Et Tu, Karl?

by marygriggs

Summary

Emily and Miranda have a moment in the copy room.

Notes

Lauren Weisberger and 20th Century Fox are the owners; I'm just letting the ladies play in my sandbox for a while.

This piece is in response to Karl Lagerfeld’s remarks on #MeToo (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/karl-lagerfeld-slams-the-me-too-movement-models-that-complain-about-being-groped_us_5ad49b6ae4b0edca2cbbf6dd) and how I think Miranda would respond.

Emily entered the darkened Runway anteroom and felt her shoulders settle. Every morning as she got dressed and ready for work, she was consumed by a fear of being late or, worse, not making it to work at all. Getting into her space and knowing that she, Emily Charlton, really had the job a million girls would kill for, was actually pretty relaxing.

Well, she mused to herself, it was relaxing for the two hours before Miranda’s scheduled arrival.

Flipping on the light, she gave a small purr of satisfaction to see the space as neat as a pin and that the junior assistant’s desk was clean and tidy. It had only taken a day’s training to instill a sense of
decorum in the newest hire. Unlike the weeks it had taken to convince the fashion disaster that was Andy Sachs that pictures of her parents and furry little boy toy no more belonged in public view than those hideous clothes she wore.

After Emily hung up her coat in the closet, she moved the sturdy wooden hanger for Miranda’s to the center of the rod for easy access. Pivoting on her heel, she smiled at the Jimmy Choos she had snagged from the closet. Without Nigel poaching things for his own personal Galatea, she was finally getting the good stuff first.

She rotated her neck and shook out her arms as she tried to shake off thoughts of that brunette traitor. It wouldn’t do to harsh her morning mellow with thoughts of past failures. There was a small voice in her head which kept harping on Andy being Miranda’s favorite. It didn’t help that she had seen Andy’s byline in this morning’s newspaper. She fumed anew that she had never gotten to blacklist the deserter.

Powering up her computer, she glanced into Miranda’s office. The fabric samples from yesterday’s editorial meeting were still on her desk, so those would need to be moved to the credenza but the rest of the space looked clear enough for her to be able to check her emails and fine tune the day’s schedule first.

She sank into her Houzz ergonomic chair and slid her hands along the armrests. After allowing herself a small swivel of satisfaction, she pushed her keyboard an inch to the left. She tweaked the position of her pen holder and used a soft chamois cloth to wipe off a few fingerprints along the edge of her glass topped desk. Emily couldn’t help the smile as she looked around her space.

Senior assistant to the Editor in Chief of an internationally recognized fashion magazine. She mentally buffed her nails as she murmured, “Not bad for a girl from Wandsworth.”

Emily loved this time alone in the office. For these precious moments, she had all the power. She could make or break careers by how she allocated the minutes of Miranda’s day. She skimmed over the subject lines of her email inbox as the schedule program booted up and knew that it was her will alone that kept the entire production running as smoothly as it did.

The silence of the office was broken by a noise from the copy room. Immediately, thoughts of corporate espionage ran through her head. Had someone come in early to make reproductions of the exclusive fashion spreads or to copy confidential information from their files?

Emily dithered for only a moment before rising to her feet. Hefting one of the many heavy, lucite Draper Fashion Publication Awards from the bookcase behind her desk, she took it and crept down the hall. Or as close an approximation as one could creep on five-inch heels. Raising the award over her head, she stepped boldly into the copy room.

“What?!” she screeched.

Miranda turned from the copy machine and her reading glasses slipped down her nose. “Good morning to you, too, Emily.” She blinked. “Is that the 2010 or 2015 award?”

Emily just stared at Miranda. She had never seen the woman in jeans but here she was. The black True Religion denim clung to the curves of her body like it was painted on. The effect was augmented by the asymmetrical white button-down Michael Kors shirt Miranda wore on top. Emily’s jaw dropped when she saw Miranda was wearing sneakers. White Tiger Ace sneakers from Gucci but still, sneakers!

“Emily?”
Shaking her head, Emily stood silently in shock. Questions flew through her mind but she gritted her teeth and repeated to herself, “Never ask Miranda anything.”

Miranda shrugged and went back to what she had been doing. She punched a few more buttons on the copier and tapped her fingernails on the plastic cover while waiting for the machine to work. She pulled the resulting sheet out of the tray and held it against her phone case. She made a face and slid the page into the shredder before returning to the copier to punch more buttons.

Miranda smiled in satisfaction at the latest version the machine spat out. She pulled out a pair of shears and cut out the small area of printing before moving to the equipment along the back wall of the room. Miranda deftly ran the miniaturized copy through the laminator and held the hot plastic by the edge while it cooled.

Her mantra failing her, Emily finally asked, “What are you doing?”

“The original is still in the machine,” Miranda responded.

On automatic, Emily lifted the top of the copier and pulled out a sheet of lined paper. It was a list written in Miranda’s neat scrawl. She noted a photographer, a stylist and several fashion designers on it. The last name on the list was Karl Lagerfeld. Holding it out, she said, “I don’t understand.”

