

REMEMBER TOMORROW

by
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CHAPTER ONE

You need to do something about my beard.” Cees Bannigan stalked into the office of her executive producer Miranda Hamilton and shut the door.

Miranda looked up, peered around her dual monitors, and squinted at Cees’s chin. “Sorry, what’s this about a beard? I’m sure that little gal down in makeup can pluck those right out,” Miranda said in what Cees was sure was supposed to be an understanding tone.

“Her name is Edith, and I don’t need any plucking,” Cees said even as her hand went to her chin for affirmation. “I’m talking about that asinine actor you hired to play my boyfriend.” Cees slumped into an office chair across from Miranda.

“Vance?” Since it wasn’t really a question, Cees didn’t answer. Adding Vance Flowers to the show had been Miranda’s idea. When the ratings jumped subsequent to his arrival, she had made huge brownie points with *The Suits* in New York. The problem was, as Cees often pointed out in private, Vance was a klutz and an idiot. An idiot who had to be supervised at all times. Lucky for them, Portland, Oregon, was not the hotbed of the television production industry that New York was. Subsequently, they had their pick of college students willing to be the guy’s servant for class credits and a few free meals.

“I hired him to be your co-host, not your boyfriend,” Miranda said.

“Then shouldn’t he know how to fix things, this being a DIY show and all? By the way, my *boyfriend* would sure as hell know how to pronounce my name. If he calls me Cease one more time I’m going to pop him one.”

“Come on, Cees, people must do that to you all the time. If you didn’t already have a fan base, New York would have asked you to change the spelling to Case.”

“And I would have asked them when hell was freezing over.”

Miranda nodded her touché. “What’s he done now?”

“He keeps asking me out,” Cees growled, and the smile threatening the corners of Miranda’s mouth disappeared.

“You mean he doesn’t know you’re gay? I’d have thought someone here would have mentioned something by now.”

“The people that know have been with me for years. Half of them worked for my dad before I got the show. I doubt they would tell him I’m gay, but I will if no one else does.”

Miranda leaned back. “Is that a good idea, Cees? Have we known him long enough to know if we can trust him?”

“I met him two months after I met you.” The alert look in Miranda’s eye told Cees that she wasn’t the only one who remembered how angry she had become when Miranda had informed her that a new co-host had been chosen without her input. “Besides, I’m not exactly in the closet. I just don’t advertise.”

Miranda shook her head vigorously. “I, of all people, would never suggest that you hide who you are.”

“Everyone knows you’re gay, Cees. You’ve always been straightforward about that. We aren’t asking you to keep your relationships secret. We both know what would happen if it became common knowledge. There would be constant speculation about who you were sleeping with and—”

“I’m not in a relationship, and it’s my business who I sleep with.”

“Well, I couldn’t agree with you more since *I’m* the one you’re sleeping with, but do me a favor?” Cees waited impatiently for Miranda to continue. “Let me talk to Vance first. I’ll explain to him that workplace romances are now being frowned on by the higher-ups.”

Cees raised her eyebrows and Miranda laughed. “All they care about are ratings, but Vance doesn’t have to know that.”

“All right, but if he asks me to dinner one more time...”

“Can’t blame the man for having good taste. I asked you out too, remember?”

How could she forget? The restaurant had been nearly empty and the hand that had settled comfortably on her thigh during their conversation had crept a bit higher than was proper. When fingers had pressed against the seam of her khakis forcing her clitoris flat, Cees had grabbed the table edge for support. The bill had been paid quickly, and the drive to Miranda’s apartment would have afforded her a speeding ticket if she had been caught. The sex was good, but the question in the back of Cees’s head had been there distracting her, keeping her from losing herself in Miranda’s sweet femininity.

Why was she having sex with someone she didn’t love? The answer was as painful now as it had been when it first came to her. Because the woman she loved had made it quite clear that there would never be a future for them. Sleeping with Miranda allowed her to forget that fact, at least some of the time.

“You know what I mean,” Cees said. “We don’t know if he can keep a secret.”

“So what if he can’t? At this point will it really matter?” Cees folded her arms across her chest and studied Miranda. She was sure that Miranda enjoyed the sex, but there was something about her that made it very apparent that they would never have more than that. Cees, never one for uninvolved sex in the past, found that she was grateful. She wasn’t available for more than that. Not yet.

“It matters. The show is geared toward—”

“I know. Single women who are first-time home owners.”

