Sabotage

by Bmce

Summary

AU. Mirandy. Set in present days. A love story.
Chapter 1

“So Mom. Are you a lesbian now?”

Miranda Priestly’s eyebrows shot up to her hairline at the unexpected question coming from her precious daughter. She leaned back into the headboard of her king size bed, pressed the phone closer to her ear and cleared her throat.

“Where did this come from Bobbsey?” she asked carefully. She suspected that her ex-husband’s new girlfriend might have come up with this ridiculous idea just to try to weaken her already fragile relationship with her daughters. If that was the case that dumbass bimbo had better run and hide somewhere really – really far.

“I heard when Cheryl told Dad that you’d finally admitted in a press release that you were attracted to women and that you were currently dating someone. That’s so cool Mom. Cass is asking if your girlfriend will be living with us. Do you think we should call her mum, or what?”

“Call her mum? Wait…what?” Miranda’s brain was becoming overloaded with the information and the barrage of questions Caroline was firing at her.

A press release? What press release? Half listening to Caroline’s animated chatter, Miranda turned on her computer and googled herself. At the same time she checked her cell phone. She had this new habit of putting her cell on sleep mode at night, so the beeps of incoming emails, messages or calls would not wake her. The kids, if they needed her, would call her landline, as Caroline just had, and other emergencies didn’t usually occur at Runway at night. Her home number was not public and not many people knew it. This was to her immense satisfaction, as lately, instead of than attending parties or dining out, she much more enjoyed being at home undisturbed, reading or watching movies with the girls. She looked at her phone and her eyes widened in surprise. Forty-five missed calls, numerous texts and emails.

“Shit.” she murmured. “This is not going to be good.”

A click on the first link that appeared on her screen, confirmed her fear. Page Six.

“Of course they would be the first ones to jump at this story.” Miranda muttered, shaking her head.

“What did you say mom?”

“Nothing Bobbsey. Listen, why don’t we talk about this when you come home tomorrow evening? Please tell your father I will call him later.”

“All right mom. Oh, Cass says she won’t call her mum or anything, and you can’t force her to do it.”

Miranda pinched the bridge of her nose and inhaled deeply. The headache that was forming behind her eyes didn’t help at all.

“Caroline let me talk to your sister.”

“She doesn’t want to…she just left the room. Sorry Mom.”

“It’s all right darling. I’ll talk to her tomorrow. “

“Ok Mom. Love you.”
“Love you too, Bobbsey.” Miranda answered but Caroline had already hung up.

She dropped the phone on the bed and turned her attention back to her computer. Not seeing all the words clearly, she reached for her glasses. Adjusting them she started to read, her anger raising with every sentence.

The Ice Queen Melting

After many years, it appears we finally get to know why the Ice Queen has not been seen with any suitor since her divorce. It seems all this time we looked but just didn’t see.

Last night a press release was issued by Miranda Priestly herself, in which the editor-in-chief of Runway magazine declared her attraction to women. She also hinted at the existence of a possible girlfriend.

Should we believe it? The timing is interesting and raises questions.

Two days ago it was announced that Edna Martin, the CEO of Martin Entertainment bought up the Elias–Clarke shares and became the major shareholder. Ms. Martin just happens to be a well-known, out lesbian.

Is it a coincidence? Or is the Dragon Lady just trying to strengthen her position with her own coming out. Does she really think the “we are family” strategy will work?

We don’t know dear readers but we will find out soon.

“This is outrageous!” Miranda wanted to fling the computer across the room.

Thought after thought was running through her mind but the whole situation just made no sense. It didn’t bother her that people might think she was a lesbian. As far as Miranda was concerned, someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity was not a big deal. What had her seeing red, was the fact that someone from her office had leaked an obviously false story and after years of relative peace with the press, she would once again have to deal with paparazzi on a daily basis.

The likelihood of an office leak, however, was more disturbing than the possibility of future unpleasant interaction with the press. If it was true that the source of this news was someone from her office that person would pay dearly. The people who worked closely with her were faithful mostly out of fear and not loyalty. They were aware of the consequences of any foul play and no one wanted the Dragon Lady to be their enemy.

The ring of her cell jolted her. It was Leslie.

Talking a deep calming breath she answered the call and asked softly. “Care to explain what is going on?”

The coldness in her voice sent an unpleasant chill down the spine of the woman on the other side of the line.

“Miranda. Thank God, you finally picked up the phone. I have been trying to reach you since I read the news hours ago. What happened?”

The editor’s fake calmness disappeared in a flash and she snapped. “What do you mean what happened? You are my publicist, Leslie. You tell me!”

“I already called someone who owes me a favor. She works for Page Six. She claims that your
coming out confession was sent directly to them from Runway.”

So it was true. Someone from her staff had betrayed her. Miranda closed her eyes and hissed through her teeth.

“By who?”

So unlike herself, Leslie laughed nervously.

“By you, Miranda.”
Chapter 2

Getting out of the house was not an easy task to complete. Despite her years of experience dealing with the paparazzi she had difficulties pushing through the small crowd that had gathered in front of her home. She did not bother to answer any of their questions. Not even a “no comment” left her mouth. She got into the car and headed to her office. During the ride she checked her emails, looking for the one Leslie’s friend had received and had claimed that it was from her. At first she almost believed that the email had been sent from her email address but when she examined it more closely something caught her attention.

Miranda.priestly@runaway.com.

“Smart.” she murmured. A fake email, with Runway misspelled. A classic tactic used in phishing, and now in this case a ploy used to fool the media. She understood how something like that could be overlooked by the smear-sheet, in a moment of excitement and in their eagerness to get the scoop. She felt relieved that possibly it wasn’t her staff who had betrayed her, but someone who had no direct access to her office.

There was more paparazzi in front of the Elias-Clark but she breezed through them ignoring their questions once again. Inside the building she felt people’s eyes on her and there were some who actually dared to whisper behind her back. She didn’t care. The days would pass and a new sensational story would take over and she would be old news again.

Arriving at her office she dropped her coat and bag on the second assistant’s desk.


She sipped the coffee that was placed in front of her and hummed in agreement. Searing hot. The first thing that pleased her this morning. There was a knock at her door and not waiting for an answer Nigel stuck his head inside.

“Morning Miranda. You naughty girl. You should have told me first before you came out for the whole world.”

Miranda grinned grimly at her longtime friend.

“So very funny, Nigel. You should sign up for open mic night somewhere in Soho.”

Nigel grinned back and sat down in the chair next to Miranda’s desk.

“You know this is big right?”

“No. Actually, I don’t think it’s a big deal, Nigel. Coming out as a lesbian. I could have done worse.”

Nigel leaned forward, his face serious.

“It’s a real problem, Miranda. I know Edna Martin and for her it is going to be a deal breaker.”

“How do you mean? Am I missing something here?”

“I don’t know who planned this ploy but they definitely know Edna and her past very well. I’m surprised you don’t remember it. It was all over the news at that time.”
Miranda frowned and sipped from her coffee. It tasted bitter this time.

“For God’s sake. Spit it out will you.”

“Several years ago, Edna fell in love with a woman. She fell hard. It was a once in a lifetime type of love. You know, soulmates and happily ever after. The power lesbian couple happiness and fluff. Until one day Edna accidentally overheard a conversation between her beloved and her friend.” Nigel stopped and sighed dramatically. “Long story short, Edna found out that the love of her life wasn’t in love with her. She wasn’t even a lesbian. In fact every time she and Edna made love, she apparently literally fell sick and threw up every time.”

“What…? Why?”

“Easy money. I believe. The woman was not the typical eye candy, so finding an older millionaire and getting married wasn’t that easy. But somehow she charmed Edna. Now since then Edna has been a bit paranoid. You coming out just as she bought those shares…well that’s sure to be more than a little suspicious to her. She will question your intentions. She will think that you came out just to strengthen your position at Runway. And who ever caused this ruckus probably knows this.”

“Just wonderful. You’re telling me that I can’t win this one?”

Before he could answer Leslie strolled in with several more people in tow. They rolled in a clothes rack, bringing make-up tools and reflectors.

Miranda raised her eyebrow. “Care to explain what is going on here?”

“I’ve figured out the solution” answered Leslie. “What you need is to convince the world that you are a lesbian. So I contacted an agency and they are sending over a woman who is going to act as your significant other for the next few months. You’ll go out on dates, show up together at the upcoming events. And of course, at the end you’ll break up, you’ll be heartbroken and you’ll go back to men. End of story, everyone will be happy.”

“What!”

Leslie missed the icy tone of Miranda’s voice and went on with her idea.

“We take some pictures of the two of you and release them to the press. When your soon-to-be girlfriend arrives, we dress her up, add a bit of makeup and all will be settled.”

“I see…and how the…” Miranda wasn’t able to finish because Emily burst into the office dragging a beautiful, young brunette with her. The woman looked like a deer in headlights, obviously uncomfortable. She opened her mouth to say something but was hushed and pushed into Miranda’s private bathroom.

“Make up! Clothes!” ordered Leslie and the office became a noisy mess in a blink of an eye. Everyone seemed to talk at the same time. They started to rearrange the furniture, to create an acceptable scene for the photo shoot. An armful of clothes were carried into the bathroom and a makeup artist slipped inside, to transform the young brunette into a princess worthy enough to compliment the Queen. They all were so immersed in their task that they failed to see the storm coming.

A loud bang made them freeze, when Miranda pounded her fist on the desk.

“Enough! Everybody get out. Now!”
Miranda turned her attention to Leslie who blinked in horror.

“Are you out of your mind? You can’t seriously think that I would agree to something like this. I’m not going to fake a relationship. I’m not going to pose as a lesbian with a kid on my arm.” She motioned toward the bathroom. “What were you thinking? Is she even legal?”

“I…” stammered Leslie.

“Get out. I will deal with you later.”

Miranda looked at Nigel who smiled wryly. “You too.”

Turning her back, Miranda looked out of the window and gazed at the small snowflakes falling from the gray sky. There was some bustling behind her back than all went silent. She rubbed her temple. The headache was coming back.

“Well…well…well. How are you today, Miranda?” The acid in the voice of the man who had entered the office was unmistakable.

Miranda groaned. “Irv.”

“I thought I’d pay you a visit before you leave us for good this time.”

“I don’t understand you, Irv. Why do you think that my coming out would end my career? If you haven’t noticed, we are way past the middle ages…or the nineties.”

“Your coming out? Don’t make me laugh, Miranda. We both know that you had nothing to do with that press release.”

“Do we now, Irv?”

“I mean…I assume you’re not really in a relationship with a woman are you?”

“Would that surprise you, Irv? Maybe after three failed marriages I finally realized that men are not what I want. Maybe I’ve been in a lesbian relationship for the past few years and no one knew about it, because I’ve had enough of living my life in the public eye and I’ve kept my private life where it belongs…private.”

“I don’t believe you, Miranda. And take my word for it, Edna Martin won’t either. She doesn’t take kindly when someone tries to use her. Knowing your reputation she won’t fall for the “but I’m really a lesbian” bullshit.”

“And of course you’ll be there to make sure of that. Right, Irv?”

“I’ll do what I have to do to finally get rid of you, Miranda. You, in a relationship with a woman? Seriously? You are not capable of maintaining a relationship. No one would put up with your attitude for long. Some might tolerate you for your fame and money but who would want to go to bed every single night with a cold, heartless…”

His hateful speech was interrupted when the private bathroom’s door swung open and a young woman stepped out. She was buttoning her shirt and didn’t lift her gaze as she addressed Miranda.

“Hey gorgeous can you help me with this? You know how clumsy I can be sometimes?”

They were both staring at the newcomer, wordless as she stopped in front of the editor before finally looking up. Apparently noticing that she was not alone in the office with Miranda, her gaze settled
on the angry looking, red faced man who was staring at her disbelievingly. Clearly he was on the verge of having a stroke. She flashed a fake apologetic smile at the gapping man and leaning closer to the equally dumfounded Miranda she whispered loud enough to be heard by both of them.

“Oh I’m sorry. I didn’t realize that you had a visitor. I don’t want to hold you up any longer, I have an appointment and I’m already late.” She tilted her head and offered a wide honest smile, so unlike the one before.

“See you tonight sweetie?”

Miranda who still hadn’t found her voice just nodded, her lips moving involuntarily until they reflected the smile she had received from the brunette. She was taken further aback when the younger woman reached up, gently palmed her face, and pulled her in for a kiss. It was a chaste, albeit sweet kiss, that colored the editor’s cheeks and left her more speechless than she was before.

The brunette pulled back with a dreamy sigh and caressed the editor’s face one more time with her fingertips. “Later sweetheart.” she whispered and was out of the office leaving the stunned editor and her angry companion behind.

As if waking from a dream Miranda shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. What the hell was that? She of course recognized the brunette as the “mail order bride” but she had no idea that she was still hiding in her bathroom. What was she doing there anyway? Why hadn’t she left with the others? And how did she dare to act like that.

The editor wet her lips with her tongue, tasting the younger woman on them. The memory of the unexpected kiss sent shivers through her body. She had never been kissed by a woman before and at that moment she was thinking that perhaps she should have tried it long ago because it just felt right. This was so unlike her. She had been kissed by a complete stranger, a woman twenty years her junior of all things, and instead of getting annoyed and angry, all she could think of was how wonderful it was. Irv was completely forgotten, as she sunk into her chair closed her eyes and continued to replay the kiss in her mind.

“Don’t think this is over. We are not done yet.”

The moment lost, Miranda opened her eyes and made a dismissive gesture with her hand towards Irv, who was hovering over her desk, his face even more red than before.

“Oh we are pretty much done here Irv. I don’t care what you say or do. I don’t care about your petty games, period.” Miranda closed her eyes again, signaling that the conversation was indeed over.

Thankfully, Irv got the clue and left. However, he made sure that his departure was heard throughout the office by shutting the door forcefully. But that had little effect on Miranda. What had affected her was the kiss and the beautiful brunette who had delivered it so sweetly.

“We have a problem.” Leslie’s worried voice snapped her out of her daydreaming.

