

## Chapter 9

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Leon

It was in my nature to be detached, since I had the tendency to compartmentalize my life. It simplified things and allowed me to succeed in my endeavors from the beginning. But then a pint-sized heavy hitter came swinging into my life and changed it all. I was like a man possessed even a week after my encounter with Annika and going through it felt like some out-of-body experience. The intoxicating scent of her perfume still lingered, and the part of my forearm she touched felt like I had been branded like cattle. Her grit and poise while handling the unknown also left quite an impression. Everything about her screamed authority, ambition, potential, and, best of all, beauty. Even with her small stature, I knew, given her background, Annika Hollands, or should I say, Annika Silverton was no simple woman. But that wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

I couldn't wrap my head around why that \*\*\*\* District Attorney would leave such a woman for trash like Sadie, though I must admit, I chose that trash to be my wife in the past. But it was a no-brainer that if a woman like Annika had been on my radar back then, I would have chosen to pursue her instead. A part of me wondered if I should tell her Sadie cheated on me with her current husband and thought, maybe, I could help her get back at him while getting back at Sadie at the same time. But I decided against it because I didn't want to scare her off. I couldn't have her thinking it was my fault for not controlling Sadie to keep her from stealing another woman's husband. Then again, not even that vicious woman's own parents could stop her, considering her mother was a mistress too. It seems the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree.

Beep

"What is it?" I answered my oce assistant, who was paging me.

"Mr. Von Doren, you have a visitor."

"I don't have any appointments. Who is it?"

"She claims to be your doctor."

[...]

Why was Annika here? What business did she have with me suddenly?

"Mr. Von Doren?"

"Let her up," I gave him the command before unconsciously starting to straighten myself up and smooth out my shirt. I calculated it would take her at least three minutes to get to my oce when I realized her coming here presented a slight predicament. Wait. s\*\*t, Annika was on her way up here, which meant she would nd out I'm not just some executive, but rather, the CEO of Paradox, and because of that half-truth I told her, she might think I was a liar. Just as I was questioning why I got so worked up about it, the door to my oce opened without warning.

"Mr. Von Doren, Dr. Annika Hollands is here to see you."

"Let her in." The assistant stepped aside, and I swore my breath caught in my throat when I saw Annika looking more stunning than ever. The word beautiful wasn't enough to describe her anymore. The person I had met before and the woman standing in front of me were apples and oranges. While dressed in a white coat with a stethoscope around her neck, Annika played her doctor role accordingly and blended in with the crowd. Today was different because Annika looked like she had stepped off a magazine cover.

Annika was quite petite, but that didn't make her any less of a woman; in fact, her body was a perfect hourglass and had perfect symmetry. A curled bob hairstyle framed her face that was enhanced by her choice of natural makeup, and the dark, navy-blue dress she wore was tailored to perfection. Her black ats gave off the appearance of simplicity, but I knew they cost ve gures. It just so happened that I bought the same pair for Sadie while we were married, except these looked like they were made for Annika, and they somehow accentuated her legs despite her short stature.

"Mr. Von Doren, thank you for seeing me," she greeted me. I dismissed my assistant, and he left without even batting an eyelash. Annika patiently waited for the door to close, and as soon as it did, she turned around and gave me a stern expression.

"Are you angry with me?" I asked right away.

"You lied to me."

"Excuse me?"

"Mr. Von ... No, wait, I should address you as President Von Doren," she jabbed at me while crossing her arms.

"I ... I ... " What the hell? Why was I suddenly speechless in front of this woman?

"President Von Doren, why did you lie to me?" she reframed it as a question and c\*\*\*\*d her head to the side very smugly. I usually hated when a woman acted snobbishly the way she just did, yet I found it rather attractive and adorable whenever she played the part. What the f\*\*k? Adorable? Since when did my vocabulary include adorable when describing a woman?

"I didn't mean to lie, Doc. I only told the half-truth," I replied.

"Anything that isn't 100% the truth is still a lie because you're withholding information," she immediately red back. I stared at her, baed that she actually outwitted me to the point where I had nothing to say. She clicked her tongue disapprovingly against her cheek before speaking again. "I didn't come here to antagonize you, President Von Doren. I came because—"

"Leon," I cut her off.

"Excuse me?"

"You don't have to be formal with me. You can call me Leon, Doc."

"Umm," she hesitated a bit, and I realized my forwardness had made her ustered. Truthfully, I wondered why I was allowing her to call me by my rst name so soon when I didn't even permit Toby to call me on a rst-name basis, and he's been with me for nearly teen years.

"What did you want to see me about?" I stood up from my desk to head towards the wet bar inside my oce. "Water?"

"Huh?" I turned around at her confusion and noticed her gaze instantly traveling up towards my eyes. I quirked my eyebrow at her. Was she checking out my ass just now?

"I asked if you wanted water?" I repeated, trying to stie the smirk that had appeared on my lips. Annika's face ushered for a second before she composed herself at the speed of light. The average person would have missed this, but not me. I knew she was embarrassed because she got caught staring at my assets. You can stare all you want, Doc. I instantly wanted to slap myself for having such thoughts because I'm never this lewd. Sure, I enjoy s\*x and the company of a beautiful woman like any other man, but the fact that I wanted my doctor to check me out was something out of the ordinary.

"Yes, I'll take a water," Annika responded. I grabbed two bottles out of the mini-fridge and handed her one as I sat down. While eyeing her again to see her reason for coming, her cheeks suddenly became a shade of pink, and I found this shy side of Annika quite charming.