What Cees didn't say was, this was nothing new; the show was geared toward women long before Miranda and the national contract that put an extra zero on the end of Cees's salary. Not that Cees cared about money. Her wardrobe for the show—fitted T-shirt, blue jeans, and boots—was pretty much her costume for life. The only changes Miranda had insisted on had to do with tailoring, fabric, and color. Although she thought the whole thing ridiculous, Cees never complained when the T-shirts changed from beefy cotton to a fine Egyptian cotton, nor did she complain when the plain white started to become pastels. She did draw the line when they tried to get her to wear pedal pushers during the pool house episode.

“Come around here. Let me show you something.”

Cees reluctantly stood and walked around Miranda's desk to peer at the dual computer monitors.

“See this?” Miranda pulled up a graph. “These are your ratings when you were just a local show.” Miranda pointed with a pen at the second screen. “These are the ratings of your closest competitor. Not even close. A full fifteen percent lower than yours.”

Cees had heard all this before. Without those ratings she wouldn't have been picked up nationally.

“Now look here.” Miranda pointed. “These are our ratings now that you're with Vance, and here are your nearest competitors.” Miranda pointed to two colored lines.

“Twenty-five percent difference,” Cees said.

“Yup. The show is doing great. The asinine actor is a big hit.”

“I don't get it. With who? I thought you said the show appealed to single women.”

“True, but you always had that fan base locally. We expected you to keep that on the national level, but we were also counting on the housewives and the thirtysomething hetero males.”

“Hence the beard,” Cees said with resignation.

“Wait.” Miranda held up her hands. “Your sexuality is not an issue. We only asked that you be discreet. At no time have we implied a relationship between you and Vance.”

“I know you haven’t, but...I think people think we are. I can’t figure out why.”

“You’re gorgeous, smart, and capable. It took the lesbian community all of two episodes to decide that if you weren’t a ‘sister,’ you damn well should be. The straight women want to be like you, and the straight men just want you.”

“What about the gay men?”

Miranda frowned as if thinking about it. “They probably actually watch the show for the DIY tips.”

Cees smiled, and Miranda stood up and hooked a hand around Cees’s waist to pull her closer even as she looked toward her office door to make sure that it was closed. “When will I see you again? You haven’t been by to pet the kitty in almost a month.” Miranda’s voice was low as her lips tickled the line of Cees’s jaw. “Petting the kitty” was Miranda’s unoriginal term for having sex. Today it seemed even more crass than usual.

“Bastian wouldn’t miss *you* if you were gone for a few weeks, as long as someone came around to feed him,” Cees said, purposely misunderstanding.

Miranda laughed. “He’s a Siamese. Very few of them come without attitude.”

“Miranda...don’t you ever wonder what it would be like to have someone other than Bastian to come home to? I mean permanently?” Miranda released Cees’s waist and tucked the tendril of hair that had escaped her ponytail. Cees pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose, a nervous habit that she wished would get edited from some of the takes, but Miranda said people loved.

“Yeah, I’ve thought about it. My parents would love for me to settle down and have kids. Preferably with a man, but I think they would be happy just to see me with a family of my own.”

“So you have considered it?” Cees was surprised, and her

voice showed it. Why was she asking Miranda all this anyway? She knew why. The doctor's appointment this morning had filled her with joy and fear at the same time. Although she had resigned herself to a lifetime of sleeping alone, her body still yearned for the promise of several minutes of pleasure and a few moments where pain was forgotten.

Miranda kissed Cees hard on the mouth. "Of course I have, sweetie. I'm thirty-six years old. Biology forces me to consider it, but the thought doesn't linger." As if sensing the sinking feeling that her comments gave Cees, Miranda rushed to explain. "I've spent a long time getting to this position. They put me here to see what I would do with it. If the show is successful, and I know it will be, there'll be other opportunities. I couldn't ask anyone to ride that roller coaster with me right now. Maybe in a few years." Miranda brushed her lips against Cees's neck. "You should seriously think about stopping by tonight," she whispered, and Cees could hear the desire in her voice.

"I can't." The words came without thought, without hesitation, and Cees blinked after she realized she had spoken them. Why couldn't she? Why was she holding back? There was no question that Miranda wanted her, and based on the dampness of her own underwear, Cees couldn't deny being physically attracted to her as well.

"Can't, or don't want to?" The skin between the perfect brows was bunched and angry looking.

Cees stepped out of the circle of her arms. "I just... can't."