“Leslie. I was just about to call you. Did you have the woman the agency sent sign a non-disclosure agreement? What did you say her name was again?” Miranda tried to act nonchalant but she was eager to get to know the young woman’s name.

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Suddenly Leslie’s earlier words sunk in. “Problem? What are you talking about? Haven’t we had enough for one day?”

Leslie cleared her throat nervously.

“I got a call from the agency. The woman they sent had an accident, so she never made it to our
office.”
Chapter 3

3.

“What do you mean the girls are not coming home?” While her voice was even and soft it took all of Miranda’s willpower not to shout at her ex–husband. She knew him well and was aware that it would only give him the satisfaction he was looking for. She inhaled slowly trying to calm herself as he explained cheerfully over the phone how the girls deserved a peaceful Christmas far from the media frenzy and how it was in Miranda’s best interest to agree to their last minute Caribbean getaway.

“We have an agreement James. I have full custody. Period. You can only see the girls because they don’t oppose it and I believe they need their father too. However these pitiful actions that you pull out of your sleeves, teaming up with your bimbo girlfriend, will end my good intentions toward you. And you know what that would mean.”

“You don’t want them to fly to Barbados? Fine. Tell them.”

Several seconds of silence passed on the other end and before Miranda could say anything, she heard Caroline’s excited voice and Miranda knew instantly that she had lost the battle. There was no way she could cancel this trip without becoming the ultimate bad parent. They had already made plans for the holidays and throwing it all out of the window just two days before Christmas angered her. She had been making great efforts lately to please the girls, trying hard not to disappoint them anymore. Planning the holidays was one of those things she did together with the girls and it was great fun for all of them. However, James might be right. The girls didn’t need all the attention that came with that outrageous article. Hopefully some A-list celeb would do something overly stupid at a Christmas party and by the time her daughters come back she would be old news. She sighed in resignation as Caroline said goodbye.

“We’ll call you after landing Mom. Gotta run now. Love you.”

“Love you to Bobbsey. Let me talk to your sist…” She wasn’t able to finish because Caroline ended the call before she had a chance to talk to Cassidy.

Leaning back in her chair she rubbed her temple. The headache that have been lurking all day hit her with full force. Fresh air. She needed some fresh air to clear her head and chase the pain away. She changed into jeans and a sweater – designer of course - and she wished, not for the first time in the past few days that Patricia, her faithful St. Bernard was still alive. She missed their walks in the park, her calming presence in the study after a long stressful day. Patricia was a gift, given to her by her ex-husband just before the twins were born. The twins were twelve now and Patricia passed away just days after their birthday. It was one of the saddest events of their lives but kids roll differently, and they were ready for a new puppy soon enough. Miranda who really was a dog person did not think it was time yet to have another pet, despite the girls constant begging.

She sneaked out through the back entrance that not many knew about and walked briskly down the street deep in thought. Her day couldn’t have been weirder even if it had been planned. She could pretty much imagine how Alice felt when she fell through the rabbit hole.

First, that article in Page Six. As she had been off the radar for the past few years, approximately since her third and if it was up to her, her last divorce, the unexpected interest of the press found her unprepared. Second, her staff’s unbelievably incongruous way of crisis management. A mail-order
bride. Ridiculous. After finding out that the young woman in her office was not the hired escort sent by the agency Miranda was furious. There was a woman, a beholder of what happened in Miranda’s office, wandering around in New York without a signed non-disclosure agreement. That was simply not acceptable. That woman witnessed everything and could easily sell the story to any of those rag papers. And all of this because Emily, her first assistant failed to fulfill her duties. Apparently, she literally kidnapped the young brunette from the lobby, without checking her identity, because “she seemed lost and the description fit”. Miranda knew Emily well and was sure that the brunette didn’t have a chance against the persistent redhead. Despite the seriousness of the situation she had to smile as she recalled the deer in headlights expression on the young woman’s face when she was dragged into her office. And then there was that kiss. The kiss albeit modest and light was still a kiss unlike any other she had received before. And it wasn’t just the kiss itself. It was the way the other woman looked at her. In those brief moments she made Miranda feel like the center of her universe. Like no one else existed except the two of them. It was almost magical, but life taught Miranda not to believe in magic.

A gust of wind blew a blast of snow at her face and she looked around surprised. So deep in her thoughts she hadn’t noticed that the snow had started to fall heavily and had covered the city like a giant white blanket. It was already dark, the street-lamps’ faint lights danced on the millions of snowflakes giving an eerie appearance to her surroundings. She shivered and fixed her scarf. Looking around again she realized that she had no idea where she was. The street was deserted, no people around, no cars and the small stores situated on both sides under the houses were already closed and dark. Seemingly everyone was settled in for the night, safe in their homes, away from the artic weather.

“Time to call Roy.” she murmured and reached for her phone. She swiped the screen, the device awoke for two seconds then went blank. Tossing the phone back into her pocket Miranda quietly cursed herself for forgetting to charge it. The wind was blowing solidly, causing a drastic change in the temperature. Miranda felt the cold sneaking through her layers of clothes, reaching her body. She was literally freezing.

Turning around she tried to figure out which was the right direction, but she was totally lost.

“Just great. Lost in New York in the middle of a snow storm.” she whispered quietly. She was cold, colder than ever and she knew she had to move or the next day she would definitely be the cover story of every newspaper. The Ice Queen frozen to death. How ironic that would be. Walking east down the street she saw some light coming through one of the small shop’s window. Fighting the wind and snow she sped up her pace and headed toward the store.

Getting closer she was able to read the lit tag? “My Sweet”. It was a pastry shop or a café of some kind, if the hand painted cakes and pasties on the window were any indicators. Stepping up the stairs she reached the door and attempted to open it. It was locked. Peering inside she saw that all the lights were on and she heard some music too. Someone must be there. She knocked. Nothing. Knocked again. No answer. She slumped against the door shivering violently and for the first time in years she started to pray.

Suddenly the door was torn open and Miranda losing her balance tumbled inside the small café. Her half frozen body refused to cooperate and mentally she prepared herself to hit the floor. Hard. Yet the impact never came. Instead of plunging to the floor she landed on top of a warm soft body. Strong arms held her gently for a long minute until she found some strength to lift her head and look at her savior.

“You.” she said incredulously.
The woman under her laughed softly.

“Well. When I asked whether I would see you tonight and you agreed, I didn’t seriously think that you would show up.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Next chapter will be posted soon. Possibly tomorrow.

4. The smell of coffee and cinnamon woke Miranda up. The familiar scent worked its way through her foggy mind and gently pushed her toward full awareness. Corina must be baking she thought. Miranda had a very strict rule about sugar and other unhealthy carbs but her housekeeper was a master of low-carb, yet tasty, baked goodies. Reaching for her phone she slowly opened her eyes and checked the time. 5:30 AM. Still not fully awake she wondered why her housekeeper was there so early in the morning. The blinking light pulled her attention back to the phone. A message from Cassidy. It seemed that her daughters were lucky and got out of New York before the storm hit the city. She closed her eyes again and sighed. While she was glad that they didn’t have to cancel their trip, there wasn’t anything more she wished for than spending the holidays with the twins. Christmas was about family and Miranda took it seriously. She made sure that her driver and housekeeper, who served her faithfully all year long, got plenty of free time to celebrate with their loved ones. Corina for example usually visited her mother in Italy and…Corina. Italy. Her eyes popped open and she sat up abruptly. She was fully awake now. There was no Corina in her kitchen baking and making coffee. Actually the kitchen where the smell was coming from wasn’t even hers. It was not her house. Not her bedroom. Not her bed. Suddenly everything cleared out and the events of last night flowed into her mind hitting her hard. She buried her head into her palms and groaned.

“Oh my god. What have I done?”

Andrea “Andy” Sachs pulled the cooking tray out of the oven. She had been up since 3:00 AM, keeping herself busy in the cozy kitchen. Creating cakes, cookies and other pastries was her salvation and the kitchen her safe place. Usually she enjoyed spending time baking, but this morning she just couldn’t fully focus on her tasks. Her mind was wandering elsewhere. In the center of her thoughts was a certain lady, who at that moment was sleeping peacefully in Andy’s bed. Miranda Priestly. Although Andy had never been interested in fashion, she knew exactly who Miranda Priestly was, thanks to her no-good, fellow chef, ex-boyfriend, Nate. Nate, the wannabe model was obsessed with the fashion Queen. Therefore Andy, who spent many nights listening to his gushing, learnt quite a bit about the editor too. She had never admitted, not even to herself, that she found the editor extraordinary and had developed quite a crush on her. She was an icon from a different world and Andy would have never thought that their paths would cross. Meeting Miranda Priestly was unexpected, kissing her was surreal and finally waking up next to her in the morning, well there were no words to describe that.

Actually her entire day was a series of strange events. First, Nate had left a disturbing message on her voicemail. Despite the early hours he was obviously drunk and ranted in a gruesome manner about Andy, how useless she had been during their relationship, called her names and finally demanded that she give him money for the suffering he had gone through because of her. They had broken-up months ago yet he wouldn’t stop with his harassment, making Andy miserable and antsy. Next, after collecting herself, she had hurried to her publisher just to be met with their sudden decision to break her contract. Her first book was supposed to come out the day before Christmas Day, she’d already received the first copies and could hardly wait to see it in the stores. Breaking the contract must have
cost the publisher a fortune, considering that the printing had been done but they did it anyway. Losing the contract was painful enough, as she’d put not only long hours but her heart into that project, but what made it more hurtful was the person behind the whole scenario. Andy knew exactly who it was and she also knew that she couldn’t do anything about it. Defeated she was about to walk out the Elias-Clark Corporate Center when a lunatic redhead literally kidnapped her. Her attempts of stopping the insistent woman failed and she was dragged into a crowded office, full of nervous looking people. And then she saw her. Miranda Priestly. Their eyes met for an instant second, before hands grabbed her again and pushed her toward another room. She found herself in a bathroom with those hands trying to undress her, fix her hair and makeup. This time her resistance was more fruitful, and she pulled away before they could remove her shirt. She never took off her clothes in front of anyone. At least not for some time now. The hands returned for a second round then suddenly disappeared and the buzzing hive went completely silent. She did not quite understand what happened. Slowly she tiptoed to the slightly opened door and peeked out. The office was empty except the white haired woman standing at the window. Miranda Priestly was rubbing her temple, her rigid posture screamed stress, discomfort and something else. Something that Andy experienced herself lately too, loneliness. She didn’t know where the urge came from to reach out and comfort the older woman but it rushed through her like an electric surge. Before she could move an older man entered the office and what happened next made Andy acknowledge she was not the only one bullied that day. The man undoubtedly wanted to hurt the editor’s feelings and unfortunately he succeeded. Although the older woman verbally struck back, Andy caught the ghost of pain in her eyes caused by the nasty little man. Without thinking of the consequences Andy launched into action and did the most stupid thing one would think of in a situation like that.

She kissed Miranda Priestly.

On her way home she replayed that kiss in her mind over and over again, smiling like an idiot. For a short time she could forgot about her book, ex-boyfriend and all the other troubling issues in her life. She doubted they would ever meet again, yet repeat that kiss, still she felt happy. She could have hardly guessed that the Miranda Priestly incident was far from over. For her ultimate surprise they run into each other almost literally. The editor showed up at her café in the middle of the ice storm, half frozen and weary. Andy had already locked up for the night when she heard a faint knock at the door. Looking out the window she saw a small figure leaning against the door. The Christmas décor lights illuminated her face faintly and Andy’s heart started to beat faster. Miranda Priestly. She tore the door open and as the older woman tumbled inside, she knocked Andy off her feet and they both fell helplessly to the ground. Miranda of course recognized her instantly, the incredulous expression on her face was so adorable Andy couldn’t help herself she just had to tease the editor.

“Well. When I asked whether I would see you tonight and you agreed, I didn’t seriously think that you would show up.”

As soon as the words left her mouth she braced herself and waited for the editor’s response. Knowing the other woman’s reputation she expected a reserved comeback or a deadly strike. It didn’t happen. Instead the editor buried her face into the crick of Andy’s neck and started to cry.
A crying Miranda Priestly wasn’t exactly something Andy was prepared for. She held the older woman in a tight embrace, not really knowing what she was supposed to do. Stroking the editor’s back she whispered softly into her ear.

“Whatever it is, it can’t be that bad. It’s going to be ok.”

Her words did not have the desired effect, because Miranda started to cry even more and pulled Andy closer into an almost painful embrace. Hot tears flowed down Andy’s neck but soon enough the icy wind that sneaked in through the still open door froze them into pearls and she started to shiver.

“All right. We have to move, it’s cold out here.”

She untangled herself from Miranda and stood, pulling the editor up with her. After pushing the door closed she wrapped an arm around Miranda and walked her to the back of the store, up the stairs to where her small apartment was situated. Once upstairs she led the crying woman into the bedroom and made her sit on the bed. Removing Miranda’s wet, cold clothes was not easy, because the editor made no effort to help, but at least she did not stop her either. Miranda obediently tolerated being undressed, down to her underwear, and wrapped in a soft, warm blanket. During the process her tears went dry and she just stared at Andy with an unreadable expression. Then she started to talk, and talk some more. She talked for hours. Years and years of pain, disappointments, and fears made their way out of Miranda’s heart and soul. Andy just sat there holding the broken woman’s hand and listened. She listened to the story of a hopeful young woman who had followed her dreams and became the Queen of Fashion. The long and hard journey full of tears and pain. Betrayals and downfalls. The cruel world of fashion. She listened to the story of several unsuccessful marriages, how Miranda was not capable of maintaining any of her personal relationships. How she did not trust anyone, because she’d learned not to. How lonely she really was behind all the glitter and how badly she missed someone she could love and cherish. She listened to a story of a woman who wanted nothing more than love and to be loved. It seemed that Miranda was not exactly talking to Andy. She was not expecting answers or confirmations. After hours of talking, finally there was nothing more to say and Miranda fell into an exhausted sleep.

