

The Saint Chapter 16 - Tips

Miranda adjusted her swimsuit coverup, her fingers moving over the sheer black linen with the same sort of precision she'd use to perform a surgical separation of conjoined twins.

Really, one couldn't be too careful with Chanel. Not that she couldn't afford both the coverup and the matching swimsuit in every color in which it was made—she could, and had, because after all, it was a classic. But she was right on schedule for her meeting with Daniel McGee, which meant she had no time to waste going into her private bungalow to change outfits. Like tardiness, neglect was for amateurs, and Miranda hadn't ever been an amateur.

From her salon-perfect head to her thousand-dollar Louboutin wedges, she was a fvcking queen. And she was going to be sure Daniel McGee knew it, just by laying eyes on her.

Reclining against the cushions on her lounge chair, Miranda swept a careful gaze over her surroundings. Remington Golf and Country Club was one of the most exclusive in the state, boasting a PGA-tour golf course, indoor and outdoor tennis courts, a restaurant that had recently been featured in Food & Wine magazine, and—most importantly to Miranda for today's purposes—three outdoor swimming pools, all surrounded by impeccably kept, impeccably private landscaping. Her bungalow was close enough to the water's edge to offer quick respite from the heat of the day, yet tucked far enough beneath the palm trees and bright pink and white hibiscus plants to provide the privacy this meeting required. If they ended up needing more, they could always retreat inside, where the shuttered floor-to-ceiling windows and stucco walls would keep anyone nearby from seeing or hearing them.

Pleasant thought, that.

She saw Daniel McGee from the moment he entered the patio, and excellent. He valued punctuality as much as she did. He was rather attractive, with a fashionable straw fedora covering his light brown-and-silver hair and a pair of sunglasses—Tom Ford, if she wasn't mistaken, very nice—covering his eyes. Even nicer, he'd kept fit in prison, his lean muscles moving fluidly beneath a pair of navy blue swim trunks and open white linen button-down shirt, and at least it wouldn't be a shame if she had to fvck him before this job was over.

"Dr. Astor, I presume?" he asked, stopping a handful of feet from her lounge chair. He gave her an up-and-down perusal that she caught despite the sunglasses hiding most of his gaze, and she looked up at him from beneath the wide brim of her sun hat and smiled.

"Miranda, please.

"Miranda it is. Daniel McGee." He gestured to the lounge chair beside her in a non-verbal may I?, waiting for her to nod and of course before he sat down. "Your husband isn't joining us?"

"Not today. Unfortunately, he had a conflict."

It was an approximation of the truth. Royce was somewhere else, but not because he couldn't be here. She hadn't told him she'd rescheduled the meeting he'd set up with Daniel. But the truth was, this was a meeting for the grown-ups, and Royce would only get in the way. This plan was hers. The power to make it all happen was hers.

"Speaking of which," she said over a coy smile. "I'm so glad you could join me on such short notice."

One corner of Daniel's mouth edged upward. "I'll admit, I was surprised. But when a smart, beautiful woman asks to reschedule a business meeting, even on short notice, it's not in my nature to disappoint her."

Miranda smiled again. Anyone who said this man was reformed had never run a con before. He was good, she'd give him that. Hell, he'd managed to convince an entire parole board to shave off more than half of his twenty-five-year sentence. But the saying "it took one to know one" had merit. Miranda could smell a con artist from fifty paces out, and one thing was sure. The only light Daniel McGee had seen was the daylight on the other side of the razor wire. She'd play along with his flirty charm, though. Now that she knew he was good, she wanted to see how good.

She turned toward him, offering a subtle but definite view of her cleavage to go with her smile. "How do you know I'm smart?"

Daniel laughed. "Lots of ways. For one, I've done my research. You graduated with top honors from Stanford University School of Medicine. Completed your residency at Duke. Have a celebrated career in general surgery. Published dozens of articles in the New England Journal of Medicine. And now, you're Remington Memorial's CEO. You have a very impressive background."

"You have done your research," she said. "I suppose that means you're smart, too."

"Just prepared," he countered, his crooked smile just on the right side of sexy. He was tempting, really. Rough around the edges. A bit dangerous. She hoped she'd have to fuck him before all was said and done.

His smile grew a bit darker, and on second thought, maybe she'd fuck him just for fun.

But first things first. "Prepared. I like that in a business associate," Miranda said.

“Ah, yes.” Daniel leaned back in his lounge chair to enjoy the sun, but she knew far better than to think that just because he wasn’t looking at her, he was no longer fully aware of everything she did. “Your husband, Royce, didn’t offer a lot of details about this proposed partnership when we spoke. I’d say it’s a pity we had to reschedule without him, but I have to confess, I’m glad to have your undivided attention.”

