

BOSS ON NOTICE

SNEAK PEEK

CHAPTER 1

Off The Clock

Ding, ding, dum, dum...

I awaken with a gasp, then blink into focus my ringing cell phone.

“Oh...” I massage my temples. My head, which feels like it’s the consistency of cement, sinks deeper into my pillow. Last night I hung out with my favorite cousin, Xena, along with friends I haven’t seen in like forever. We danced. We drank. We danced some more. I had a good time—my dull, throbbing headache is evidence of that.

But lying here in my very comfortable bed, I know that something is wrong. I’m not supposed to be still in bed. There’s too much light in my room. I was supposed to wake up extra early this morning to get to the office and do something.

What was it?

What time is it?

The phone is on its fourth chime. It'll do eight before sending the caller to voice mail. I squint at the screen.

"Damn it," I breathe.

It's Orion Lord, my boss. The time at the top of the screen glares back at me.

I wince as I fling myself up and into the sitting position. It's 11:00 a.m. I had planned to be at the office three hours ago—and now I remember.

The letter.

My heart constricts as I panic. But then, I also remember that Orion never gets in before noon on a Friday. So, I have nothing to fear.

Feeling a teensy bit more relaxed by the seventh chime, I snatch my cell phone off the nightstand as I spring to my feet. "Good morning, Orion." I sound extra chipper in efforts to make him believe I'm at my desk working my ass off.

"I've been calling you all night and this morning." His tone suggests that I had committed an unholy act by not answering when he calls. I had definitely done something unusual by avoiding his after-hours disturbances. Yesterday afternoon, I let Xena persuade me to put my cell phone in Do Not Disturb mode and leave the office before 5:00 p.m. I was on a call with her complaining about Orion when the power went out. I meant to unsilence my device when I got home last night. I must've forgotten to do it. And now, I can't chance him making it to the

office before I do.

“Mm-hmm. Well, you found me now.” I laugh a little too high and then freeze midmotion. “Where are you?”

Orion never pauses for this long. He’s the sort of man who presents with an annoying kind of confidence. It’s as if he never has to think about what to say or do because he thinks second-guessing himself is a weakness. And so that pause means something is definitely amiss. I move even faster.

“On my way into the office,” he finally says.

I speed-walk to my closet, a real walk-in closet in New York City. I can afford it because Lord Technical Innovations pays me an executive’s salary to be the assistant to one of the worst executives on the planet. The money is why I never complain about him to his face, even when he assigns me the silliest tasks.

“Okay!” I say cheerily as I peel a navy blue shift dress off the hanger. “I’ll see you soon.”

I wait for him to say something. Orion’s not one of those people who ends a call without a *goodbye* or a *see you soon* or a *thank you*. Even though he’s a horrible and annoying boss, he has fantastic manners and persuasive charm.

“By the way, you didn’t send me my calendar yesterday,” he says.

If I had the time I would stop dead in my tracks, but I don’t have the time so I shove my feet into my running shoes as fast as I can. “I know. Sorry. The power went out at around four thirty.”

“Which is why I was calling you.”

“I know... Sorry.” *Not sorry.*

“Don’t worry. I got it.”

Now I go rigid in the middle of hanging my satchel over my shoulder. “You did?”

No...

Please, God, no.

“Yes,” he says.

I can’t afford to stand still while staving off my second panic attack of the morning. I’ll probably have more before the day is over. The only way Orion knows how to access his calendar is through my computer. *No...* I’m stabbing the Down button to the elevator with my elbow while staring longingly in the direction of my apartment. I feel like I’ve forgotten something.

“How?” I close my eyes, chastising myself for asking that question. I didn’t mean to say it that way. Orion may be superficial, but he’s not dense. On very rare occasions he’ll shock me by displaying moments of brilliance. However, he’s never been able to access his calendar remotely. Let’s just say that I have a sneaky feeling he pretends not to know how to access his calendar remotely. Regardless, after I tried to walk him through the process dozens of times, he threw up his hands and insisted that I push his calendar to his devices three times a day throughout the workday and on weekends if something changes. Something is always changing on the weekends.

For instance, Heather, his date for his brother's wedding this weekend, for which the festivities actually start today, had called and told him to find someone else to go with. She was angry because Orion hadn't answered any of her thirtysomething messages and eleven emails. I so desperately wanted to let her know that ghosting women he makes dates with is his MO. I have no idea why he does it, but I think it's psychological or psychotic or something in between. But I've come to know Heather well. She was bluffing, which is why I never passed on her message.