Andy quietly watched her sleeping for several minutes. Her heart was bursting with emotions, and she felt the first familiar sign of a lurking panic attack. She needed to occupy herself before it hit, so she tiptoed out of the room and went straight to the kitchen. Baking. Baking always helped and she had an order to fulfill anyway. Hours later she was glazing a batch of cinnamon rolls when she heard some movement. Looking up she saw Miranda standing at the door, freshly showered, and wearing her bathrobe.

“Oh you are up. It’s still early though, I hope I didn’t wake you.”

She poured some coffee into a mug and handed it to Miranda who took it without a word.

“Searing hot. Just the way you like it.”

Smiling warmly at the older woman, Andy continued to glaze the cinnamon rolls and went on with her babbling.

“I charged your phone. I put it on the nightstand, I hope you found it. Although I won’t open the
store today I still had to complete this order. I usually bake something for Christmas for the folks at
the retirement home down the street. This year they wanted cinnamon rolls. So I made cinnamon
rolls. They’re freshly out of the oven. I know it’s not typically something you would eat for
breakfast, but would you like one?”

No response, just silence, so Andy finally looked up from her task and froze. The editor was staring
at her with an expression that Andy read as somewhat hateful?

“What’s wrong?” she asked, carefully placing the pipe on the table. The sticky, sweet glaze oozed
out of the bag but she couldn’t care less.

“How much do you want?” asked Miranda unemotionally, not bothering to taste the coffee, no
matter how divine it smelled. Yes, the Ice Queen was definitely back.

Andy tilted her head uncertainly.

“Um…I’m running a café here yes but you don’t have to pay for the coffee or…” she motioned
toward the rolls, “…for the pastries.”


Getting only a confused head shake instead of answers Miranda took a deep breath and lowered her
voice.

“How much do you want for keeping all that I told you last night to yourself? How much, or what
do you want?”

It came out almost as a whisper but the coldness in her voice made Andy shiver involuntarily.

“I’m not sure how to answer to that.”

“Oh please. Just name your price. Everybody has one. What’s yours?”

Andy shook her head again disbelievingly.

“I don’t want anything from you, Miranda. And don’t worry I’m not going to sell you out.”

The brunette didn’t really know how to handle the situation, so she did what had helped her before to
release the stress. She grabbed the piping bag and turned back to her pasties. Unfortunately, what
had worked nicely before did not this time, she just couldn’t ignore the other woman’s sneer.
Frustrated she tossed the bag aside, straightened, and looked pointedly at Miranda. The editor
avoided eye contact, instead she looked fixedly into her mug.

“Look. I understand how you feel. I’m sorry that you can’t seem to trust anyone. I’m sorry that you
feel the need to push me away just because I showed you compassion and understanding. I’m sorry
that I can’t help you more…I’m sorry because apparently you need help and need someone to rely
on.”

Andy became more and more agitated, and paced the cozy kitchen.

“I’m sorry that your daughters are away and that your ex-husband is an asshole. You had bad
experiences. I get that. Trust issues. Anxiety. Noted. I’m sorry that you can’t see that I’m not the
enemy here. I’m…” Andy inhaled deeply and let out an exaggerated sigh. “I’m just sorry, ok?”

“The level of pity has just increased to unknown heights. Is there anything concerning me you are
“Actually, yes. I’m not sorry for kissing you.” answered Andy coyly. “And,” she continued with a sheepish grin, “I would do it again if I had an opportunity.”

Miranda’s head snapped up and she narrowed her eyes at the brunette skeptically. No way, had she heard her right. After last night, the breakdown, the tears, the younger woman should know perfectly well how much of a failure Miranda really was. Adding to that she was standing in her kitchen without any makeup, feeling and possibly looking tired and old. No. This young vibrant woman must be out of her mind wanting to kiss her. Or - even worst – she was just making fun of her. She slammed the mug on the counter and hissed angrily.

“You can’t be serious.”

Andy shrugged and took a guarded step toward Miranda.

“I can assure you, Miranda, I’m quite serious. I just can’t get that kiss out of my mind.”

She stepped even closer, so close that their bodies almost touched. Slowly she lifted her hand to the editor’s face, pausing for a second to give the other woman time to move if she wanted. Miranda didn’t, so Andy gently caressed her face with featherlike fingertips, drawing never-ending lines on the soft skin. She deliberately explored every inch, not missing the faint wrinkles around the eyes, still red and puffy after hours of crying.

Miranda just stood there mesmerized. She didn’t really understand what was happening, why she was letting this young woman, a stranger, touch her, and why it felt so natural, so blissful.

Andy leaned in and rested her forehead against Miranda’s.

“I know what you are thinking. But you are wrong,” she whispered “Makeup or not, you are beautiful and sexy as hell. And I do want to kiss you again.”

Miranda shivered but still didn’t make any effort to move away. Where did her anger go? Why did everything that this young, incredible creature did or say, sound so right, so real?

“This is insane.” she breathed out “I don’t even know your name.”

Before Andy could have answered, a loud, unmistakably male voice hollered from outside.

“Honey. I’m home.”
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: aggressive behaviour and cursing

6.

“Honey. I’m home.”

Hearing the unexpected, slightly slurred words made both of them jump. Miranda jerked her head away from Andy’s touch and Andy pulled back her hands as if burnt. The brunette took a shaky deep breath and tentatively reached out but retreated when she saw that the older woman’s mask had slipped back into place. It was the Ice Queen starring back at her, not the vulnerable, sweet woman she almost kissed seconds ago.

“Um… It’s not what you think.” Andy said, as she nervously stepped back and glanced toward the door.

Miranda shook her head and lifted her hands in a defeated position. “Don’t. Please, just don’t.”

“Andy? Where are you princess?” the voice hollered again.

Andy shivered and looked at Miranda. She did not say anything for a long moment just eyed the editor pleadingly. Her face reflected sorrow and regret. Some other emotions flashed by, too quickly that Miranda couldn’t identify them, just yet. Was it guilt?

“Aaaanndyyyy!”

“I’m sorry. I have to deal with this.” Andy walked to the door then turned back, taking in the stiff posture of the editor.

“I have a back entrance. If you are not here when I’m back, I want you to know that meeting you was the best thing that happened to me in a long time.” She paused for a second then added “Or ever.”

Andy didn’t wait for a response. Probably since she knew she wouldn’t get any. With a sad smile on her face she disappeared along the dark corridor.

Miranda was fuming. She hurried upstairs and looked for her clothes. She found them neatly folded on the couch in the living room. She started to dress, her hands shaking so badly it took her twice the usual time to complete that simple task. Her solid defense that she had been building for years, had been weakened by the lovely brunette. Miranda was angry with herself that she let that happen. She had to get out of here, go home and start to rebuild her walls and shields. She just hoped that the younger woman would keep her word and wouldn’t sell her out. How did this happen? She made a huge mistake last night, when she broke down in front of stranger. She’d realized that, yet she’d almost repeated it again. She’d almost kissed this stranger. Well, at least she now knew her name. Andy. What a pedestrian name. Must be a shortened form of something. Amanda? Cassandra? Andrea perhaps? She looked around, making sure, that she’d collected all her belongings. She snatched her coat from the back of the chair with more force than intended. The heavy coat swirled
and knocked over the glass on the coffee table. The contents of the glass, fortunately just water, slowly flowed towards a pile of books. Before the tiny stream reached its destination, Miranda picked up the books, saving them from being soaked. Placing them on the couch, her gaze caught in the top one.

Andrea Sachs: From scratch with confidence

From the hard cover of the apparent cookbook the brunette smiled back at her. She was leaning back against a kitchen counter, her posture relaxed, the smile genuine and kind. The photo was taken in the cozy kitchen downstairs, Miranda recognized the setting immediately. The editor run her fingers over the picture, as if caressing the sweet face of the younger woman.

Andrea. No, she wouldn’t call her Andy. This wonderful, magnificent young woman was not a plain Andy. Andrea. Who wanted to kiss her and who, obviously had a boyfriend. Only someone close to her would show up early in the morning, calling her honey. Right? She did not look happy though. Maybe their relationship was not that solid. She’d confessed that she liked Miranda and had kissed her after all. Someone in a working relationship wouldn’t do that. Would they? And she looked sad and scared when she heard the shout of that caveman. He must be a caveman, or Andrea wouldn’t be afraid of him.

“Oh my god” whispered Miranda as realization hit. “She was scared.” The emotion she saw on the young woman’s face wasn’t sorrow or guilt. It was fear. Whoever that man was, he clearly caused distress and made the younger woman jumpy and scared.

Her anger gave way to concern. Miranda grabbed her phone and hastened down the stairs toward the shop.

Andy was trying hard not to show nervousness. Entering the shop, it was hard to mask her emotions but somehow she managed to speak without any quiver in her voice.

“Nate. What are you doing here? How did you get in?”

The obviously drunk young man, sitting at a table, looked up from the box of cinnamon rolls he was chewing on. Andy winced at the sight of her once neatly packed pasties. All the boxes were torn open, smashed rolls covered the counter and the floor. The young man had done a good job, no pasty remained untouched.

“Andy baby” he dropped the half eaten cinnamon roll on the floor and staggered to his feet. Leaning against the counter he licked his fingers and leered at Andy.

“Ewwh. Disgusting. You’ve never been any good. Your food sucks. As do you.” He snickered and started to sing and dance. “You suck bitch. You always have and always will.”

His moves were more like drunken swaying rather than real dance moves. Andy just watched helplessly as the pasties she spent hours baking became a sticky mess of carpet under her ex-boyfriend’s feet.

It was still dark outside, the storm had gone, leaving behind the cold and a great amount of snow. The door was slightly ajar, there was no sign of forced entry, and she knew that Nate had no keys. Then she remembered. Last night she had not locked up. With all the things that happened, it just went forgotten and now she was paying for it. She suspected, that getting rid of her ex would not be easy. There was a time when she thought she loved him. Now she was certain that they’d never been in love. Nate saw her as a money bag and Andy happily financed his every, sometimes luxurious, need. In exchange she got the ghost image of belonging, and compared to what she had before, it
was satisfying. Things changed when Andy decided to leave the corporate world and had entered the uncertain land of a chef. Long hours, shitty paychecks, still she felt she was in heaven. Nate on the other hand did not take the change well. He wanted the money Andy had provided before. Penniless Andy wasn’t attractive anymore. He also did not tolerate the fact that Andy quickly rose and got invitations to kitchens he was just dreaming about. He started to drink and party, and while Andy was slaving away, he cheated on her with many. The last straw had been when Andy was invited to the iconic cooking show, The Ironchef. He went ballistic and his destructive behavior unavoidably led to tragedy. Andy took a shaky breath and straightened. She was not willing to give in and be a victim again. She had suffered enough from the cruelty of her ex and she just did not want to go through all the pain again.

“Nate. You have no business here. Please leave.” Her voice quavered but she was holding up. She braced herself and repeated it again.

“Nate. Leave.” This time her voice was stronger and more confident, it echoed through the empty store.

Surprised by the force of the command Nate stopped his awkward dancing and lunged forward. He slammed his fists on the counter and shouted, saliva spewed from his mouth, dripping down his chin.

“You don’t tell me what to do bitch. You owe me. I can’t get a real job in this godforsaken city thanks to you and your friends. I’m broke. You owe me.”

“I don’t owe you anything, Nate. You did this to yourself. I had nothing to do with it.”

“You…you suck. Bitch. Oh wait. You don’t suck, little princess. Do you? Andy princess doesn’t suck. Andy princess doesn’t do anything in bed. She can’t please a real man. She’s a cold fish.” Andy’s face turned red in embarrassment. She’d heard those words a million times before, but every occasion the unfair accusations hurt her. She just hoped, that Miranda was already gone and would not witness her humiliation.

“Nate. You used me. You hurt me. It was enough. I want you to leave me alone. Stop calling me. Stop coming here. Stop destroying my life. If you don’t leave I’ll call the police.”

Andy reached into her pocket and pulled out her cellphone. Before she could dial, Nate reached over the counter and violently grabbed her arm. The brunette did not see it coming, she couldn’t get away in time. She cried in pain and tried to free herself, but the man was just much stronger than her, despite his drunken state. Nate almost dragged her over the counter until a steely voice snapped at him and he froze.

“You’re still here?”

The question was barely audible, yet the raspy whisper sounded like a cry echoing through the quiet room. Miranda looked up from the book she was reading and peered at Andy above her reading glasses. The brunette slowly sat up in her bed. Pulling up her legs she rested her chin on her knees and repeated again. This time it was more a statement than a question.

“You’re still here.”

Miranda nodded and turned her attention back to the book. Andy’s book. She had started reading it as soon as things had been settled and she was entirely captivated. It was more a tale of a bittersweet journey of self-awareness through food than just a simple collection of recipes. Her daughters, especially Cassidy would enjoy reading it. Cassidy loved watching cooking shows and she had an extensive collection of cookbooks. She made a mental note to ask for a signed copy.

“You’re still here!” The third time it sounded almost like an accusation.

Miranda put the book down and carefully placed her glasses on the top of it. She rose from the well-worn, comfortable armchair she’d been curled up in for the last three hours and walked to the window. Pulling the curtain she peeked out. Yesterday’s storm was gone, the warm sunrays reflected brightly on the fresh white blanket of snow. A new day with the promise of a new beginning. New beginning? How lame is that she thought. We have to deal with our present first, chase away all the demons of the past and that’s when we can talk about building a happier future. Happiness. She did not remember how it felt. How it tasted. How it smelt. She did not remember happiness at all. Sighing deeply she turned back to the younger woman, who was just staring at her silently. She cracked a small, reassuring smile.

“Yes. I am still here.”

“Why?”

The question took her surprise. Was she supposed to leave? Did this poor girl really think that Miranda would leave her alone after all that happened? If the look on the brunette’s face was any indication, then yes. The younger woman was clearly surprised if not confused at seeing Miranda still around. The editor sat down on the edge of the bed, mindful to not to touch the other woman.

“I’m here because you need me. It is that simple”

“It’s never that simple.”

“It was for you, when you helped me.”

“That was different.”

“Different. How?”

“Dunno. Just different.”

