

Chapter Forty-Three

Following an unsatisfactory discussion with her husband, Connie Raymond had come to the conclusion that divorce was her only option. Plagued with guilt, both from her decision to divorce and her recent sexual indiscretion, she had delayed calling the attorney whose name she had obtained from Diane. Finally, out of desperation and the desire to get on with her life, she found herself seated in the lawyers mahogany paneled office, staring out of a window and marveling at its panoramic view of San Francisco.

"If you are convinced that this is the only way, then I will require a five thousand dollar retainer to get started," the attorney, Charles Donovan remarked.

"I've given it a lot of thought, Mr. Donovan," Connie replied, while dabbing her eyes with a tissue. "I just don't see any point in delaying the inevitable. You see, even when he is home, I'm still alone."

"What do you mean?" Donovan asked, his hands clasped in front of his chest.

"On those rare occasions when he finds his way home, he spends most of the time in his little office with the door closed. I feel like an uninvited guest. And other times, when he's not at home, I usually cry myself to sleep and frankly, Mr. Donovan, I just can't do it any longer."

"Have you discussed these feelings with your husband?"

"Of course," she replied, with a pained expression.

"And how does he respond?"

"He blames it all on his job responsibilities."

"So, I guess that marriage counseling is out of the question?"

"I raised the question once, over breakfast--he just frowned and said that it wouldn't help his public image."

"Excuse me for asking a personal question but, on another note, what about your sexual relations?"

"Give me a break, there haven't been any. When we first got married he couldn't get enough but recently, he's been either too tired or simply unavailable. If you want to know the truth, I think he's got a mistress."

"Do you have any proof?" he asked, while doodling on a yellow legal pad.

"No, just a suspicion."

"Do you want to go that route?"

"You mean a detective?"

"Yes."

"I'm not sure what's better, knowing or not knowing."

Donovan adjusted the soft pink tie that peeked out from between the lapels of his dark blue, pinstriped suit. "Some clients," he said, "have felt that knowing the truth gave them the needed edge to go through with the action."

"You mean revenge, right?"

"Well, call it what you like but if we can substantiate your suspicions, the knowledge of such might help to keep you focused during the months to come."

Connie moved back in the chair, her short skirt rising unintentionally, revealing the tops of her dark gray nylons.

"Maybe you're right," she remarked, softly.

Donovan's gaze shifted immediately, seemingly aimed at the soft white flesh between her skirt and stocking tops. "I have just the man for the job," he commented, his appreciation for her thighs becoming ever more obvious, "he's discrete, can fit in anywhere and is good with a camera."

"Fine," she said, pulling her skirt down, now aware of the object of his attention.

"One last thing. California is a community property state and as such, you are entitled to one half of the accumulated family assets."

"That's good, I suppose."

"It is, in terms of your future support, but it also means that we will have to dissect your husband's and your own financial records."

Connie shrugged. "Whatever you need to do to get me out of this nightmare is fine."

"OK," Donovan whispered, while making a note in his appointment book.

Connie reached into her purse and removed her checkbook. "Where do we go from here?" she asked.

Grinning, Donovan rose from behind his desk and extended his hand. Connie responded by offering her's for the anticipated handshake but instead, he shook his head. "The retainer?" he said.

Connie exited the gleaming skyscraper with a feeling of emptiness. I know that I'm doing the right thing, she remarked to herself, while negotiating a crowded sidewalk on the way to a lunch date with Diane. Haven't I tried everything possible? Well, it's over, at least in my mind and it's time for me to get a new life. Lost in her battle of self-recrimination, she nearly

passed the coffee shop. Stopping just outside, she removed a makeup compact from her purse and made an attempt to camouflage the signs of her emotional state. Resigned to the futility of her actions, she closed the mirrored case and walked into the restaurant.

"Over here," Diane shouted, while waving her hands wildly from the confines of a booth.

Connie ambled over and with a deep sigh, slid onto the bench facing her friend. "Well, I did it and I feel like shit," she said.

"That's a natural reaction, honey," Diane commented.

"Can you imagine, he screws up and I feel guilty?"

"Just concentrate on starting a new life and let the past go."

"I wish I could do that but parts of the past are still in the present."

"Trust me, it'll get easier."

"I don't know, Diane, wait until he gets the papers. I can only imagine what will happen then."

"Look, you're young, sexy and soon to be available. Try to look towards the future and you'll soon see that the past will fade in comparison."

"I need a drink," Connie exclaimed, with a tone of exasperation.

"I thought you didn't drink before dinner time?"

"I'm starting a new life, right?"

"Waiter," Diane shouted. "So, what did you think of him?"

"Who?"

"Donovan, silly."

"He seems pretty capable. After all, if you trusted him to do your prenuptial, considering your family inheritance, I'm sure that he can handle my little affair."

"That's not what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I was asking about the man."

"Oh, that," Connie replied, as she gazed about the restaurant, lost in thought.

"Earth to Connie," Diane said, tapping the base of a salt shaker on the table.

"Sorry, just daydreaming."

"So, Donovan, he's pretty hot, isn't he?"

"I wasn't really paying attention to that."

"I'll bet he was."

"What do you mean?"

"I've heard that he can't keep his hands off of the recent divorcees and that he rarely gets turned down."

"You've got to be kidding ... isn't that unethical?"

Diane shrugged. "Hey, when you're coming out of a shitty, sexless marriage, are you gonna stop and think about ethics? Nah, you just want to get laid and there he is, with his tongue hanging out--it's nookie nirvana."

"Well, I'm not sure he'd be my choice."

"Why, have you got someone else in mind?" Diane asked, as the waiter arrived and took their orders for Long Island iced tea.

"C'mon, you know I've been a good girl ..."

"Now Connie," Diane interrupted, "I seem to recall how hot and disheveled you were after that night at the club."

"So?"

"What about your masked marvel?"

"That was awhile ago. I never even got his name," she said, while recalling the business card that she had found the following morning and never disposed of.

"Well, I shouldn't tell you this," Diane whispered, "but I called that freaky looking club manager the next day and asked about your friend."

Connie lowered the menu that she had just opened and gazed expectantly at Diane. "And?" she replied.

"At first, she didn't know who I was talking about but when I gave her a detailed description ..."

"Detailed," Connie broke in.

"OK, I'll own up. I couldn't resist, so I peeked a bit while you two were going at it."

"Great," Connie hissed.

"Anyway, she said that he comes in from time to time and that he's very picky about whom he pursues."

"Picky?"

"Yeah, that's what she said. She told me that she's seen him on occasions spend an entire evening by himself."

"Interesting, and he chose me?"

"I told you, you're a hot commodity."

"You know, this conversation is making me feel uncomfortable. The minutes have hardly passed since starting my divorce proceedings, it's too early for me to be thinking about another guy."

Diane Winked. "That'll change," she commented.

"Maybe."

"I'm hungry," Diane exclaimed. "Let's order."

"You haven't even looked at the menu."

"I eat here all the time, I've got it memorized."

"I should have guessed."

"Oh," Diane added, "just so you know, I asked the club manager to call me if she finds out anything else about your friend."