Miranda was in the process of affixing the laminated list to the inside of her phone’s case. Absently, she spoke, “It is my personal list of those you will never see in my magazines again.”

“Karl?”

“He seems to believe that groping is the price models pay for working. Anyone who doesn’t want to be sexual harassed should become a nun.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes. For him there is no middle ground. And no acknowledgement of the power imbalance that might keep young, vulnerable women who are desperate for work silent for years about their traumatic experiences.” She rather viciously slammed the scissors back into their holder and then swept the trimmings into the trash. “I know we’re in a business that is built in a large part on women’s insecurities but that is no excuse for victim shaming those who dare to speak out against sexual misconduct in our industry.”

“What was he thinking?”

“No idea. It was just another example of Karl spouting off. This latest interview in Numero, as you might have guessed, is causing quite a stir on social media.”

“How is Chanel handling it?”

“So far, they aren’t.” Miranda snapped the case back on her phone. “Which is why I need my own method of accountability.” She slid the phone into her purse. “For too long, there hasn’t been any discussion about sexual harassment or a way to deal with allegations of abuse.”

Miranda glanced at her senior assistant. “I know you’ve experienced it.”

Emily went cold. “Mir…Miranda?”

One perfect eyebrow raised. “Don’t deny it. I will allow you to not confirm it but don’t make the mistake of lying to yourself that it didn’t happen.” Her voice softened. “I buried my experiences and
carried on with a stiff upper lip, too, you know. It led to my success but also to years where I couldn’t meet my own eyes in the mirror. Especially after learning that someone else endured the same thing because I never spoke out.”

Emily nodded. The icy fingers down her spine were being banished by a feeling of warmth spreading from her chest. She never knew that Miranda had been aware of the pinch or proposition. She had just been grateful without questioning when other people had been sent to deal with the designer instead.

“We’re facing a seismic shift in the way our society and our industry is responding to these allegations. It helps that we are finally breaking the silence but it won’t be enough until everyone is treated with dignity and respect on the job.”

Emily scoffed. “How do we get there?”

“Women like you ensuring the end of the reign of the dinosaurs.” She waved a hand at herself. “That includes collaborators and supporters and all who had the power but did and said nothing.”

“But you’re doing something.” Emily paused. “Right?”

“I’m trying. I’m supporting efforts to offer comprehensive training about workplace sexual harassment for models and I’m advocating putting in place some sort of complaint mechanism and, maybe even, creating an independent monitor to investigate allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse.” She sighed. “However, beyond meaningful remedies for victims there need be real consequences for those who abuse their power and positions.”

“And not letting them get away with it because they are free spirited creatives,” Emily whispered.

“Indeed.” Miranda crossed her arms. “We’re finally having the conversations we need to have. Until the breadth and impact of sexual violence was brought into the mainstream, it was ignored and survivors were alone. With the work of Tarana Burke, among others and the growing, global MeToo movement, we are creating solutions.”

Emily was about to reply when another voice intruded on their moment.

“Hey, Mir? Did you see what I found in the closet?”

Emily turned in shock as Andy Sachs came around the corner, a pair of pink furred handcuffs dangling from her index finger.

“Oh, hey, Em. You’re looking smart,” Andy said with a smile.

Emily bit back her planned snark and bared her teeth in a simulation of a smile at the reminder that she was wearing one of the skirts Andy had given her after the Paris debacle. “You, too,” she managed to force out.

And, unfortunately, that was the truth. Andy was wearing fitted Bill Blass khaki trousers and a baby blue silk tank top. A top Emily had coveted but missed when it disappeared from the closet.

“Oh, this?” Andy twirled. “Just some old thing I had lying around.”

There was a clearing of a throat.

Andy blushed. “Okay, something Miranda had chosen specially and set aside for me.”
Emily gaped as Andy turned her brilliant smile onto the Queen of Fashion. Miranda simpered. Honest to god, simpered and smiled back!

Her brain spinning, Emily concentrated on not speculating on what the two of them together at this hour and in those casual clothes could mean. Doing so had the added benefit of helping keep her head from exploding.

Miranda patted her on the shoulder as she walked past. “Move my nine o’clock to this afternoon. I will be in late as we’re celebrating Andrea’s first front page scoop.”

Grinding her teeth, Emily said, “Yes, Miranda.”

Her boss turned to the other woman in the room. “Andrea, you should know by now I have better restraints at home. Those were only good for a fashion shoot.”

“Shall I put them back?”

“Well, since you have them, we might make the drive to the Water Club for breakfast a little more interesting.”

Andy bounced a little as she reached out and slapped Miranda’s ass. “My turn on top!”

“As you wish,” Miranda replied.

As they walked away, they heard a faint chanting from behind them.

Emily stood alone in the copy room, repeating to herself, “I love my job. I love my job. I love my job.”

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