“I see.” and Miranda really did. She saw that Andy was withdrawing. The sweet, vibrant woman
she’d almost kissed this morning had disappeared. The unexpected incident with her ex-boyfriend had robbed her and took away her spirit.

“I understand how you feel. I’m sorry that you are pushing me away, because I know you need help. You need someone to rely on.”

Hearing her own words from earlier brought tears to Andy’s eyes but she did not answer. She could not look at Miranda anymore. She fixed her eyes on her own hands, fidgeting nervously with the bracelet, hanging loosely on her wrist. The sleeve of her shirt slid up, revealing the ugly bruises Nate left behind. Miranda winced at the sight. She reached out and gently caressed the smooth, warm skin, unaware how her action caused the other woman to shiver. The blue-black marks were in harsh contrast to the pale complexion of the brunette and Miranda felt her wrath awakening again. What would have happened if she had not gotten there on time? She remembered the terror in Andrea’s voice, as she was pleading for that man to let her go. The ultimate fear on her face. She remembered how her own heart was pounding heavily in her chest when she entered the café and saw that caveman attacking Andrea.


The command startled both Andy and Nate. Andy had not expected Miranda to be still there and Nate had not expected anyone to be around. In his surprise he released Andy’s arm and hastily stepped back. Andy stumbled backward and landed safely, in Miranda’s arms. Nate on the other hand was not that lucky. He learnt the hard way that there was a reason why karma was called a bitch. His foot slipped on one of the half eaten cinnamon rolls he had thrown on the floor and he fell. In his fall, before the hard floor knocked him out, his alcohol clouded mind registered two facts. One, his ex-girlfriend was being cradled in the arms of his long time obsession Miranda Priestly and two, because of that he was in trouble. A very deep and possibly life changing trouble.

Miranda had not realized that she was clutching the bed cover until a warm hand gently covered hers. She relaxed, all the tension immediately faded away by the light touch. Andy folded their fingers together, leaning forward she rested her forehead against Miranda’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry. You saved me and I haven’t even thanked you.”

“I don’t want you to thank me, Andrea. I want you to let it out and feel better. I want you to cry. Scream. Break something. You are quiet. Too quiet. And that worries me.”

Miranda held on to Andy tightly. The brunette stood still for a long moment, then shook her head in disbelief.

“I was told that I can bake a mean cinnamon roll. I guess it’s true.”

She untangled herself from Miranda’s embrace without another word and walked out of the room. Miranda pulled out her phone, made a quick call and then hurried after Andy. She heard the shower running so she waited impatiently in the living room. Long minutes passed but the younger woman did not emerge from the bathroom. Her phone rang and she spoke softly, giving orders about cleaning, baking and taking the garbage out. An hour later everything was back in order. The mess in the café was cleaned up, the cinnamon rolls baked and delivered. And the garbage was taken out. The police were not involved, as the editor wanted to make sure that Nate got the message loud and clear. Do not bother Andrea ever again. So she let her private security expert handle the situation.

“I’m all right. This is my way to cope with this, Miranda. I don’t cry. I don’t scream. Not anymore.”

Miranda was on the phone, talking to her daughters when Andy finally got out of the bathroom. She
was pale and shaky. She did not talk, she did not look at Miranda. She went straight to her bedroom, got under the cover and was asleep in seconds.

Miranda reached out and pulled Andy into her lap. The younger woman snuggled close, resting her head on Miranda’s chest she inhaled deeply. Then again. The first sob came like a soft whimper. And then she broke. Miranda rocked her gently while she cried, occasionally placing soft kisses on her forehead. After a while Andy stopped crying and they just sat there, enjoying the intimacy of their closeness. Miranda lightly grazed the blue marks on Andy’s arm with her fingers.

“Bastard” she murmured.

“These bruises will heal in time.” whispered Andy, her voice hoarse from crying “Unlike the others’ she added in a flat tone.

Miranda tensed.

“What do you mean?”

“This is not his best work. Not even close.”
8.

“This place is magical.”

“It is. Isn’t it?” Miranda tilted her head and looked up from her seat at the brunette, who casually stood against a wooden column, seemingly not minding the decreasing temperature. Miranda started to get chilly, despite the thick wool blanket she was bundled up in. Thankfully, the swing cushions gave her an extra layer of protection, so she was holding on like a champ. They were outside on the porch of an old but fully renovated cottage in the Big Indian Wilderness, only three hours of drive from New York. It was surprisingly easy to convince Andy to join the editor. The younger woman still exhausted from their morning encounter obediently followed Miranda’s gentle orders about packing and making the necessary arrangements that were needed for the week long absence. The drive was quiet and uneventful, both women lost in their thoughts. Andy’s mind was running circles, recalling every little detail of the day, over and over again. She had trouble processing all that happened. She did not understand the motive behind the older woman’s helpful and caring acts. While she was drawn to Miranda, she just couldn’t imagine that the other woman could feel the same and her anxious brain was desperately looking for some valid explanation. Miranda on the other hand, did not want to overanalyze either her own protective behavior, reserved only for those who were close to her, or her rather unexpected romantic feelings towards the younger woman. The only valid reason – midlife crisis - was not appealing and she refused to think of her age, or the fact that she recently bought a sports car she did not need.

“Winter Wonderland. That’s how it was advertised. I suppose they were not exaggerating.”

Andy inhaled deeply, the fresh, crisp air filled her lungs and she shivered lightly. The sun was going down, the orange–red rays waved their last goodbye before slowly disappearing behind the snow covered hills.

“No, they were not. How did you find it?”

“I didn’t. My daughters… My daughters had this crazy idea to spend some time together, really together. No work, phone calls, or internet. Just us.” Miranda smiled wistfully, thinking of her daughters who chose a tropical vacation over something that originally was their suggestion.

“They were truly excited about it and they insisted on arranging everything themselves. They found this place and came up with an extremely detailed plan of how we would spend our days. Unfortunately they found something better to do.”

“But,” she grimaced slightly, “you already know that, right? While I don’t quite remember all the things I told you during my infamous breakdown, I’m sure I mentioned this. I had to.”

Shoving her hands into her pockets Andy shrugged nonchalantly.

“Most of the things you were talking about didn’t really make sense at that time.”

Miranda frowned. “Is that so?” Andy did not miss the hurt coloring Miranda’s voice. She stepped to the swing and squatting down, she placed a hand on the editor’s knee.

“Miranda. You mentioned people I don’t know, people who perhaps I should have, but have never heard of anyway. Events from before I was even born. But please don’t presume that I wasn’t listening. I was. I remember all your words but it’s like a puzzle of thousand pieces. I need time to
put it together. Yes, I learnt some things about you. But I am far from mastering the subject.”

“The subject?”

“Yes. You.”

“I’m a very simple woman darling. Easy to figure out.”

“Somehow I doubt that. Even a lifetime wouldn’t’ be enough to do that.”

“A lifetime? Now, that would be a waste.”

“And again. I have my doubts. I believe you are worth a lifetime, Miranda. I would give you mine if I could.”

“You witnessed possibly my most embarrassing moment in life, not only once but twice if we consider your visit in my office. Yet you’re here and confessing your wish to spend more time with me. A lifetime nonetheless.”

“Why is it so unbelievable? You have definitely seen my most embarrassing moment. You cried on my shoulder. I cried on yours. We are even. Besides, I said I would if I could. But unfortunately it’s hardly possible.

The tone of the younger woman’s voice was light, the words she delivered not so much. The night fell on them and Miranda couldn’t see the younger woman’s expression. Long seconds passed in silence and she was desperately trying to see through the darkness, as much literally as figuratively. Grabbing the hand resting on her knee Miranda rose to her feet, pulling Andy up and with her toward the door.

“Let’s take this some place warmer. I am freezing.”

She led Andy inside, straight to the couch in front of the fire place. She didn’t let go, fearing that the girl might flee, or maybe she didn’t want to give herself the chance to run away. Discussing emotions had never been her forte. The thought of intimacy frightened her. Yet she was ready to jump and firmly believed that Andy wouldn’t let her fall. They settled on the couch and Miranda snuggled against the younger woman, pulling a soft blanket around them. Andy tensed at first then a moment later she relaxed and sneaked an arm around Miranda, resting her palm on her stomach. It did not go unnoticed by the editor who placed her own hand above it and laced their fingers together.

“Care to explain? What are you afraid of?”

“What am I afraid of? You. Me. Everything. Yesterday morning everything was matter of fact. Organized, planned. And now? Everything is so out of control, I hardly recognize myself. Honestly, Miranda I’m not sure what we are doing here. What am I doing here?”

“I’m not accustomed to these feelings either. You kissed me and I can’t get that kiss out of my mind. I should be concerned about other things. More important things. My daughters. The scandal. My future at Runway. But all I can think of is that damn kiss.”

“This is not about that kiss, Miranda. It’s not about me. You needed someone and I was there. As they say, at the right time, in the right place. It could have been someone else. Someone with less baggage. Someone who can match your perfection. Dunno. Maybe a better kisser.”

Miranda sit up and positioned herself to be able to face Andy.
“Perfection? You’re not serious are you?”

Narrowing her eyes she searched her face for answers, but the young woman’s demeanor, not for the first time that day, was unreadable.

“Perfection?” Repeated Miranda. She abruptly stood and began to pace, shaking her head in disbelief.

“They believe…they want to believe that I’m perfect. They want to see perfection and that is exactly what I give them. Perfection. However this image comes with a price. I am not perfect. God knows I’m far from it. So if I intend to sustain this illusion I can’t let anyone close. If I did, they would see me. My flaws. My weaknesses. The real me.”

With every word she sounded more and more agitated, almost angry, and so unlike herself. She indeed was angry, albeit she did not quite understand where these heightened emotions came from. Miranda Priestly has always been cool, calm and collected. This obviously wasn’t the case anymore.

“The real you is everything I would ever want, but I’m not supposed to be here. I wasn’t strong enough to say no, because god help me I want you. I want you. I desire you.”

“No one wants the real me…” whispered Miranda. “No one.” The earlier passion was gone, she seemed almost defeated. “I thought I was ready for this, but apparently not. Your words and mixed signals confuse me beyond words and I despise this state of mind.”

“You don’t understand, Miranda.” Andy pleaded.

“You’re right. I don’t. Frankly, Andrea I am lost here and you are not helping.”

Andy got up and walked toward Miranda. The editor tried to step away but Andy backed her up until they hit the wall. She reached out and placed her hands on Miranda’s face, holding gently, her thumbs caressing the velvety skin. Miranda closed her eyes, leaning into the touch, she breathed a feather soft kiss on Andy’s palm.

“Andrea.” Miranda sighed, turning her face.

“I…I’m sorry.” Andy willed herself to step back. “If she finds out. She hates me. I’ve been dealing with that my entire life. But you, you don’t have to get in the middle of this. You can’t and you won’t. I won’t let you.”

Struggling to keep pace with the turn of events, “I beg your pardon?” Miranda asked.

“Runway is your life and she has the power to take that away from you. You can’t be associated with me. I’m not worth it. I’m not worth the risk of you losing everything.”

“She? Who? For god’s sake Andrea. What are you talking about?” Miranda demanded.

“My sister. Edna Martin!”
9.

“Andrea? What are you doing?”

Andy yelped in surprise and almost dropped the piping bag she was holding. She carefully placed the bag on the table and looked up.

“Umm…baking?”

“Baking? At two in the morning?”

A rather cranky looking – and sounding - Miranda Priestly, was standing in the kitchen door, hands on hips, lips pursed. She was wearing lavender silk pajamas and an almost well-worn grey robe. Her face was free of make-up, hair slightly mussed and despite her tense posture she oozed sex appeal. Their eyes met and all at once the temperature increased to a level that was almost unbearable.

Breaking the connection Andy stepped to the window and cracked it open. She needed to cool down. She did not want to risk a foolish move, like grabbing Miranda and kissing the annoyance off her face. She was drawn to the editor, there was no denying that and it was also clear that whatever force laid behind that would consume them both.

“I…you left without a word and I couldn’t…I mean…I just got restless and I…did I wake you up?”

Andy knew she was rambling but she couldn’t help it. After her confession, their evening ended with the wordless departure of Miranda. Andy swore she saw a flash of shock on her face but she might as well have imagined it. Her tentative “Miranda, please let me explain.” had bounced back after hitting the wall the older woman built, literally in seconds, in front of her eyes. Andy spent a couple hours on the couch, staring at the fireplace. The monotone dance of the yellow-orange flames were supposed to calm her but it didn’t work. She heard Miranda moving around, a constant reminder of their ruined Christmas Eve and any possible relationship. All of her relaxation technics failed, so she called in the last option. Baking.

“You have a rather extensive, awesome pantry here, you know.” Flattery, thought Andy. Yeah, flattery might work.

“And apparently a rather loud stand-mixer, as well, you know.” came the sarcastic answer. “Also, you, smacking the trays on the table, a hundred times did not help either.”

Andy winced. Oh crap. She didn’t think of that.

“Macarons.” She explained.

“Macarons?” repeated Miranda. She clearly didn’t follow what macarons had to do with banging around the kitchen like a mad woman.
“To pop any trapped air bubbles. I have to rap the tray hard against the counter. Not the table.”

“Very important detail. Now I feel much better, that you did not hit the table Andrea.”

An uncomfortable silence fell on them. Andy felt tearing up and one little drop sneaked out before she could prevent it. She didn’t want to cry, not in front of anyone and definitely not in front of Miranda, again. The woman already thought the worst of her, she would think that Andy was fishing for sympathy. She shut her eyes, squeezing them tightly to keep the tears at bay, but the traitors had other ideas. They were flowing freely down her face, accompanied by a pitiful sob.

“No, no. None of that, Andrea.” Gentle fingers wiped the tears away and she was pulled into a hug. Miranda held the younger woman and let out a sigh. Miranda’s feelings confused her, she felt out of her element. Given the circumstances, she should have been angry even furious, but oddly all she felt was concern. Concern and something else she didn’t dare to name just yet, because she was Miranda Priestly. And Miranda Priestly, the Queen of Fashion, the Devil in Prada, the Ice Queen, most definitely didn’t fall in love with girls half her age.