"Doc, why did you come to see me? Are you here to see if I actually took some time off work?"

"Well, no, but now that you mention it, I guess we can circle back to our previous conversation about bosses not being able to take vacations when they please."

"You're right. We have something in common because, like you, I can't just leave. Otherwise, my company—like your practice—would crumble. I may have plenty of subordinates, but there can only be one owner, one president," I leaned back, telling her in the same smug manner she used earlier.

"You're right. Happy?"

"Very."

"Back to why I'm here," she reiterated and let out a deep sigh. Her inner turmoil was on full display through her eyes, and her body language shifted into nervousness, even though she was trying painstakingly hard not to show it.

"Doc, is everything alright?" I asked as the silence dragged on.

"Umm, how can I put this to where it doesn't freak you out and make you think I'm crazy ..." she trailed off and bit her bottom lip, staring up at me through her naturally long eyelashes. I was completely disarmed by her innocence and the way she looked at me while biting her lip, and it suddenly made all the blood in my brain rush south. What the f\*\*k? Why am I getting hard just by this one act?

"Doc, I work in the corporate sector of real estate. I've met plenty of crazy people in my days. Trust me; you're not one of them. My ex-wife, now, she's one of them."

"Actually, the reason why I'm here happens to involve your ex-wife," she quickly admitted.

"Oh?" This was interesting. I wonder if ...

"Mr. Von Doren, please don't take this as my being nosey or meddlesome, but why did you divorce your wife?"

"Ex-wife. And I divorced her due to indelity," I answered without hesitation. I knew it. There was no doubt in my mind that she knew her husband's mistress was Sadie. It was quite obvious to me because the looks they exchanged at the practice were lled with severe contempt and hostility. I was right about my hunch that Counsellor Malloy had Jorge looking into Sadie because he was getting evidence for Annika.

"Do you ... happen to know ... how long ... she had been ... umm ... stepping out on you?" Her tension was visible as she tried to get the words out.

"Doc, you don't have to be nervous. I have nothing to hide. From what I can already gather, your husband is cheating on you, and his mistress is Sadie, am I right?" I bit the bullet and got straight to the point.

"How did you—?"

"Because I already know who you are, Doc, and I know everything about you. I know your maiden name is Silverton and that you're the daughter of the Rhode Island Silverton's, and I also know that you're the current D.A.'s wife."

"How ... Why?"

"Again, I have nothing to hide, so I'll come clean. Sadie cheated on me for almost our entire marriage. And yes, the entire time, it was with your husband. I divorced her three months ago and lost assets worth tens of millions in court because she pushed the blame on me while tampering with the evidence of her indelity. I'm pretty sure that was her father's doing, and David Galloway is not a simple-minded individual. I married Sadie because I thought she would be a submissive wife, but I was wrong. She married me for money and power, and when she didn't get that, she stepped out on me with your husband. I had noticed the signs early on in the marriage but was biding my time to gather the evidence I needed. Unfortunately, due to her family's interference and the fact that our prenup was inadequate, I lost a lot of money. Granted, I made up for the loss in a matter of days. I'm never short on money, I have the condence to say that much; however, that doesn't mean I nd it acceptable to be cheated on and cheated out."

"Did you say that ... she was cheating ... for almost a year?" Annika choked out, and her eyes immediately became glassy. The sadness in her eyes, the anger in her glare, and the way her body trembled over the betrayal pulled at my heartstrings. Huh? Heartstrings? What's with this role reversal nonsense?

"I'm sorry, but it's the truth. Your husband has been cheating on you for more than a year," I said bluntly. From how she was staring at the top of my desk, and what Jorge had reported already, she was already aware of this, but seemed to be in denial. I guess hearing it directly from the other party involved wasn't what she actually wanted. However, I was not about to beat around the bush and lie to this poor young woman. She had been subjected to enough lies already. She blinked, and gravity took care of the rest as tears owed like waterfalls from both of her eyes. Seeing the amount of pain Annika was experiencing stirred up something within me, and it made me want to shoot that scumbag husband of hers. Never mind that he stole my wife, but how could he do this to his own wife? How did his family raise this bastard? "Doc, I have to ask, what were your intentions for coming here?"

"I ... I ... " Annika gulped down her sadness and snied once. "If what you say is true, and my husband has been cheating on me with your ex-wife throughout your entire marriage, not to mention she took your money by cheating the legal system," she paused before continuing, "then how about joining hands with me?"

"Come again?" Did Annika just propose for us to join hands? I looked down at her dainty hands and couldn't help but wonder what they felt like.

"I want us to work together to bring down Jeffrey Hollands and Sadie Galloway. I want to take everything they love and hold near and dear to them. They love each other and want to grow with each other, so how about we make them fall together as well?" Annika stated her declaration of war with such ferociousness that it was hard to believe it came out of the same mouth struggling to form a coherent question moments ago. I studied her face as she slid a USB drive toward me.

"What is this, Doc?"

"Open the le, and you'll see. It benets both of us, though I'm sure you'll want to gouge your eyes out after watching it." Her words immediately piqued my interest, so I plugged it into my computer. There was a single le on it, and after I saw when it was dated, I looked up at her in shock.

"Doc, this is ..."

"As I said, it will benet both of us." I didn't need to watch it to know that she was right. The existence of this le alone was denitely to both of our advantages.