However, he has paused again and now my insides are sending SOS signals to my feet. He couldn't have gone back to the office yesterday evening, could he? No way. He never returns to the office after he leaves. But I had turned my phone off. *Oh no*. I clutch my chest as the elevator stops on the eleventh floor. I know I should've run down the stairs instead of getting myself trapped in the slowest-moving elevator in New York City. I don't have enough patience to stop. I need to keep going, especially if...

Oh no...

"I figured it out," Orion finally says.

A guy with curly black hair, the most gorgeous eyes I've ever seen, the body of a Greek demigod, and perfectly white teeth smiles coyly at me as he joins me in the elevator. This isn't our first time smiling at each other this way as we say good morning or good afternoon and on rare occasions good night. Once, he said good night to me while wearing a beautiful woman, who

appeared to be a supermodel, draped over his shoulder. He's always flirting though. But I'm certain I'm not his type. I never have the time to make myself look like his type. Just like this morning, as I left the house wearing no makeup. *Shit*. I pat the side of my head, remembering I left my apartment so fast that I had forgotten to neaten my ponytail.

So, realizing that I look a mess, I shy away from smiling back at Mr. Eleventh Floor, which is what I call him in my head and when I talk to Xena and my girlfriends about him.

"You figured it out?" I try to whisper to Orion while staring in the opposite direction of Mr. Eleventh Floor. He smells extraordinary today. I love a man who smells like heaven.

"Yes," Orion replies.

I shake my head. This makes no sense to me. Orion is not the kind of person who figures it out. I jump when the elevator dings. Dang it, I should've muted our call before the car stopped.

"Where are you?" Orion asks.

I race into the lobby. "I'm getting coffee."

He pauses yet again. "Oh yeah. On the fourth floor or at Starbucks?"

"Starbucks."

"Did you get me one too?"

I'm practically running up Fourteenth Street. "Yep, black, no sugar or cream."

"That's great. You're great, Lilly." His tone is patronizing.

I frown as I narrowly avoid slamming into a pedestrian

who's following the normal New York City sidewalk-walking speed, which is very brisk and at a steady pace. But did he just call me *Lilly*? He never calls me Lilly. He always calls me Lila—and nobody calls me that but him—even though I've told him more times than I can remember that nobody but him calls me that, but he stills does it just to annoy me. But now he's calling me Lilly? *What's he playing at?*

“Right,” I barely say.

“You don't believe me?”

I want to breathe heavily, but I can't tip him off that I'm running. However, even though I can't see his face, I can very well picture his charming smile. Orion can charm cheese from a starving mouse. But there's no black or white answer to the question he just asked. He's being manipulatively charming and I have no idea why, although my brain has propelled me into figure-out-why mode.

Has he read the letter?

I picture myself sitting at my desk before the power went out, grumbling to Xena about what had happened that morning. Orion woke me up with a phone call at 7:03 a.m. and asked if I could bring him a bottle of cold water and towel. He was in the neighborhood, jogging on the High Line. I had dragged myself out of bed, grabbed a fresh bottle of cold water out of my refrigerator, and a towel from my hallway cabinet and met him on the corner of Ninth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. Orion showed no signs of ever breaking a sweat. He claimed he went for a run,

but I thought it was more like a walk, and not even a power walk. He grinned at me with that annoying twinkle in his eyes as if I should've felt blessed to be doing him a favor. *He's such a narcissist.*

He didn't even say thank you either. He just gobbled down the bottle's contents as though he had spent the morning in hell and finally had been given ice water. But I didn't care. All I wanted to do was turn my back on him and pretend our strange encounter never happened. Yet before I could spin around on my heels and stomp back to my apartment, he said, "Wait a minute. I'll give you your towel back." Then he proceeded to wipe his nonexistent sweat.

I glared at him, asking myself, *What do women see in him?* On a subconscious level, I'm aware that Orion Lord is an extremely handsome man. But frankly, I cannot allow myself to acknowledge his looks. The way he behaves doesn't allow me to see them.

"Whoa," he finally said. "You don't look so good. Did you get enough sleep last night? Because you can't take off today. I need you." To drive the point home, he aimed his half-drained water bottle at me. "I need you."

My mind experienced some sort of mental traffic jam full of insults, expletives, and explanations. For instance, "Yeah, I look like crap because I was stuck at the office until 2:00 a.m., finishing a report for your brother Hercules's office that was supposed to be completed by you." *By the way, I do his work too. I*

also wanted to say, “When was the last time I had a day off?” I can never take off. If I did, the whole office would go to shit.