“Why don’t we start over? Let’s finish up here and then we talk.” Miranda said.

Andrea nodded and stepped back from the embrace. She gave a weak smile to Miranda, who smiled back. That was all the encouragement Andy needed, the near future looked much brighter.

“So, macarons?” Miranda seemingly changed her mind on finishing up, she sat down instead and eyed the confection.

“I remembered that you were fond of them. I was lucky, most people don’t have extra fine almond flour in their pantry.”

“Cassidy is gluten sensitive. She loves baking though. Hence we have every imaginable substitute for wheat flour. I believe in her itinerary she dedicated a whole day to baking cookies.”

Miranda picked up a macaron and took a small bite. She groaned in pleasure, when the unique flavors burst in her mouth.

“This is delightful Andrea. Coffee mousse?”

“Yes. White chocolate, cardamom macaron, filled with espresso mousse and raspberry-basil jam.”

Miranda took another bite and then another. The macaron was out of this world. Andrea managed to marry all her favorites into one extraordinary flavor bomb. No doubt these macarons were made with one purpose, to make her happy.

“Thank you Andrea.”

“Sometimes I’m not good with words, Miranda. This is my way to show you, that I care. I created something for you. Just for you. I want you to know that I have nothing to do with Edna, her business or the scandal.”

“I know.”

“You know? How?”

Miranda popped another macaron and gave Andy a wistful look.

“You, darling do not have a malicious bone in your body. I don’t believe that you are capable of
hurting others intentionally. However,” Miranda grabbed another macaron, “we still have to talk. I don’t want secrets or misunderstandings between us.”

“Just like that? I mean I dropped a really explosive bomb on you…”

“No, it’s not just like that, Andrea. Maybe it’s the sugar rush. Or maybe I am the biggest fool of all and making a huge mistake in trusting you. Don’t you see? I’m scared. I don’t remember being this frightened before. Ever!”
Chapter 10

10.
Miranda folded the kitchen rag and placed it on the counter. Looking around she hummed approvingly. It took them more than an hour to clean up, but finally the kitchen was spotless. No words passed between them, just stolen, somewhat shy glances. Anticipation of what was coming next. Their so much needed talk. Would that resolve their concerns or just complicate the situation more. Miranda knew she was walking on thin ice there and it wasn’t just about Andy’s untold story. There was that undeniable draw that absolutely made no sense for Miranda. Yes, Andrea was gorgeous but wasn’t she always surrounded by beautiful women? What she felt went beyond pure physical attraction and that’s what was throwing her out of balance. Love at first sight was not in her dictionary, she found the concept utterly sappy, yet she was seconds away from declaring her wish for happily after ever. With a woman. Half her age. Someone she only met the other day. Madness. The sweet macaroon scent still lingered in the air, in soothing harmony with the aroma of the freshly brewed coffee. Miranda arranged two mugs filled with the hot liquid, cream and some sugar on a tray and carried it to the living room, where she found Andy standing in front of the undecorated Christmas tree.

Handing one of the mugs to Andy she eyed the tree and the boxes of ornaments laying around it. Lots of boxes.

“Merry Christmas, Andrea.”

“Merry Christmas, Miranda.” She saluted with her mug and took a healthy gulp. “I see, you didn’t skimp on style here. This is a lot, I mean a lot of decoration.”

“Go big or go home, Andrea. Isn’t that what they say?”

Andy put down the mug and kneeled on the floor. She opened a box and carefully pulled out a hand painted, bronze color-based globe ornament. Holding it up she admired the fine details of the drawings. Funny looking elves playing in the snow.

“This is wonderful. Reminds me of the ones Ed made me when I was a kid.”

“Ed?”

“My sister, Edna. She was a very talented artist. Drawing, painting was her life.”

“Edna Martin? The Barracuda? An artist?”

“She was a different person back then. We both were.”

Andy gently hang the globe on the tree and stood. She dusted her pants to get rid of the imaginary dirt, she needed a couple seconds to collect herself. Childhood memories raided her mind, disturbing her already fragile peace.

“Do you mind if we postpone this? I don’t feel like decorating right now.” Andy said.

Miranda squeezed Andy’s arm, smiling warmly at her.

“Don’t worry about it. We can do this later. Or not at all. Anything you wish, Andrea.”

Andy took hold on the hand resting on her forearm. Folding their fingers together, she put her other
arm around Miranda’s waist and hauled her close. The forceful almost rough motion had an immediate effect on Miranda. She felt a gush of wetness between her thighs and her nipples hardened painfully. She was certain that Andrea noticed them, as they were poking through the thin fabric of her night clothes.

Andy was indeed aware of the physical response. The extreme heat radiating from the editor’s body, the delicious, swollen nipples pressing against her breast, the sharp intake of breath. Her lips, so close to hers.

“Anything?”

"Anything?"

Andy fell onto the couch, breathing heavily. She was sweaty, her muscles felt like jelly and all she wanted was lie still and never move again.

“Holly shit, Miranda.” she exclaimed. “That was…Where did you learn that move?”

“You weren’t bad yourself, Darling.” laughed Miranda.

She collapsed next to Andy and patted her trembling thigh.

“Don’t forget I have two teenagers who happen to love dancing. I practice with them sometimes.”

“Yeah, but hip-hop?”

“Hip-hop, electric boogie, Latin dances, Shastriya Nritya…name it, we danced it.”

“Indian classical dance? No way.”

“Yes way, my dear. I’ll demonstrate for you some other time though, if you don’t mind.”

As they lay there, this time the silence was comfortable, even relaxing. Andy chuckled as she recalled the editor’s dumbfounded expression when she asked her to dance. She could tell, that in the older woman’s mind they were moving toward to a very different destination but she obeyed without missing a beat. It wasn’t that Andy didn’t want Miranda. She did. But it wasn’t about her want. She knew, that without a solid foundation there was no chance to build a meaningful future together, and that was all she craved. A future, with Miranda.

“I know there is a lot going on right now, but this is the best birthday I’ve had since ages.”

“Birthday?”

“Yes, I was born on Christmas Day.”

“Your parents must have been enthusiastic. The perfect Christmas gift.”

“Quite the opposite, I assure you. My arrival messed up all their plans. No Aspen that year. Go figure.”

Andy sat up. Pulling her legs under herself, she curled up in the corner of the couch, facing Miranda.

“The only person, who welcomed me positively, was Ed.”

Miranda sat up as well, mirroring Andy’s position. Resting her head on her palm, she studied Andy searchingly.
“I’m a bit puzzled here Andrea. You talk about the old Edna so fondly and on the other hand, the picture you painted of the present one is not too flattering.”

“Ed was the perfect big sister. Half- sister really. She’s from my father’s first marriage. When my parents met, Ed was sixteen. By the time I was born she was off at college. She only visited us on the holidays. As I got older, I always looked forward to those visits. Ed was the only one who didn’t think I was a mistake. A mistake, an accident, that’s how my parents called me.”

“A mistake?” Miranda was furious. “How could someone say that to their child?”

“They had the decency not to call me that face to face, but I often heard them mention it. My father was old enough not to fancy another kid and my mother just never wanted any. Long story short, I spent more time with nannies than with my parents. They traveled, entertained a lot and I didn’t fit in with their high-end lifestyle.”

“Oh, Andrea.” Miranda opened her arms and Andy accepted the gesture with no hesitation. Miranda leaned back, pulling Andy with her and they ended up entangled, snuggled as close as humanly possible.

“Ed was always there for me. We did fun things together, she was kind and caring. And as I mentioned before she was a gifted artists. Her professors forecasted a bright future for her.”

“What happened?”

“Many things. First of all my parents reckless spending almost ruined the family business and Ed had to intervene. She sacrificed her art to save the company. After years of hard work, she built a successful empire and made the mistake of stepping down to continue on her dreams. My parents didn’t learn anything and almost destroyed the business again.”

“Let me guess. Edna had to take over again.”

“Yes. This time she had some help though. A sixteen year old financial prodigy, with a doctorate in her pocket. The wizard of numbers she was called.”

“Who was that?”

“Me.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Emily. Because we all love her right?

Chapter Notes

And again. Thank you for the lovely reviews. You fed the bard generously.

11.
“Hello, Red.”

Emily Charlton was straight. Except when she wasn’t. It usually happened at the weekends when she hit the bars and ended up in bed with someone from the same sex. Tall, handsome and muscular, a little bit on the androgynous side. Just sex, preferably no talk and definitely no strings attached. That’s how she liked them, and she liked them a lot. The woman standing at the office door was the perfect image of her type. She was at least six feet tall, tailored pants, shirt and vest showed off a lean, athletic body. She looked vaguely familiar, but she couldn’t place her. Emily pursed her lips – a gesture she learnt from her ultimate idol Miranda Priestly – and gave the woman a disapproving look.


Laughing, the woman flashed a self-assured smile and entered the room as if she owned the place. Leaning against Emily’s desk she crossed her arms and whispered in mock seriousness.

“I had to come up with something. You’re not big on exchanging names, remember?”

Looking at the woman closely her heart almost stopped. Emily felt her face burn as pictures of their night together from a couple months ago filled her mind. Wild, hot, sweaty sex. The best she’d ever experienced nonetheless. She was out with friends, celebrating her birthday. She drank a lot and stayed away from women. She didn’t intend to pick up anyone, she didn’t drink and dive. In her rule book one night stands required a clear head and a hotel room. That night she broke both. She was more than a little tipsy and she took the woman home. The next day arrived with a heck of a headache, a sore body and vague recollections of the previous night. No, no. This was not happening. What was the woman doing here? She had never run across any of her casual hook-ups before and she was very uncomfortable with the situation. The memories kept coming and she shifted in her seat. Pressing her thighs together she tried to control the growing arousal, originating in her groin. The cocky smile on the woman’s face became wider and she winked at Emily. The woman clearly recognized what was happening and was undoubtedly enjoying the redhead’s discomfort.

“But then again, it wasn’t about becoming friends and sending Christmas cards to each other right?”

The patronizing tone flared Emily’s temper. She sprang from the chair and grabbed her Starbucks cup, welcoming the comforting heat. Passing through the woman she hissed.
“Right, and you weren’t in a hurry to introduce yourself either. I thought we were clear that it was a one-time event.”

Emily didn’t wait for an answer, she hurried toward the Closet, hoping the visitor would somehow disappear. Her wish wasn’t granted because the woman was right behind her, matching her pace without effort.

“You think I’m here because of you? Cute. Keep up, Red. I’m looking for Miranda Priestly.”

Emily was taken aback and maybe a little bit hurt but she wasn’t about to give this arrogant woman any satisfaction by showing it. Not slowing down she answered over her shoulder, keeping her voice neutral.

“As you can see, Miranda is not here.”

“Where is she?”

“Are you for real? It’s Christmas Day. Where do you think she is?”

Christmas Day. Of course. The woman had totally forgotten about it. Holidays didn’t mean anything to her. Not anymore. She spent almost all of the holidays in her office working. She overlooked the fact that others might have some kind of attachment to those special days. She silently cursed herself for making this mistake and appearing as a fool in front of the redhead. She’d occupied her new office in the Elias-Clark building the day before and in the morning she decided to look around. The building was practically empty, shiny, over the top decorations everywhere. Christmas.

“Christmas Day. Right. Then why are you here?”

“That’s none of your bloody business.”

Emily was pissed. She was pissed at herself for losing her cool and pissed at this insufferable stranger for being the cause of it. She was at work for god’s sake. She couldn’t act like a sex deprived housewife, drooling over the pool boy…pool girl…Whatever.

They reached the Closet and Emily swiped her pass through the console. The new door was installed the day before adding a new layer of security to the Closet. Actually the only security and Emily didn’t think that it was necessary. The Closet was a sanctuary and those who knew about its existence wouldn’t have dared to break the unwritten rules. Or more like one rule really. You can borrow, you can try on anything and everything, just be sure that Miranda doesn’t object to it. Who ordered the installation and why was a complete mystery, it was done overnight, one day before Christmas. Miranda wasn’t informed yet and Emily hoped it wasn’t her who would have to deliver the news. The editor won’t take it kindly, that someone made decisions about her beloved Closet without consulting her. The console biped and…and nothing happened. Emily tried again. Nothing. She couldn’t believe her bad luck. It was the first time she attempted to get into the Closet since the upgrade and the door didn’t comply. All this when she wanted to hide from the irritating woman and not entertain the woman any further with her growing frustration.

“Great.” she muttered “What now.”

“Need help, Red?” the voice she had learned to hate in the last ten minutes sent shivers down her spine. The woman was standing close to her, so close that she felt the heat emerging from the muscular body. Emily breathed in her perfume, the unique bergamot scent enfolded her. She remembered how she smelt, how she tasted, how she sounded in the heat of passion. The memory, so vivid, sent all of her already heightened senses on red alert. She needed to get out of there, she
needed the distance before she did something stupid, like get on her knees and beg the woman to fuck her into oblivion. She spun around, so fast that her heels couldn’t catch up and one broke, throwing her out of balance, right against the woman’s chest. Emily’s tea left a trail of brown, down the woman’s off-white shirt.

“Bloody hell.” Kicking off her shoes Emily stumbled back staring in terror at the stains on the expensive shirt. Thankfully, the tea was no longer piping hot, at least she didn’t have to worry about causing any possible injures.

“If you wanted me naked, you should have asked. I would gladly strip for you. Again.” the woman deadpanned.

“Look, I don’t know why you’re here and at this point frankly I don’t care. I’ll replace your shirt, then you must leave. I just have to get in somehow.”

Emily gave the door another try. Nothing.

“I wonder what bloody idiot thought that this was a good idea.”

The woman cleared her throat to catch Emily’s attention. When she had it, she pulled a pass card out of her pocket and swiped it. The door hissed open.

“Apparently, I’m the idiot.” said the woman, her tone dry, the cocky smile gone.

Emily’s eyes widened and she groaned. Could this day be any more embarrassing? Moments later she realized it could indeed.

“By the way, my name is Edna Martin. You can call me, Ed.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

A little bit more of Emily. Because we all love her, right?