"Why not? We both enjoyed the sex last time, correct?"

Cees agreed.

"So what's the big deal? I'm not asking you to marry me, just a little lick and tickle." Miranda laughed, but Cees bit her bottom lip. *A little lick and tickle? Was that all it was to her? Of course that was all it was, and if you were honest with yourself, that's all it was to you too.*

"No, it's just that I promised Lilly we would have dinner tonight. We've both been so busy we haven't had time to catch up

in a few months.” *Stop being such a wimp and tell her the truth, for God’s sake.*

“Call her up and tell her you’re tired.” Miranda’s voice had taken on a seductive, wheedling tone.

“Ah no, sorry. I’ve already broken off too many dates with Lil.” This was the truth. Lilly had started prodding at places that still ached, and it just seemed easier not to call her than to be bulldogged about why she was having sex with someone she had no future with.

“Are you sure I can’t convince you?” Cees thought Miranda was going to give her a quick kiss, but the expected peck was turned into a long, crotch-pulsating kiss. Cees sighed and allowed herself to be engulfed by the heat. A night with Miranda would be delicious. She would come and she would sleep, but the next morning she would wake up hungry for something she would never have again. *Sometimes a taste is just enough to create a craving.* Cees was so tired of craving that she had decided to give up altogether. Miranda wouldn’t like it. Hell, *she* didn’t like it, but it would be better for everyone involved.

Cees reluctantly pushed Miranda back by the shoulders. With her eyes still closed she said, “I need to talk to you about something.”

As if scripted, the phone chose that moment to ring and Miranda quickly walked around the desk and picked it up. She studied Cees’s face as she said, “Miranda Hamilton’s office.” If there was a trace of breathlessness or arousal evident in her voice, Cees missed it entirely. Miranda listened for a moment and then sat down and began rifling in her desk drawer. “Oh, hi there. Thanks for getting back to me.” She looked up at Cees, rolled her eyes, pointed at the phone, and mouthed “sorry.” Cees smiled and started for the door. Just before she closed it behind her, she glanced back. Miranda was not only attractive and good in bed, she would never question Cees’s inability to give her whole heart. Aside from their working together, the situation was perfect. So why was she thinking about ending it with her? The answer was

as clear as the hopelessness of ever having a serious relationship with Miranda. Cees couldn't give her heart to anyone. Not now, perhaps not ever again. But just because she couldn't, didn't mean she didn't want to.



There were always so many people milling around the studio at any one time that Cees simply pasted an amiable smile on her face as she passed each shadow. Part of her was glad that she hadn't had to have the first of at least two difficult conversations with Miranda. When the time came, she had no doubt that Miranda would support her decisions. She wouldn't be happy about either of them, but she would be supportive in the end. It was New York she had to worry about.

The thought had no sooner crossed her mind than two figures that she vaguely recognized as wearing suits walked past her toward Miranda's office. Miranda was good about sending out warning memos when The Suits from New York were in town so that language and attire could be modified. This was either a surprise visit, which was never a good thing, or...

"Excuse me?"

Cees mouthed "shit" and wiped the scowl from her face before turning around. Suits meant hours of fake laughing, dinner at expensive restaurants, and sometimes drinks after, when all she wanted to do was go home, put on some soft music, and sleep.

The female flashed a badge so fast that Cees wouldn't have been able to read it even if she had been close enough. She introduced herself and her partner as detectives with the Portland Police Department. "We were told we could find Cease Bannigan up here," the male detective said.

"You've found me. It's Cees. Pronounced like Casey without the Y." The two detectives shared a startled look. "What can I help you with?"

"Is there someplace private we can talk?"

Cees pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose. “My office is the last one on the right.”

Cees followed the broad back of the male police officer toward her office. “Have a seat.” Cees sat on the edge of her desk and waited for the two officers to situate themselves on the couch. Unless she needed a nap, she rarely came into this room “What’s this about, detectives?”

“Arieanna Simon.”

Cees straightened, her back cracking audibly in the silent room. When was the last time she had heard that name mentioned? Over a year at least. Cees’s lips parted, but no sound came out. And just like that, pain flooded her chest.



“What happened?” Cees asked.

“She’s in the hospital, Ms. Bannigan.”

“In the hospital?” Cees repeated automatically. She wasn’t aware that the tears had begun to fall until after they were already sliding down her face. The female detective, Cees couldn’t remember her name, steered her toward the couch, and her larger partner stood up to give her space. Cees sat with her hands between her legs, looking down at the floor.

