritted out.

Oh, you have no idea Doc!

"Once again, your input is invaluable. I'll ensure to mention that this rule doesn't apply to non-medical staff and management personnel," I declared, my smile widening as I observed his face darken with frustration.

"You can't do this," he retorted, his tone laced with anger.

He didn't know what I was capable of doing. I snickered at the thought of when he ever found out what he would do.

"My hospital, my rules," I smirked, shrugging nonchalantly.

"You're... You're a..." He stopped himself, his teeth clenched.

"Feel free to say something you'll regret forever," I challenged him.

He huffed in frustration, storming out of the room in a t of rage. I exhaled heavily, well aware that my actions were far from fair.

But as they say, everything is fair in love and war.