

## Chapter One

*The tales they don't tell you...*

*Have we all been duped by reality radios two most successful DJ's? We've been listening to them for months, to them bickering and blasting each other on their respective shows. Their real antics have had us all turning up that DAB.*

*Radio ratings have suffered in the competition with ever expanding, customised, commercial media. With the rise of the internet, smartphones, and Smart TV's, radio is often not a consumer's first choice.*

*Radio has been fighting back with more and more daring shows, various celeb presenters, and music to suit all listeners. Of course, if your audience doesn't care about the latest tunes, or follow celebrity trends, then getting their attention can be tough.*

*So, what's the latest? Reality radio – that's right you heard it here first six months ago, remember? Sceptical as we were it seems that the formula has been cracked. Station PDR got there first with "Annie's Antics", where Miss Annie Chambers – previously a very successful talk radio presenter on the same station – agreed to record portions of her week using cutting edge technology trained to specifically pick up the users voice and eliminate ambient noise.*

*Hours of Annie's day were aired live to the audience as they happened. Annie then took to her usual time slot, nine 'til midnight on a Friday to discuss her week, take caller comment, answer questions, and give advice.*

*PDR's biggest competitor KDS – and arguably the larger, more successful station – was not deterred. They fought back with their most popular DJ Hunter Riordan, a man that the largest stations worldwide have been clamouring to poach, but he has stayed put – though no one can figure out exactly why. The man knew media on a scale larger than most DJ's before him, regularly appearing for chats on TV, interviews in magazines, and who could forget the spread in Cosmo's sexier cousin MissMix late last year – we're still swooning over the pictures taped to our bedroom ceilings.*

*But hold the press! After "Reality with Riordan" began using the same formula six weeks after "Annie's Antics" started and had proved a hit, Hunter couldn't help but take pot-shots at Annie, and who could blame him.*

*His hours were filled with laughter, parties, sports events, “Buddies at the Bar” (now a regular segment), and various lucky women. Annie’s show was much slower, a more stoic, and often said a watered down – perhaps simulated – life.*

*Annie spends her days running errands, taking her friend’s ailing grandmother to the doctors, giving us commentary on the book she’s reading, or the last play she went to see.*

*Her show didn’t just disappear silently though, no, they fought back, taking their own shots at Hunter and his immature capers. Annie’s ratings went up, Hunter’s plateaued, and the public has been enthralled ever since waiting for the next challenge to be laid down.*

*But, wait a minute, what is this we see? Last night our very own Daily Delight photographer spotted the two DJ’s at the Premier Radio Awards reception where the nominees were announced before next month’s ceremony. What would you expect? Were they arguing? Teasing? Taking the usual pot shots at each other?*

*In fact, these two had shifted from school yard taunting to a decidedly more behind the bike shed moment. As you can see from the picture snapped by our very own Rod Byron their public personas have an issue with each other that apparently they don’t share with their off-air counterparts.*

*The tongue Annie has slandered her opponent with over the airwaves was silenced by the taste of that opposite defamatory tongue. And, what is this? Her hands full with his lapels; but his hands?*

*We’ve all heard the jokes of what radio presenters wear to work, but I think we all saw far more of Annie Chambers than we ever thought we would with her skirt around the wrist of Riordan’s grasping fingers. We have to wonder, just where would this have led if our colleague hadn’t interrupted the moment?*

*Their moment sucking face in the shadows of an isolated hallway corner behind a potted plant of all places – shame Hunter! We know just how you like to treat your honeys, surely Miss Chambers deserves that same pampering?*

*But, all of this begs the question – just how well do these apparent competitors know each other? Furthermore, have we all been had? Was the whole thing a ruse from the very beginning?*

‘There’s a picture!’

‘I know,’ Annie said grasping the edge of the seat under her thighs. ‘I know. I saw it.’

‘His hand is up your skirt!’

‘I said I know Ed.’

That didn't stop her boss Edgar Prew from throwing the newspaper down on his desk toward her – that picture plastered all over the front. Her paper was delivered to her front door, and even the paperboy hadn't missed his chance to taunt; deliberately knocking on the door to deliver the offending paper personally as opposed to leaving it outside as he usually did.

The youngster with his cheesy grin and train track braces, practically salivated as he guffawed and stared at her thighs. Yes, the entire world had seen her backside; they knew she wore thong underwear to what was supposed to be the start of a glorious awards season because she was actually in with a chance of winning something this year; or rather, she had been.

The stout man paced behind his ramshackle desk, which was so covered by paper and newspaper that Annie didn't know how he found anything. A computer monitor took up a whole quarter of the space; she assumed there was a keyboard under there somewhere.

Edgar had initially taken to technology with gusto, but that had stopped as quickly as it started, which the nicotine stained beige monitor circa 1998 attested to.

'What the hell are we going to do about this?' he asked.

The scrape of his fat, calloused fingers dragging over the stubble he hadn't bothered to rid himself of this morning grated on her.

'What the hell were you thinking?' he barked and stopped to slam his weight onto his hands on the desk sending paper everywhere.

'I really don't know what to say Ed. I'm sorry.'