“Is she all right? What happened to her?” Cees looked back and forth between the two detectives, trying to gauge the seriousness of the situation by the expressions on their faces.

“She was in a car accident. Her landlord let us into her apartment. He mentioned she lived alone and hadn’t had visitors in months.” Cees’s mind cleared enough to recognize the question buried within his statement, but she wasn’t sure how to answer him. “We found your name on her medical power of attorney.”

“My name? Are you sure? I haven’t spoken with Arie in well over a year.” Cees remembered the shock of dialing Arie’s phone number only to have found it had been disconnected with no forwarding number. She had dialed it three times, pushing each

number carefully, despite the fact that Arie's number had been programmed into her speed dial. That final blow, dealt without a word, had left her curled into a fetal position.

Why would Arie give her power of attorney without mentioning it to her, and why wouldn't she change it after they split? She wasn't even sure she understood what power of attorney meant. Seventeen months ago, it might not have surprised her. She knew that Arie had listed her as beneficiary for her life insurance policy because they had filled them out together, on a Sunday morning while watching *Scooby-Doo* and sipping coffee from the same mug. But when open enrollment had come around the following year, she had changed her beneficiary back to her best friend Lilly Nguyen. "Arie was my lover, but I wasn't even sure she was still in town."

The two officers must have communicated with a look, because it was the female who spoke. "The car accident was last Wednesday. A young mother and her child stalled in the middle of Skyline road. They were just exiting their car when Ms. Simon came around the bend. She swerved to avoid them, lost control of her SUV, and flipped it."

A vision of a crumpled and bleeding Arie assailed Cees's senses. Cees dropped her head and willed herself to continue to breathe.

"Is she going to be okay? Wednesday was six days ago. Why are you just now coming to tell me this?"

"She was lucky. She slipped in and out of consciousness, but she was calling for someone when they brought her in, but the ambulance folks garbled the name. We had nothing to go on until we found the documents in her home."

"She was calling for... me?"

"We think so. We couldn't find any other references to friends in her apartment." The male officer made no effort to hide the fact that this surprised him. "Ms. Simon has no other family?"

"No. She told me her grandfather died right before she moved

to Portland. We always joked about the fact that we worked so well together because we were both orphans. Wait, why are you asking me these questions and not her?”

“She’s been—traumatized by the accident.” The female detective’s answer was hesitant. Cees recognized that hesitancy. She had hoped to never hear it again. It meant there was more that wasn’t being said. That “more” was never good news. It meant that a seasoned professional was trying to spare her feelings. It meant things didn’t look good. It meant, “I’m trying to spare you pain even though I’m busy.” It meant, “I feel sorry for you, but my job is not to give you unfounded hope.”

“Her medical power of attorney is why we’re here, but we were hoping you could clear up some things that we found odd.” The female cop laughed and looked at her partner. “We’ve been doing this so long that we see inconsistencies where none exist, but while we were trying to find Ms. Simon’s family, we found a marked lack of...connections. No job, no relatives, no friends other than yourself that we could find.”

“No job? For how long?”

“The last form of employment we found was when she worked with you. It took some digging, but the lawyer that drew up the power of attorney assured us that Ms. Simon has always been well off, even before her grandfather left her everything.”

Cees had a theory that after the first blush of their romance had faded, Arie had begun to regret her job as the show’s expert on landscape architecture. Now that theory was out the window.

“I wish I could help you, but as I said before, I didn’t know about any of this until you told me.” There was another long, uncomfortable moment.

“So you don’t know anything about the concessions in her power of attorney?”

“Arie and I never discussed a power of attorney. We barely discussed—” Cees stopped speaking. These two weren’t interested in the life she had with Arie.

“We don’t mean to sound like we’re grilling you over this because we aren’t. It’s just, she’s also got some strange stipulations in it.”

“Strange how?”

“If she’s ever deemed unable to care for herself, her powers of attorney stipulates that she not be left on life support, which is pretty common, but what’s unusual is that she also stipulates that she does *not* want to be left in your care. She is to be put in a home if she is ever deemed incapable of taking care of herself.”

Snippets of what the male cop was saying filtered through Cees’s conscious. “...*does not want to be left in your care. Deemed incapable of taking care.*” Cees stood. Dread spread its black wings, descended, and sank its claws into her chest. Her body wavered. She had been here before. Heard similar words uttered.

Not again. She didn’t think she could survive it again.