

C L A N B O O K :

# Antique

Sample

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C L A N B O O K

# Adventure

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# TO FAIL AND SUCCEED

Casper Johnson pressed the elevator call button for the fourth time in nine seconds. He knew rationally that it didn't make a damn bit of difference, but he was in a hurry. The elevators at the Hyatt Plaza knew he wanted one of them, and they would send their representative in due time. Just like politicians, elevators worked on their own schedules and made you wait for them. Unlike politicians, elevators didn't yell at you when you kept them waiting. Not that Mr. Van Dorn would yell at him. He'd just stare, which was actually much, much worse. At least it was worse when Van Dorn did it.

Casper wasn't the only person waiting anxiously for the elevator. The Hyatt was a madhouse tonight, just as you'd expect for the biggest party fundraiser of the year. The mayor was due to arrive any minute, while three state senators, six states' representatives and a would-be national senator were all downstairs boozing it up with lobbyists from every big bank, industry and special-interest group in the state. He knew all about that, because, as a lobbyist himself, that was exactly where he'd been too until a few minutes ago when he'd had to cut Representative Friedman off in mid-anecdote by glancing at his watch. 9:02. He was two minutes late. He had 13 minutes to round up Councilman Mackie and get him up to suite 1225.

Now at 9:16 (a minute late!), he pushed the call button a fifth time with Mackie standing beside him.

"Fuck. He's gonna kill me," Casper muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" Mackie asked, obviously a little nervous himself.

"Oh, just cursing these elevators, Councilman," Casper replied. "They've been slow all week, and I know you're a busy man. Sorry about that."

"Well, I don't suppose Mr. Van Dorn will mind waiting a few extra minutes, will he?" the lean young councilman chuckled. A former high-school teacher turned politician, Mackie had won office at the tender age of 36 on a platform of education and above-board politics. A year and a half later, though, he faced re-election and found he needed money. Bake sales just didn't cut it any more. So, like nearly every other councilman before him, Doug Mackie had agreed to meet privately with Matthias Van Dorn, investor, captain of industry and the largest private political contributor in the city. Of course, not many people outside of Casper's lobbying firm knew this last fact. Mackie was about to find out.

The elevator doors opened finally, revealing a car full of portly men and women wearing suits and tags that read "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_." Mackie looked like he wanted to wait for another car, but Casper dove in, pushing the crowd back and making room for the councilman. He opened his mouth, almost ready to order him into the car, but Mackie came of his own volition. Two-and-a-half minutes later (9:22!), they stood before suite 1225. Before he could even knock, the door swung open to reveal Van Dorn's assistant, a sharp-featured politico named Spencer.

Spencer just nodded and stepped aside to allow the two men entry. Mackie and Casper nodded back. Five more steps brought them into the suite's salon before Mr. Van Dorn, who stood by the window, looking out over the city. He turned to meet them, his impassive eyes fixing them each with a glance. Shivers ran up Casper's spine, but he was used to that. It happened every time he met the billionaire client. A quick look to his left told him that Mackie felt it too, although he obviously wasn't used to it. The councilman almost took a step backward.





Matthias Van Dorn wore a dark gray suit, a subdued purple tie and perhaps the most polished leather cap-toes known to man. His pale, angular features and short-cropped blond hair looked decidedly Nordic and refined, although he spoke with no discernible accent. He locked eyes with Casper for a moment, and the lobbyist's heart filled with dread. He wanted to run away and hide in some dark hole, maybe beneath the porch at mama's house back in Louisiana. He'd been late. This was a bad thing. But the moment passed as quickly as it came. Van Dorn smiled to Mackie and extended his hand in greeting.

"Good evening, Councilman Mackie. It's such a pleasure to finally meet you."

"The pleasure's all mine, Mr. Van Dorn," said Mackie, who suddenly looked very gangly and awkward next to the urbane and refined industrialist. "Mr. Johnson here has told me so much about you and your interest in the city's welfare. I'm happy I could find a few minutes to spare for you."

Ha! Casper thought, if you only knew who was sparing time for who. He doubted that Mackie's comment sat well with Van Dorn, but the stern man showed no sign of displeasure.

"Yes, I do thank you for meeting with me," Van Dorn said, all smiles and grace. "I hope it wasn't too much of an inconvenience."

"No, no; not at all."

"Excellent. Please, sit down. Would you like a drink?"

"No thank you, I don't drink," Mackie said a little too quickly as he sat down in a chair opposite Van Dorn. Casper and Spencer remained standing, trying their best to remain unobtrusive. Mr. Van Dorn did not abide interruptions during his meetings. Casper felt for the phone in his pocket to make sure he'd turned it off, just in case.

"Councilman, where do you stand on the upcoming 215? The rezoning issue?" Van Dorn asked, already well aware of the answer.

"Well Mr. Van Dorn, I'm opposed to it. The Laurel Park neighborhood is one of this city's success stories. It needs more schools, affordable homes and restaurants, not factories." Despite Mackie's initial unease around Van Dorn, he slipped back into politician mode easily, speaking on automatic.

"I see," Van Dorn said, his tone still genial. "The neighborhood certainly has improved immeasurably since I first moved to our fair city. Tell me, though, did you realize that unemployment in that area has risen steadily over the last three quarters?"

Mackie frowned. "I have to dispute your facts, sir. Unemployment in this city is at its lowest point ever."