12.

“My fault! How is it my fault?” Ed exclaimed.

“You really have to ask that?”

“Yes, really. I’m anxious to hear your explanation on how the door malfunction is my fault. Why me? Why not the service company? Or their workers? Their supervisor? WHY. ME.”

The tall woman threw her hands up in exasperation and Emily rolled her eyes at the overly dramatic gesture.

“Now you’re acting like a four year old, on the verge of throwing a tantrum.”

“Excuse me?”

Emily sighed and shook her head. She was getting tired of this drama filled day and unfortunately it was far from the end. Blow number one, running across a one night stand. Blow number two, finding out she is the big boss. Blow number three, getting stuck with her in the Closet. Seconds after they had stepped into the room, the door had closed and stayed that way. Blow number four, none of them had carried their cell phones. Seeing the flashing error message, Emily’s mood switched and she wasn’t in danger of jumping the other woman’s bones anymore. She wanted to scream. Actually she wanted to scream and hit Ed, or just do both at the same time. Considering hitting your boss was not the best recipe for long-term employment, she decided against it. Without a word, she grabbed a Ralph Lauren shirt and tossed it to Ed. Ignoring the other woman’s chatter, Emily stepped into a pair of Manolo Blahnik, and walked to the other side of the room. The further the better. Ed didn’t take the hint and went after her, inquiring why the redhead refused to talk to her. Oddly enough, Emily managed to stay calm and sweetly told Ed, that the shit they were in, was all her fault. She used colorful words to describe how she felt about Ed and her precious door. While there was no real hitting, the figurative punches worked and at the end Ed looked almost defeated.

“You heard me. We are stuck in here, thanks to you and your brilliant idea. Have you realized that it’s Christmas Day and no one is going to find us until tomorrow, if ever?”

“Thanks for stating the obvious, Red.”

“Why did you have this bloody door installed? It has absolutely no use. And stop calling me that.”

“You are wrong, RED.” Answered the CEO, not just simply ignoring Emily’s request, but making sure to put an emphasis on the nickname. “It is needed to protect the company’s property.”

“The company’s property? What property? And most importantly, from who?”

“From you, and from others who use these clothes, shoes and other accessories like their own. I
happen to know, that it costs the company millions.”
“Bollocks. What the bloody hell are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about these for example.” She pointed at Emily’s shoes. “Or the shirt you so generously
gave me. I’ve been informed that this has been going on for a while, but it ends now. I ordered a
catalog of everything in here, and there will be limited access to this room.”

Emily couldn’t believe her ears. Company property. Catalog. Limited access. Oh boy. Miranda will
be furious and she will want the head of who was responsible for this. Emily snickered at the thought
of the confrontation between Miranda and Edna Martin. The CEO clearly had no clue how things
worked here, someone deliberately led her on. Adding the coming out scenario to the math, that
could have meant only one thing. Someone worked hard to pit two powerful women against each
other. For a split second she considered warning Ed about her serious mistake but then she decided
against it. There was only one person Emily was loyal to, no matter how delicious Edna Martin
looked in her tailored pants.

“What’s so funny Red?”

“You. I was right. You are a bloody idiot, Ed.”

“Now wait a minute…” Only one person dared to call her an idiot before. She could still hear her
little sister’s trembling voice. She could see the tears in those soulful brown eyes, her eyes, when she
was leaving after their last, big argument years ago. “You are an idiot Ed.” No, she didn’t needed
these memories right now.

“Let me guess. Your informant also warned you about Miranda. Told you how she will try
everything, even dirty tricks to get on your good side, to secure her position at Runway. Then you
read about her “coming out” in the papers and now you believe everything that so called well-wisher
whispered in your ears.”

One look at the older woman’s face confirmed Emily’s suspicion.

“They are feeding you load of horseshit, Ed. You are the owner of a multi-million dollar company,
yet you make decisions based on hearsay?

“How I operate my company is none of your concern, Red. And you curse a lot, aren’t you
supposed to be polite or something?”

“I’m British not Canadian.” Emily rolled her eyes. This woman was ridiculous. And annoying. And
sexy. That cute half-smile in the corner of her mouth. And the way she gesticulated with her hands,
those fingers. Those strong, long fingers…no. It was not going to work. She needed to put some
distance between the two of them. What was it with this woman? She wanted to throttle her one
minute, then tear her clothes off and ravage that divine body the next.

“This room is big enough to stay out of each other’s way.” Emily said as she walked past the other
woman, mindful of avoiding any contact. “I’ll settle down over there and mind my own business.
And you can stay here and do the same.”

“Agreed. We are both professionals after all.”

That statement earned a loud snort from Emily.

“I’m a professional. Not quite sure about you.”

Ed was completely lost. There it was again. That look on the redhead’s face. And that comment.
What was it about?

“Am I missing something here?”

“You said that it was not my concern how you lead your company. You may be the main shareholder of Elias-Clark, but it doesn’t make you the only top dog here. I don’t doubt that you have power, connections and you can accomplish many things. But this is not your game Ed. In this game you’re merely the dark pawn and someone is using you to get rid of the white queen.”

“The white queen? Give me break…”

Emily didn’t bother to answer, just shrugged and turned away. She regretted getting into this debate with the other woman. Edna Martin was as thickheaded they come. She wouldn’t just change her mind based on the word of a lowly assistant. First assistant. As if it that made any difference.

“I get it. You are Miranda’s first assistant and you think you have to represent her interests. That’s lovely. You confuse me. Maybe it’s you who is feeding me a load of horseshit, as you so eloquently put it. Don’t think that just because we slept together you have anything on me. Besides, it wasn’t that good, that I would be so easily taken in.”

Ed winced mentally. It was a low blow, she knew that. Emily didn’t deserve it. In truth, what the assistant said raised some red flags and the tall CEO began to question her decisions. At the same time she couldn’t let some silly sexual attraction blur her judgment. She’s been there done that before. She sacrificed the most important person in her life to it and almost lost her company too.

Emily spun around and with two long strides she was standing in front of the older woman.

“Fuck. You.” She hissed.

Seeing the fury in the redhead’s eyes, Ed involuntarily stepped back but not fast enough. Her face made an unwanted connection with Emily’s palm. There was an unexpected beeping signal coming from the console and the door slid open. Emily starred at the swollen, angry mark her ring caused on Ed’s face in horror. Then she turned and ran.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

And again, thank you for your reviews. This girl appreciates you all.

13.
“What do you mean, you want to come home?”

Miranda entered the kitchen, her cellphone pressed to her ear. She sat at the table, listening intently but her eyes were glued to Andy, who was busy with the coffee maker. Miranda knew immediately that something was off, when the girls’ ringtone interrupted her conversation with Andrea. She picked up the phone and before she could say a word, Cassidy started to whine about everything and anything. It was evident after ten seconds, that there was no real emergency unless Cassidy’s blunt demand – get us home now – qualified as one.

A fresh cup of coffee was placed in front of her and she smiled at the brunette gratefully, mouthing a silent thank you. A gentle squeeze on her shoulder provided some comfort, but she needed more. Circling Andy’s waist, Miranda pulled the younger woman closer, right between her legs. She propped her forehead against Andy’s stomach and let out a contented sigh when two strong arms circled her shoulders. She was so lost in the sensation, that she almost missed Cassidy’s last comment. Almost. She tensed and Andy literally felt the air freeze around them.

“Watch your language, Cassidy.” Miranda warned her daughter in a low voice. “I can’t imagine where you learnt that.”

Except she could. Miranda was well aware how her ex-husband’s girlfriend tried to influence the girls. The young blonde’s ultimate mission was to get a ring on her finger and she presumed that the key to achieve that was Cassidy and Caroline. Her brainwashing tactics failed on Caroline but unfortunately Cassidy was more susceptible and that caused countless arguments between mother and daughter. Miranda pursed her lips, as she listened to Cassidy. The girl’s temper was beyond control today and Miranda, not for the first time, gave boarding school a serious thought.

There was some huffing and puffing on the other end and Cassidy hung up, without so much as a goodbye.

Miranda Priestly loved her daughters. It was a well-known fact. Long line of miserable assistants, second assistants and other employees could tell endless tales of how protective the editor was and how she made sure all their whims were satisfied. When the girls were younger, Miranda was absent a lot due to her insane work hours and traveling. Until recently, family dinners, goodnight kisses or bedtime stories weren’t her strength, she never managed to get home on time. She fooled herself thinking that expensive gifts and fulfilling all their wishes were enough to make it up to them. It didn’t work out well. At the age of ten the twins were almost unmanageable, disrespectful and full of shitty attitude. Hoping that she could still get it right, Miranda dropped the pretense and switched into being present, mom mode. While her relationship with the girls had changed significantly in the last two years, it was far from perfect. The peace was fragile and sometimes it resembled more of a cold war than a real truce. So she loved the girls dearly, although at that moment, she didn’t like Cassidy that much and she couldn’t care less that her feelings weren’t exactly motherly.
Miranda let go of Andy and withdrew from the embrace. She threw the phone on the table with more force than she intended. It slid along the smooth surface and landed the floor. Andy collected the phone and handed it to Miranda, then receded and stood against the counter. Uncertain of the situation, she didn’t want to pry, she was just waited patiently. She didn’t have to wait too long.

“They want to come home. Actually I didn’t have a chance to talk to Caroline, so I don’t quite know her view on this. Cassidy…she’s bored. Apparently there is nothing to do and their father is not in a rush to entertain them. She hang upon me but first she had to rant about how I am the worst mother ever. How I exiled my daughters, so I could spend the holidays getting fucked by a strapped dyke.”

“No. Those were not my twelve year old daughter’s words.” Miranda rubbed the bridge of her nose and closed her eyes. Andy stood still, observing the editor and Miranda didn’t move either. Her breathing was even and after couple minutes passed in silence Andy thought she might have fallen asleep. She crouched at the editor’s chair and gently squeezed her thigh.

“Miranda?”

Miranda opened her eyes.

“I’m awake” she said. Covering Andy’s hand with hers, she spoke slowly, drawling the words as if speaking was painful.

“I thought we were making progress. I’m home almost every evening. On time for dinner. We talk. I listen, really listen. Pay attention. I am present. Part of their everyday routine. I dance hip-hop with them for god’s sake…And all my efforts seem to be nullified by an airhead bimbo, whose lifetime goal is to marry someone with a healthy bank account. Sometimes I wonder…” Miranda’s voice cracked and she took a long, shaky breath.

“And here we are again. I question myself, my credibility as a mother. Did I make the wrong decision when I let them travel, instead of coming here? Why didn’t I attend all their school events? Why didn’t I spend more time with them? Why did I divorce their father? And there are many more whys…”

“Do you have answers to those whys?”

“I believe I do.”

“Reasonable ones?”

“Mostly.” Miranda stood, pulling Andy up with her. She framed the younger woman’s face in her palms and gave her a light peck on the lips. It was natural and matter of fact, in a way only long-time couples can relate to each other. They weren’t officially a couple, let alone long-time ones, yet the kiss had the familiarity of a lifetime spent together.

“You’re right. I guess, I’m just tired. All these unexpected affairs, drained me emotionally as well as physically. At my age it’s harder to keep up. I’m not twenty anymore.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Why thank you, Andrea. You are too kind.” Miranda didn’t seem offended in the least, Andy could detect a hint of humor in her voice and a half smile. She interpreted it as the ultimate sign of Miranda’s affection. She presumed that not many dared to joke about the editor’s age, or if they did,
must have faced the consequences.

Miranda picked up the phone, then dropped it back with the same motion.
“I should make arrangements for the girls to fly home. Although I’m not sure I want to.”

“Unfortunately, I can’t help you decide. I don’t know anything about kids. Heck I’ve hardly been one myself.”

“What do you mean darling?”

“Being a prodigy basically stole my childhood. Studying and more studying. No playtime, toys or anything normal kids did. I can’t say I didn’t enjoy books, school and learning things but sometimes it became so overwhelming. Without Ed… I don’t know. I might have not survived those years.”

“You miss her, don’t you?”


“You speak fondly of her. It appears that she was your world. What happened Andrea?”

“I promise I will tell you the whole story. But first, why don’t you take advantage of the hot tub and soak your old bones, Miranda. Relax, clear your mind and figure out what to do with the girls. Meanwhile, I’ll be your personal chef and make you a royal breakfast.”

Miranda raised an eyebrow. “Royal breakfast?”

“A royal breakfast for the Queen of Fashion.”

“Really, Andrea?”

Andy grimaced and shrugged nonchalantly.

“Yeah, well… in my head it sounded much better.”

“All right. I’ll go and take a bath.”

She leaned in and gave Andy a lingering kiss on the left cheek. Her lips trailed across her face in a feather light touch and stopped at her ear. Andy jerked when sharp teeth bit on her earlobe.

“And don’t think,” whispered Miranda, her breath hot and stimulating “that I didn’t notice that you used old and my name in the same sentence. We can discuss your punishment later.”

Miranda breezed out of the kitchen, leaving a very flustered Andy behind.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Thank you, thank you. You are great.

Miranda never thought that it was possible to be awakened by the growling of her own stomach, but that was exactly what happened. She had had a weird dream. She had been floating around in the air on the top of an oversized macaron, hitting fluffy, and cotton candy-like clouds on the go. The clouds exploded with a loud grumble, releasing rainbow colored sprinkles. She tried to catch the tiny candies but they vanished as soon as she touched them. She bumped into a huge pink cloud, it exploded, starting a chain reaction. The clouds blew up, one after another, the roar increasing to an almost unbearable level and she stirred. She remembered almost falling asleep in the bathtub. Then before getting dressed she had lain down just for a couple minutes. She hadn’t intended to fall asleep but her intentions were apparently all for naught. She couldn’t afford the luxury of sleep, she had to make arrangements to bring the girls home. She had decided to give up and go with Cassidy’s whims one last time. She wasn’t proud of her own decision. It meant that her time with Andrea was over and given the circumstances she couldn’t tell what the future held for them. She also knew that it was time to seriously address the Cassidy issue or more like the idiot ex-husband’s overly influential girlfriend issue. She sighed and crawled out from under the light blanket she had been covered with, by Andrea no doubt. Miranda almost felt like crying over the thoughtfulness of the young woman when she saw the small tray on the nightstand. A bottle of water, macarons, her reading glasses, cellphone and a note. Her stomach growled rather loudly and she realized how extremely hungry she was. She popped a macaron into her mouth and unfolded the note.