All she could hope was that Hunter was suffering under his station manager's scrutiny as much as she was.

'Hey!'

Stopped by yet another colleague Hunter received the high-five with zest. He'd had it on the street, in his building, even the garbage men on the kerb stopped to praise him.

'Get in here Riordan,' Theo Marshall called from his office doorway and then disappeared inside.

Slurping his coffee Hunter reached over to snatch the notes from his pigeonhole only to see it was crammed to bursting.

'I've got a whole drawer full,' Theo's assistant Tandi said curling a bleach blonde strand of hair around her finger. 'I can give it to you later.'

The promise on her lips she'd given him just about every morning since she started here a year ago. He'd yet to take her up on it, but it was nice to know the offer was available.

Hunter bestowed the usual wink then headed away from the pigeonholes, past Tandi, and into Theo's office.

After he closed the door Hunter swaggered across to put his coffee on Theo's immaculate desk. Nothing in the room indicated that Theo actually did any work, not a file, nor a computer was in sight.

Propping his ankle on the opposite knee after he sat, Hunter cracked his knuckles, and waited for Theo to talk. Instead, his boss turned from the window and dropped the newspaper into Hunter's lap, folded open to show the picture which took up more than half of the page.

'Have you seen this?'

'No,' Hunter said inspecting the picture. 'Didn't need to – I was there when it was taken.'

'And you didn't think to phone me?'

'What for?' Hunter asked shoving the paper onto the desk and retrieving his cardboard coffee mug.

'If we know about these things we can control them. Barbie's on-air right now fielding nothing but calls about last night.'

'It was a big night in radio,' Hunter said sliding down in the chair, and rolling his shoulders.

'Don't bullshit me,' Theo said taking his seat and pulling it into the desk. 'You've got a special segment in half an hour, what are you doing with it?'

'I'm hung over so I'm meeting Conner for breakfast.'

'And, you don't think your best friend is going to ask about the picture?'

'Let him ask,' Hunter shrugged. 'I don't have anything to hide.'

'They're saying that you're fucking around with her.' Hunter had only skimmed the article but he had gleaned that much. 'Well?'

'Well what?' Hunter asked.

'Are you?'

Hunter couldn't tell if Theo was genuinely as curious as the rest of the world apparently were, or just exasperated about the whole thing.

'Come on Theo,' he said twisting his lips to the sly smile the world knew him for. 'A guy doesn't kiss and tell.'

'Is that what you're going to tell Conner?'

'Are you kidding? I'm going to tell Conner about my nomination for breakthrough show. Triumph man! It's in the bag.'

'Except PDR have got us by the balls because it's their format.'

'No one gives a shit who came up with the format. They care about who knocks it out the park, and that's me.'

'Don't forget Chambers is up for that same award.'

'She's not even competition. Trust me.'

'I don't want to do this,' Annie muttered to Linnie, her producer.

The woman was wide-eyed and eager, but she was a pit-bull. Linnie knew what she wanted, how she wanted it, and no one got through without her say-so. The ideas of the two women didn't always gel but that didn't matter to Linnie because more often than not she won any disagreement.

'Don't be silly,' Linnie said to Annie as they watched the seconds play out of the track put on to cover their transition from the previous show to theirs.

'Did you hear his show this morning?' Annie asked her face flaming with the memory of how Hunter had answered his friend's questions about the previous night – about the picture.

'You shouldn't listen to the competition,' Linnie said.

But they all listened to each other, even if they didn't admit to it. Annie usually got the cliff-notes as soon as she walked in. If she, the station, or the show was mentioned by KDS, she had to know. Annie couldn't imagine that Riordan, and his crew were any different, even if they didn't admit to it either.

'You're on in five,' Linnie said getting her stoic game face on.

Annie watched the countdown, and while straightening her headphones she closed her eyes, rolled her head on her neck, and bit her lip. The light came on and she smiled, the listeners really did hear her facial expression.

'Hello! My wonderful listeners, welcome to Annie's Antics, and isn't that an apt title tonight. I know, I know,' she said on a self-deprecating laugh. 'I could tell you to forget it, and ask none of you to talk about it but you know our rules – nothing is off-limits, right? Yes, the picture is real. No, the article is mostly untrue. But yes, I did go temporarily insane.'

Pressing one of her buttons the airways echoed with the sound of a cuckoo. 'As much as I know you are all desperate to get the low-down on this morning's special edition tennis lesson, and the dish that is my coach Gio, I'll open the lines first, and we'll take a few calls... Ok,' Annie said reading Linnie's notes at the same time she clicked the button for the caller. 'Lisa, what is your question?'

'Was it good?' Lisa asked.

Annie bit out a laugh. 'My tennis lesson?'

'Hunter,' the woman said in a small voice. 'Is he a good kisser?'

'Definitely not in my top three,' she said on another laugh. 'Next caller, Nina?'

'I have to say I'm shocked,' the caller said. Nina apparently wasn't the meek type. Talk about one extreme to the other, in this job you had to be ready for anything. 'The man has done nothing but mock you, and your callers. I think he's an affront to women, and quite frankly I feel betrayed.'