But instead, we stood at the bend of the street corner, cars whipping by way too fast, people whipping by even faster, as he kept talking and talking, *and yapping*. I tuned him out as the words *I think I hate you* repeated in my head. The guy didn’t even look at me while he talked. His eyes kept wandering to all the beautiful women who were out and about. I think he’s a sex addict or something. The guy juggles so many women and cares for none of them. That’s why I was surprised that he was so jealous when he learned his brother Achilles was engaged to Treasure Grove, who is apparently his ex-girlfriend. Last year, on top of all the important work I do for him on a daily basis, he made me befriend Achilles’s assistant, Jenn, so that I could easily track his brother and his brother’s fiancée’s whereabouts.

Finally, Achilles and Treasure are getting married in Las Vegas this weekend. They rented out an entire hotel, which costs the same amount as it does to run a small country. I think their soon-to-be nuptials is one reason why Orion has been acting so needy. I almost feel sorry for the guy, almost.

“Recycle this, Lila,” he had said, shoving both towel and bottle into my chest.

I was ready to claw his perfect face off. I almost said, “You narcissistic nitwit, do not call me Lila. How many times do I have to tell you not to call me that!”

But I didn’t. Instead, I turned my back on him and stormed

home, licking my wounds the whole way. However, it was on that walk when a solution to rid myself of Orion Lord for good began to spark in my brain.

Orion is still waiting for me to answer whether or not I believe that he thinks I'm great when I peer through the window of Starbucks and see a line that feels as long as the entire East Coast.

"Oops," I say. "I dropped the coffees." I tell him I'll make some more once I'm back in the office.

"You never answered my question," Orion says.

I roll my eyes. He made me lie about the coffees and now I have to lie again. *Grrr...* "Yes. I believe you," I say through the fake smile I conjured just to get those words out.

I finally race into the LTI building.

"Why are you breathing so heavily, Lilly?"

I am breathing heavily. Sweat warms my forehead and trickles down the sides of my face. Our office is on the first floor. We used to be on the penthouse floor with Hercules, and his co-CEO and wife, Paisley until Orion screwed that up. Then his job duties changed and we were moved to the sixteenth floor to join the sales team. He screwed up there too, and now we're crunching numbers in an office with two rooms—both the same size—but still Orion insists that we share the same space while the other room be used for storing paper, pens, books, ledgers, a copier-printer-fax machine combo, and a refrigerator. He could have his own office and I could have mine. But rarely do any of

Orion's decisions make sense.

"Lilly, are you still with me?" he asks.

I scan my employee badge to enter our private hallway. "I'm breathing heavily because I want to hurry up and get to my desk." I squeeze my eyes shut, shaking my head. "I mean back to my desk."

I pull up to a stop when I notice the office door is cracked open. Oh no, did I forget to close it before leaving in a huff yesterday afternoon? I take a moment to visualize myself walking out into the hallway. I was definitely hopped up on a high dose of fuck it. But I don't have to think about what happened yesterday anymore. I know he's in there—I can feel him in the air.

My stomach lurches as I cross the threshold of the office. I'm now existing in slow motion as I lock eyes with Orion who's sitting behind his desk, fingers behind his head and long legs crossed on his desk as he nails me with the cockiest grin.

He points his fingers at me as if he's aiming a gun. "I bet you thought I'd be on my way to the wedding."

I can feel my eyebrows hovering just above my eyes. "I didn't." He and Heather are supposed to board his private airplane at eight p.m. I set my bag on top of my desk, peering at my computer. "What are you doing here so early?"

Oh no. I stifle a gasp. My screen is up. The last task I worked on populates the screen. My head feels floaty as I pretend not to be bothered by the letter that's on display and waiting for anyone and everyone to see. *Has he read this?*

*Dear Orion Lord, (You
fucking narcissist—remember to
delete)*

*A day comes when an
overqualified assistant becomes
tired of picking up your laundry,
managing your many girlfriends,
lying to them, acting as your
personal alarm clock, and a new
low, even for you, Mr. Lord,
bringing you a cold bottle of water
at the end of your run. You run?
When did you start running?*

Never mind.

*Oh...I almost forgot, having
me stalk your brother and his
fiancée was not your finest moment
and is actually lower than the water
thing. (Delete—maybe.)*

*The point is, yes, the money is
excellent, but you are not
(Remember to revise). I quit. This is
my two weeks' notice.*

*Not Even Sincerely,
(Remember to delete)*

Delilah O'Shay