Dinner is ready whenever you are.

A

PS: You are beautiful. I swear I wasn’t ogling you for too long.

She smiled and caressed the letters with her fingertips. Oh Andrea, you can ogle me as long as you wish. Wait a minute. Dinner? She checked the time on her phone and realized, that she slept through almost the whole day. Wonderful. It was five pm and no arrangements were put in place for the girls. She felt tempted to send a message to Emily and make her handle it, but dismissed the idea quickly. Although her faithful first assistant didn’t have a clue, Miranda actually liked Emily and respected her for the hard work and loyalty she showed. It was Christmas Day and Emily deserved to be left alone.

Miranda opened a browser, to search for an available flight, when a discreet beep signaled a new incoming message. Cassidy.

Mom. You are the best. Today was awesome. We’ll call you when we’re back to the hotel. Now gotta run. Love you. And I’m sorry.

What was going on? Did the message mean they had changed their minds and wanted to stay after all? Why was Cassidy sorry? She dialed Cassidy’s number, but it went straight to voicemail. She tried Caroline’s and James’ numbers too, without luck. It seemed she would have to wait for them to call. Until then, the mission to bring the girls back home could be put on hold. Her stomach
grumbled again, demanding something more substantial than macarons, no matter how delicious they were. She dressed quickly and headed downstairs still wondering what to make of Cassidy’s message.

“Andrea. I received this message from my daughter and I would like to know your…Andrea? Are you all right?”

The brunette didn’t acknowledge Miranda’s entrance. She was standing in the middle of the kitchen, a tray of fresh pasta in hand, staring intently at the pot of boiling water on the stove.

“Andrea?” Miranda stepped closer and gently touched her arm.

“Miranda. Sorry. I was just daydreaming here.” Andy winked at the editor playfully and smiled. Miranda narrowed her eyes. The smile seemed forced and she couldn’t help but notice the other woman’s anxious energy. Andy kept looking at the pot and although the water was boiling over the rim she still didn’t move.

“I didn’t know when to expect you, so I just put the water on and let it simmer.” She held up the tray “I made fresh pasta”

“I see. Are you planning to cook it any time soon? Or we just eat it as it is.?”

“Oh. Yes. Sorry about that.” Andy dumped the pasta into the water and lowered the heat.

“You must be hungry by now.”

“Hungry? That’s an understatement, darling. Do you need a hand?”

“Would you grab the salad from the fridge please? This only needs a minute or two. Nothing fancy, Cacio e peppe.”

She melted some butter in pan and ground a generous amount of black pepper into it. Adding the pasta, pasta water and pecorino cheese she shook the pan expertly with a flick of her wrist.

“Cacio e peppe? How did you…? Never mind. I’ll get the salad.”

Andy divided the pasta and placed one plate in front of Miranda. Miranda took a bite. It tasted amazing.

“When I got my first ever paycheck, hardly anything mind you, I thought it was worth celebrating nonetheless. There was this small, Italian restaurant next to our apartment, never been there before or any restaurant for that matter.” Miranda took another bite and hummed. Delicious. “Cacio e peppe was the cheapest item on the menu yet I felt like a queen, dining in a restaurant. I haven’t had any since then. I was told to never order anything pedestrian like that if I wanted to be taken seriously. I believed it.”

“I know.” Andy said, simply.

“You did? Did I? Of course I did. Perhaps I should ask you to write a memo about what I told you during my…my episode.”

“I could do that. I remember every single one of your words. This dinner is a reminder of the small, simple things you have been missing from your life.”

Miranda reached out and squeezed Andy’s hand.
“Thank you, Andrea. You are a constant reminder of those things and I’m more than thankful for that. You certainly know how to make me feel special.”

Andy glanced at the stove and shrugged.

“I… I don’t make pasta too often you know.”

There it was again. The anxious energy Miranda sensed earlier. She suspected it had something to do with their dinner or maybe the preparation of it? She decided to play along, as she didn’t want to scare away the younger woman with direct questions. She knew, that her style of questioning sometimes sounded like an interrogation. Whatever it was, Andrea would tell her, when she was ready.

“Really? It’s not that you have to worry about your figure.”

“My figure? Guess not.” Andy pushed aside her plate and leaned back. “I wasn’t always like this. The smart, fat girl. I was the smart, fat girl for years.”

Miranda didn’t comment on the statement. She stopped eating though and waited for Andy to continue.

“At home no one really cared about my eating habits. Ed didn’t live with us and while she notices my unhealthy habits, she wasn’t able to influence any changes. At school everyone was older than me, I didn’t fit in, and I had no friends. So I ate. A lot. I wasn’t simply just overweight, Miranda. I fell into the extremely obese category.”

Andy wrinkled her nose and licked her lips nervously. She looked at Miranda, expecting to see disapproval but there wasn’t any. The editor’s expression didn’t give away what she was thinking, the only thing that was obviously present was her intense focus on Andy.

“As I said, smart, fat girl. After I started to work with Ed, she insisted that I move in to her penthouse. She hired a personal trainer and a chef and made sure that I worked out regularly and ate healthy, wholesome foods. Things slowly changed.”

Andy stood and brought her half empty plate to the sink.

“Coffee?” she asked Miranda, who too arose from her seat and carried her own plate over.

“No, thank you. Why don’t we move to the living room? Cleaning up can wait.”

They settled in front of the fireplace and Andy was eager to go on with her revelations. It was painful to recall the bitter memories but she had to share. She wanted, no needed to confide in Miranda. She wasn’t sure how it would end. The risk that with all her secrets out in the open, Miranda would abandon her, was high, yet she had to take a chance. Revealing her past and baring her soul was essential before they got to the point of literal exposure.

“It took us almost two years but we successfully revived the company. Business was up and flying high. Ed came to an agreement with our father. He handed over the company in exchange for a ridiculous amount of monthly appanage. Ed and I became the owners, at least that’s what I and everybody else thought.”

“What happened?”

“In reality she tricked father to sign the legal documents and she acquired the ownership, alone. She still transferred him some money every month, but hardly enough to maintain their accustomed
lifestyle. I only found out about this years later, during our last, deal-breaking argument.”

“Have you ever thought of challenging her in court? We are talking about millions here.”

Andy shook her head.

“Money is not important for me, Miranda. I could make millions with almost no effort, using my so-called financial talent. But that’s not I want. I earn my living by doing what I love, what makes me content. And almost happy.” She added after a second of hesitation.

“What hurts the most is not the loss of the company.”

“But losing Ed?” asked Miranda gently.

Andy nodded and wiped her eyes. Stupid tears. She was not going to cry. She already cried enough tears for a lifetime.

“Our problems started after I turned eighteen. By that time I had transformed into a whole new person. Fit and healthy. I got rid of my braces and my pimples were gone. I wasn’t invisible anymore. Men began to recognize me. But on the inside I was still the same fat girl, with all the same insecurities and fears. So I accepted the courtship of someone, who knew me before my make-over.”

Miranda didn’t have to think hard, she perceived right away, who Andy was talking about.

“The chef.”

Andy grimaced.

“Yes. Nate. He asked me out and I said yes. Ed wasn’t happy about it in the least. She was concerned about Nate’s real intentions. She was convinced that he only wanted my money. I didn’t listen to her and we argued a lot. Things got worse, when she met someone and fell in love.”

“I understand that it was a disaster. Her love story hit the news?”

“It was a nightmare. It was my turn to warn Ed, that the love of her life was only after her money. Ed was furious and accused me of being jealous of her relationship. I showed her evidence of the woman’s betrayal – she stole money from the company and from Ed’s private bank account - but she refused to listen. Ironic isn’t it?”

“It appears, that you both saw the shortcomings of the other’s relationship but ignored the shortcomings in your own.”

“Basically yes. We ruined our family for what? For two gold diggers.”

Andy threw a log into the fire and stared at the orange flames for a long minute. When she spoke again her voice was so low, Miranda had to lean forward to catch the words.

“You know, I knew from the very beginning that Nate was not good for me. I just wanted to belong so badly, that I overlooked his flaws and behavior. He pulled me down, he fed my insecurities by keeping the image of the fat, ugly girl alive in my head. He spent my money as if it was his and I didn’t mind. Money was the only thing he cared about. I left Ed and moved in to my own apartment. In theory, Nate lived with me, but days often passed without me seeing him. He kept himself busy with other women. I stayed with the company for two more years. It was a torture. Ed and I barely tolerated each other, we only spoke when it was unavoidable. Then she found out the truth about her lover and she turned into someone I didn’t recognize anymore. She became hateful and cruel. She
made questionable business decisions, which resulted in people losing their jobs. I was always proud of the humanistic way we handled business and I couldn’t let that happen. I called her out. Reminded her that we were both in charge and she couldn’t just do what she wanted. ”

“And then you finally uncovered the facts about the company’s ownership?”

“Yes. She threw it into my face. I was so pissed off, I didn’t even look at the documents. I stormed out of her office and never looked back. I haven’t seen or talked to her since then. Seven years have passed and she’s used all her power to make my life miserable all this time.”

Andy struggled to her feet and started to pace. All these memories were affecting her greatly, but she didn’t want to stop. She had to finish her story, she had to see how Miranda would react.

“After leaving the company I made a lot of changes to my life. I have an impeccable pallet, strong work ethic and a real passion for food. I put those to use in the restaurant business. I slowly worked my way up to sous chef. I felt free and I was doing what made me happy. Nate didn’t take the changes well. The money was tight and he was jealous of me.

“Jealous?”

“He is a trained chef, I’m not. Yet I was invited to kitchens he just dreamt of. It didn’t sit well with him. He also despised that I acquired some friends. I wasn’t the lonely, pathetic creature anymore who he could use. The ugly, fat girl retired for good and with that he lost his power over me. He drank a lot and I only saw him when he needed money. The real turning point was when I was asked to compete in Iron Chef. One night I was practicing for the next challenge in a friend’s restaurant. Nate showed up. He was drunk and very angry. Actually he was out of control. He had acted aggressive or verbally abusive before, however he never got physical.”

Andy stopped and shuddered. Miranda stood and took a step toward her, desperately wanting to comfort the torn woman. Andy raised her hands, stopping her from approaching.

“Please, no. I have to finish this. If you come closer I won’t be able to.”

Miranda halted, giving Andy the space she required, but didn’t sit back down. Miranda braced herself, assuming that whatever was coming, was possibly crucial regarding their relationship.

“He threw a pot of boiling water at me.” Andy pulled up her shirt with one swift motion, revealing her scarred skin.

“This is who I am. Burnt. Damaged. And now you are free to change your mind and leave. I won’t hold it against you.”
Chapter 15

15.
“How. Dare. You?”

Miranda’s question made absolutely no sense. Nor did her soft, almost inaudible icy tone and in contrast the fury in her eyes. Nor did her finger, repeatedly jabbing Andy’s chest, emphasizing each word she spat out.

“How. Dare. You.”

Andy tried to dodge the next poke with a quick backward step but she hit the wall and there was no room to maneuver any further. Fortunately, Miranda stiffened in mid-motion and retreated, putting a much needed distance between them. Andy blinked stiffly uncertain of their standing. What was happening? She expected heightened emotions from the editor after revealing her condition. She had catalogued them in advance. Disgust, pity, rejection. She could work with those. Handle them masterfully. However looking at the older woman who was now leaning against the bookcase on the other side of the room, she saw none of those.

Anger. There was pure anger written on Miranda’s face. Fury radiating from every pore of her rigid body.

“No. You can’t be angry with me. That’s not how you are supposed to react.”

Andy’s voice was thin, almost pleading. Surely, Miranda would understand that right? She would accept that anger was Andy’s kryptonite. Anger paralyzed her, made her unable to think, to act. She was almost completely vulnerable against it. It was something she had been working on with her therapist and although she had succeeded on a certain level, she still had struggles. She could block strangers’ animosity or people’s she didn’t care about. But when it came from someone she loved, she froze. And there it was. That realization which made the whole situation even more impossible. She knew that her behavior toward the older woman was unpredictable and could have been interpreted as she playing push and pull with Miranda. It could not have been further from the truth, as it wasn’t a game of any kind. The physical attraction between them was immediate, although on Andy’s side it rapidly developed into something deeper than primal sexual need. She loved Miranda. More precisely she was in love with her. Telling Miranda about her feelings, wasn’t an option, when she couldn’t collect herself enough to provide a coherent thought. Besides she doubted that they were on the same page if the editor’s unexpected anger was any indicator of her intentions. The first wave of anxiety was right on schedule and she rode through it expertly. She braced herself for the next one she knew would follow soon. Taking deep breaths she leaned against the wall, seeking a solution to avoid a full force panic attack. She looked at Miranda and whimpered.

“Please, you can’t be angry.”

“I can’t? Pray tell Andrea, how exactly am I supposed to feel? Tell me what my predicted behavior is in your script? Am I supposed to feel grossed out? State that while you are a nice person I can’t overlook your scars? Call you a freak, perhaps? Or should I pity you instead? Say something along the lines of how unfortunate this is, then walk away? Because clearly, in your mind you have already decided the outcome, haven’t you?”

Miranda was so wrapped in her own emotions that she failed to see Andy’s distress. Her words were like physical punches. They hit hard. Andy wasn’t able to evade them. They were aimed with precision, targeting the right spots. Every single word was true and Andy wondered how Miranda
had come to see her so well, in so short an amount of time. Hugging herself she lowered her head and murmured her calming mantra, while trying to process the situation. If Miranda had figured Andy out, why was she angry? Why?

“Why are you angry with me?”