'Oh,' Annie said sliding her feet out of her shoes and rubbing one foot on top of the other under the desk. 'I apologise, I didn't mean to betray you, or any of my listeners. I agree that Hunter certainly has an archaic view on the opposite sex. But, believe me my actions do not mean implicitly or otherwise that I agree with any of his views, on anything.'

‘Well explain yourself then,’ Nina demanded. ‘Honestly, unless he had you under the influence of some sort of illegal drugs I cannot understand your behaviour.’

‘Maybe that’s it,’ Annie said keeping the conversation as light as she could. ‘Who knows what lows a man like that will sink to for his kicks? Who’s next? Alyssa?’

‘He drugged you!’ Alyssa screeched. ‘You should report him to the police immediately! You poor thing. My friend was the victim of a sexual assault too; you have to fight, to stand up for yourself.’

‘Now, Alyssa, I—’

‘I heard his show this morning, and it was disgusting. The way he spoke about you, oh it makes me ill to think about it.’

‘It’s nice to know this little incident has encouraged my listeners to the dark side,’ Annie said with a nice Darth Vader sound effect thrown in there. ‘Please come back to the light,’ she called dramatically and ended on a laugh.

‘She said what?’ Hunter shouted at Theo who met him outside the booth at the end of his show.

‘The police are already over there looking for a statement.’

‘How do you know that?’ Hunter asked walking at Theo’s side down the dimly lit KDS corridor.

They shoved through the double-doors, and he didn’t need Theo to answer, because there outside Theo’s office stood two uniformed officers with their hats under their arms.

‘Mr Riordan we have a few questions,’ one of them said coming forward.

‘You have no idea what it took for me to persuade them to let you finish your show,’ Theo said from the corner of his mouth while patting Hunter on the back.

‘This is ridiculous,’ Annie said, looking up at the officer who paced while jotting down in his notebook. ‘It’s late, and this is nothing.’

‘Are you sure he didn’t give you anything?’ the female officer that sat on the other side of the desk in PDR’s board room asked her for what had to be the tenth time.

‘No,’ Annie said planting her hands flat on the table and staring the woman directly in the eye. ‘He didn’t give me a drink, or anything to eat. He didn’t inject me, or hit me over the head. Don’t you think if he did that he would’ve taken more than one silly little kiss?’

‘So, you believe he is a sexual predator?’ the woman asked her with fierce determination.

‘No,’ Annie said flopping back in her chair. ‘I don’t know anything about him.’

‘So, you haven’t been engaged in further sexual activity?’ the male officer stopped pacing to ask.

‘Since last night, no,’ she said and sat up again sliding her rear to the back of the chair. ‘It’s late, I have to go home. I have an early day tomorrow.’

‘We are trying to protect you,’ the female officer said. ‘Your statement may help other women come forward, it’s important that we—’

‘I’m not giving you a statement. I’m not pressing charges. My God,’ Annie said running her hands through her hair. ‘It’s was a stupid kiss, haven’t you ever done something silly in the heat of a moment?’

The female officer took a deep breath and pushed away from the table. ‘We’ll leave it there for now. But, if you think of anything else, or you need someone to talk to—’ she handed Annie a card. ‘Phone the number on the card. And, if you feel threatened by any male, at any time, phone the police immediately.’

Annie didn’t stand to show them out she only watched them leave.

The door shut with a final sounding thud and she tried to make herself relax, turning the card over and over in her hands. She needed a minute to compose herself before she faced Edgar to wring his neck.

He should never have let the police in, let alone leave her alone while they desperately tried to get her to admit that Riordan had molested her without consent. Riordan might be a scumbag but she doubted he would be a threat to a woman, especially when he had so many willing applicants for his consideration.

Flattening her hands on the desk she was about to push away from it when Edgar entered.

‘They’re here,’ Ed said under his breath as if she had the foggiest idea what he was talking about.

‘They just left,’ Annie said wondering if Ed was the cuckoo one.

Then as Ed stood holding the door, Hunter Riordan filled the frame. Annie knew he was tall, she knew it up close and personal, but those narrowed eyes of his under that dark honey mop on his head weren’t blasting lust her way tonight.

Women said they wanted to run their fingers through his thick tresses; Annie personally wanted to take handfuls of it and rip it from that insolent skull. His eyes were the darkest brown and right now, they seemed to be firing fury.

‘Happy with yourself?’ he demanded marching into the room.

Shoving away from the table Annie wanted to leap the thing and slap him silly for how he had spoken about her.

‘Me?’ she screeched back. ‘What about you? What the hell was that this morning?’

‘I’m glad you listened in,’ he said. ‘Where do you get off saying I drugged you?’

‘I never said that.’

‘The whole city thinks I’m a perv!’

‘Oh,’ Annie said folding her arms. ‘I’ve done the women of this town a public service then, maybe they’ll think twice before getting involved with you.’

‘Jealous?’ he barked, but that damned mouth of his contorted to show his pleasure.

‘You’re baiting me,’ she said. ‘Stop it!’

‘Or what?’ he taunted. ‘Come on Bunny Rabbit, give it to me.’

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