Before facing Andy, Miranda had the same question echoing in her mind but unlike Andy, she had an answer to it. She understood Andy’s way of thinking, how she attempted to scare Miranda away. She knew it was rooted in her past, her relationship with Ed and that bastard Nate. Still she was angry. However, despite what Andy thought, Miranda was not angry with her. Finally looking across the room she became conscious of Andy’s discomfort.

“Oh Darling. I’m not angry with you. I’m angry for you.”

“For me?” Andy snapped her head up and frowned. “For me?”

Pushing away from the bookcase, Miranda approached Andy, stopping close enough to touch her if she wanted, but she didn’t. Searching Andy’s face she established eye contact, claiming the young woman’s full attention.

“I’m angry with that low life bastard, who hurt you.” said Miranda. “I’m angry that you had to go through all that pain. I’m angry that he made you believe that you were somehow less because of your injury, that he tried to destroy your beautiful soul. I’m angry with Ed that she wasn’t there for you. I’m angry at all the devastating moments in your life. But most of all. I’m angry that I wasn’t there to protect you. I wish I could have been there, but I couldn’t. And don’t tell me that it makes no sense. I’m aware of that. ”

Miranda didn’t care if it was a stupid mid-life crisis or some ridiculous cliché from a cheap romance novel. She wanted in. She wanted to take the hand of this wonderful, perplexing woman and walk toward the sunset. She wanted to embrace all the conflicting emotions this journey came with. Leading or being led, didn’t really matter as long as they were traveling together. And it was something knew, unfamiliar territory for Miranda. Normally, it would have frightened her but there was nothing normal about their circumstances. How they met, how this girl put her through an emotional shock therapy in less than three short days, it was anything but ordinary. A couple of years ago Miranda visited an old friend – yes she had friends - in Finland and she was talked into trying ice swimming. A quick dip in freezing water, afterwards a relaxing warm up in the hot sauna. She was assured that this method had many health benefits, also an overall healing effect on the body. It must have been true, after trying it for several days, her mood improved and temporarily she got rid of her insomnia. Being with Andrea reminded her of that Finnish experience, except it wasn’t her body that was exposed to the extremes. Receiving an almost blank stare and no verbal reaction from the younger woman, Miranda puffed mildly frustrated. Was this girl even listening to her?

“You don’t understand do you? And here I thought I had myself a smart one.”

She needn’t have worried though. Andy was listening to her. Her analytical mind systematically catalogued every one of Miranda’s words, carefully processing all the possible meanings behind them. Adding the last three days’ worth events to it, she run scenarios, variation after variation, just to be end up with the same result over and over again. Her days of traveling alone were over. She had finally arrived at a safe harbor, docked her ship and was free to do anything she yearned for. Stay or sail away it was her choice, but she was certain that no matter where she was headed, she would always have Miranda to accompany her. Andy was no fool to think, that it was going to be easy. They had just met. Their relationship had barely started first grade and there was a long and bumpy journey to college graduation. Andy gratefully embraced the relief, her train of thoughts delivered. Her anxiety toned down, giving space to the more manageable anticipation and something she would
describe as primal, raw need to be physically close to the older woman. Andy launched forward and Miranda yelped in surprise by the sudden move.

“Andrea what …”

The question died on Miranda’s lips as she was locked in an embrace and a hungry mouth descended on hers. This kiss was different. Nothing like the sweet kiss in Miranda’s office or the small pecks they shared here and there. And it most definitely did not resemble any kisses she had ever received. As clumsy as it was, it still had the potential to shake Miranda’s world and ruin her for anything else. And that’s exactly what happened. She acknowledged that there was no way back from here. It was either Andrea for the rest of her life, or no one.

Andy was not an experienced kisser. She knew she lacked the technique and her nose had the tendency to act as a block when she tried to find the right angle. It wasn’t different this time. Their noses bumped together, but Miranda didn’t seem to be bothered by it. She opened up to Andy and moaned blissfully when her warm tongue met hers. Somehow they made it to the couch. Sitting, Andy pulled Miranda onto her lap. The intensity of their kissing slowed down, and turned into playful nibbles and gentle caressing.

“I understood you completely.” Breaking the comfortable silence Andy referred to Miranda’s earlier comment. “Except one tiny little detail. What gave you the impression that you had me?”

Seeing Miranda’s crestfallen look, Andy regretted the teasing instantly.

“Sweetheart, you had me the moment I set foot into your office.”

“I did?” Miranda jabbed Andy’s chest accusatorily. “Don’t you dare say it if you aren’t serious.”

Andy grabbed Miranda’s hand, folded her fingers and held it against her chest.

“Ouch. What is it with you and poking? You have damn strong fingers lady.” With her free hand she reached up and traced Miranda’s upper lip. “I am serious.”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that. I brought out everything I had in the inventory and you masterfully navigated through all the roadblocks. I can’t think of anything else to sabotage this. Us.”

Miranda squeezed Andy’s hand and nodded. Andy smiled and squeezed back in response. A silent affirmation passed between them. They made no sweeping declarations. Perhaps they were not ready to word those very present feelings both were achingly aware of. Or maybe, it was the knowledge that sometimes you don’t have to say it out loud. Whatever it was, it was solid for now. After several seconds Andy clapped and said cheerfully.

“It’s settled then. Now let me go. I have to pee.”

She untangled herself from under Miranda and rose to her feet.

“Shit, shit. My leg is asleep. Ouch.” Shaking her left leg vigorously, which refused to support her weight, she limped to the bathroom. A sharp bang came from the bathroom, followed by a muffled “Ouch. Shit.” then a loud, “No worries. I’m good.”

Miranda dropped back on the cushions and closed her eyes, her lips curling up involuntarily.

It couldn’t have been any less romantic. Or any more perfect.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Emily and Ed are moving forward. Or are they?

16.

“Can we talk?”

Ed looked up from the computer screen she had been studying intently and grimaced at the redhead, obviously not thrilled about her presence. Emily winced at the sight of the ugly mark on the CEO’s face. It was swollen and there was some dried blood around the red cut. Blood? She didn’t hit that hard, did she? Ed must have read her thoughts, because she made a dismissive gesture with her hand.

“Don’t worry. It’s not all you.” she stated dryly. She didn’t volunteer any further information and Emily wasn’t keen to ask, but she had to be sure, that it wasn’t anything that threatened her future with the company. Right after she had run from the Closet she realized that she couldn’t leave without sorting things out with Ed. She prided herself on being a professional, no matter the circumstances. That was what made her the perfect first assistant. She met Miranda’s every demand, dealt with the twins’ every whim, handled high profile associates, models, designers masterfully and not once had she lost her temper. Until Ed.

“Then what happened?” Emily asked.

Ed didn’t answer at first. She stood and walked to the huge window, behind her desk. Shoving her hands into the pockets of the perfectly tailored trousers, she rocked back and forth on her feet. A couple minutes passed, then Ed finally turned back to Emily and admitted reluctantly.

“That stupid door hit me.”

“Oh.”

“And no, we are not going to talk about it.”

“I still feel terrible, Ed. I apologize, I shouldn’t have reacted the way I did.”

Ed sighed and motioned Emily inside the office.

“Please, take a seat.”

Ed waited for Emily to occupy one of the armchairs, then she sat down facing the redhead. Leaning forward she rested her arms on her knees and looked Emily straight in the eye.

“If anything, it’s me who has to apologize. I said those things to hurt your feelings. I was out of line and I’m sorry. What you said to me…that I was an idiot…you brought back memories I’d rather not remember. Still I had no right to belittle you. Please accept my apology.”

Emily was taken aback. Where did the other woman’s arrogance go? She searched for signs of subterfuge but all she saw was a genuine regret on Ed’s face.
“The only person, who’s ever had the balls to talk to me like that was my sister. Our last conversation, or rather argument, years ago concluded in her calling me an idiot. She pointed out all my mistakes, trying to save me from my stubborn self and I didn’t take it kindly. By the time I realized that she was right, our relationship had been ruined, beyond repair. All my attempts to reconcile failed. She never returned my calls or replied to any of my emails, except for one occasion. She sent me a short, straight to the point email. “Leave me alone.” She even filed a restraining order against me.”

Ed stood and walked back to the window, starring out for an endless minute. She wasn’t sure why she was sharing this with Emily. She hardly knew her, if she did at all, and they weren’t exactly best buddies. Based on their circumstances Ed should have not confided to her, yet she did anyway. She had no family or friends and she gave up on counseling ages ago. Maybe it was time to get rid of all the extra baggage and burden an almost stranger with it.

“All of this because I called you an idiot?” Emily couldn’t quite fathom that.

“Partly, yes. You said a lot more than that and” she pointed to the computer “I already found some info, suggesting that I might have been misled. Do you have anything more to add? I assume, you know Runway and the game they play here better than I. Anything I should key in on? Maybe a little help on how to match Miranda? You know, soften her up a little?”

“No. Do you own homework.” said Emily, anger coloring her voice. “Or” she added heading to the door “Hire someone. That’s what you rich people do anyway.”

She wrinkled her nose, as if smelling something unappealing and with one last headshake she was gone.

“That went well.” murmured Ed. She was disappointed by the turn of the events. Her intentions were honest but clearly Emily interpreted them as a vicious attempt to weaken her fidelity to Miranda.

“I have to work on my communication” she said grumpily and flopped down the chair at her desk. Maybe she could do some more work. Emily’s angry face came to her mind and she knew she was not going to do anything productive.

“Time to go home.” Gathering her things, her eyes fell on an unfamiliar object laying in the armchair Emily had occupied earlier. A cellphone.

“What do you want?”

Emily glared at the unexpected visitor at her apartment door. She had left Ed’s office in a haste after the CEO’s suspicious comment about changing her mind about Miranda and Runway. The shift in her attitude was too sudden to be believable. What pissed Emily off the most was the tearful story about her relationship with her sister. Did she even have a sister? Was it just a lie to earn Emily’s sympathy? Or was it all true and Emily misjudged her. Despite her earlier thoughts on not disturbing Miranda during the holidays she decided to send her an email, with a heads up about the situation. She couldn’t find her phone and was wondering where she had left it when there was a knock on the door. Ed.

“I…Your phone. You left it in my office. I thought you might need it.”
Emily snatched the phone from Ed’s hand without a word and more forcefully than intended, shut the door in her face. Ed smiled wryly at the closed door. It wasn’t that she expected a warm welcome, still she couldn’t help but feel upset. The feisty redhead got under her skin – almost literally- and despite their opposite standings she was drawn to her. Having great chemistry which led them to a mind-blowing night together was one thing, although not what Ed valued the most. Emily was smart, passionate, and upright. She didn’t try to suck up to Ed and after years of being surrounded by yes-man minions it was liberating. Her unwavering loyalty to Miranda made the young woman even more irresistible.

All at once, the door flung open and she was hauled inside the small apartment. The door closed with a dull thud behind her, as she was shoved against it. Before she could fully process and react Emily’s petit body pressed into hers and she was kissed. Hard and rough. She ignored the throbbing pain in her cheek, her sole focus was on those luscious lips and persistent hands, roaming over her body.

“Keep in mind. This doesn’t mean anything.”

There was no tenderness in Emily’s voice nor in her action and Ed took it as it was. Just sex. Yet, when she was pulled toward the bedroom a new feeling sneaked in and shadowed her excitement. Longing for something more meaningful.

The longing was still present, when she lay in Emily’s bed, sweaty and completely sated. Listening to the sound of running water, she knew it was time to go home. They would just argue again if Emily found her there after her shower. She gathered her clothes and quickly got dressed. She was about to leave when Emily emerged from the bathroom, wearing only a short, thin bathrobe. She took her phone, tapped the screen a couple times then shoved it to Ed’s hand without any explanation.

“What’s this?” Ed asked confused.

“My STD test result.” answered Emily. “I received it just before we…you know.”

Ed snorted. “Don’t get all shy now, Red. Before we fucked. That’s what you meant, right?”

“Whatsoever. It’s negative.” shrugged Emily and looked at Ed expectantly.

Ed didn’t get it at first.

“What? Wait, you want me to present you mine? You must be kidding.”

“I’m dead serious Ed. I care about my health.”

“It’s a late too to worry about that now, don’t you think? You should have asked before you sucked me dry.”

Emily fumed.

“Are you for bloody real? I pick up strangers in bars Ed. I take them to a hotel and let them fuck me. And even though I always, and I mean ALWAYS practice safe sex, I get tested regularly. Then you come along and all my safety rules fly out the window. I took you home Ed, where we had unprotected sex. But that wasn’t enough, and I repeated that mistake. I have the right to know if you are clean or not.”

“Mistake? I see…If you were clean Emily, sleeping with me didn’t change that. I can’t talk for the others.”
“Others?”

“You said yourself Emily. You fuck strangers on a regular basis.”

“You…” Emily bit back her angry retort. Ed was right after all. She couldn’t blame her for thinking Emily was sleeping around. In reality, she hadn’t been with anyone since Ed, but no way in hell was she going to admit that.

“Don’t worry about the “others” Ed. You are the only question mark here.”

They were standing face to face, staring at each other, neither willing to back down. At the end it was Ed, who stepped back and raised her hands in yield.

“Fine.” she grabbed her own phone and signed in to her MyChart.

“Here”

Emily took a look at the screen and her eyes widened.

“What the…this was down eight years ago.”

“You wanted my latest result. There you go. It’s negative. You can relax now.”

“But it’s from eight years ago.”

“You point is?”

“My point is that this was taken Eight. Bloody. Years. Ago.”

Ed put on her coat and tucked the phone into her pocket. Her face showed no emotions, but a small, twitching muscle on her jaw gave away her inner turmoil.

“You are the first person I’ve been with in the last eight years. Happy now?”

Emily laughed. “Yeah sure”, she thought to herself. “I don’t believe you.” she said out loud.

“Believe what you want, Emily. I have no reason to lie to you. I got tested for obvious reasons after I broke up with my fiancée. It was a messy break-up by the way. I’m sure you’ll find all the juicy details online.”

She walked to the main door and opened it then called back over her shoulder. “I’ll get a new one. I’ll notify you when I have the results.”

“Wait. I…”

“Don’t. Just…don’t. I have a heart you know. It’s already broken. It doesn’t need to be crushed any further.”

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