Bold and easily led by his c0ck. This was going to be even easier than she’d hoped. “I’m happy to give it to you. But before we start talking business, why don’t we take a dip in the pool?”

This was Miranda’s failsafe. She had no interest in cooling off. But she hadn’t made it this far by not taking every precaution possible, in every situation, and no surveillance equipment known to man or machine would survive being submerged in the pool.

Daniel’s smile didn’t budge, but neither did the rest of him. “Miranda, let’s save some of each other’s valuable time, shall we? You pursued me, asking for a meeting to discuss a business venture. I have a very specific sk!!lset, so that gives me a rather good idea of what sort of business you’re interested in. I’m here because I’m interested. I understand that you think you need to take precautions before we talk about more than how s3xy you look in your swimsuit—”

She cut him off right there. “If precautions are a problem for you—”

He cut her off right back. “They’re not. But that’s not the point.”

Shock filled her c.hest, sending one eyebrow upward. Very few people interrupted her. Daniel was either stupid or extremely smart.

“Miranda, let me cut to the chase. I just spent ten years in prison. I don’t just understand the need for discretion. I require it. No matter what, I’m not going back.” His smile returned, just as dazzling as ever, and ah. Smart, then. “But if we’re going to work together, we need to be honest with one another. No bullsh!t, no games. If you want to know whether I’ve become a changed enough man to work with the police and somehow managed to get a wire in what little clothing I’m wearing—nice touch, having us meet here by the pool, by the way—just ask. And if you’re really that untrusting around a good old ex-con like me, well, I suppose I could do this meeting n*ked. That might draw more attention than you’re after, but if it’s worth it to you, I’m game. I’m willing to earn your trust. All you need to do is ask for it.”

Miranda considered her options. A part of her—not small—was tempted to tell Daniel to take off every blessed st!tch. No one told her what to do, and that included what to ask for. But she and Royce had already vetted Daniel thoroughly before they’d even considered reaching out, let alone scheduled a meeting. This was a power play on his part, nothing more. The fact that Daniel had so easily understood her security measures for what they were spoke well for him, and the truth was, his sk!!lset was exceptional. He was one of only a few outside parties in the country who could pull off a scam of this

magnitude, and the look on his face right now said he wanted to hear what she had to say.

Just because she could piss him off didn't mean she should, and the one thing she liked nearly as much as power was money. She'd have plenty of time to let him know who really held all the power here. For now, she'd play along.

"Daniel," she purred, letting her eyes roam freely over him. "Are you wearing a wire?"

"No, Miranda." He lifted his sunglasses and looked her directly in the eyes. "I am not."

She made a tiny sound of disappointment. "Well, then. As attractive as your offer to disrobe is"—she sent a blatant gaze directly to his d!ck, and oh, he was impressive—"I think we can pass on the indecent exposure. For now."

"This may be one of the rare occasions I'm disappointed to do business first," Daniel said, and Christ, he was one of the few men on the planet who could wink at a woman without it being cheesy in the least. "But, since that's what I'm here for, why don't you tell me what sort of venture you've got in mind?"

"My husband and I are looking for someone with the proper knowledge to do some work on a medical database."

She let the words hang until he bit. "Related to the hospital?"

"No," Miranda said. "This would be a separate endeavor. We're able to provide secure access to a database containing thousands of medical records and insurance claims. There are many possibilities."

"And you need someone to exploit those possibilities both wisely and efficiently," Daniel finished. "I understand." For a long moment, he was quiet—weighing all the variables, just as she'd expect him to. But what he said next was a surprise. "Miranda, before we talk any further, I need to ask if you're working with the FBI."

"I beg your pardon?" It was rare for her to let anything slip out unintended, but there was no help for her shock.

This time, Daniel's smile didn't reach his eyes. "No offense. It's just that there are quite a few folks who are, let's just say, less than pleased that I obtained an early release from prison. They'd love nothing more than to see me back behind bars, this time forever, and after having wasted the last ten years of my life there, I'm not keen to give them what they want."

By the time he was done speaking, Miranda had gathered her wits. "Do you really think I'd go through all the trouble to make sure you're not wearing a wire if I were working with the FBI?" she asked.

"As I mentioned earlier, I think you're incredibly smart. We've never worked together before, and until we get to know each other better, you're going to have to earn my trust just as much as I have to earn yours."

"Would you like me to do this meeting n*ked, then?" she asked coolly.

"I'd take a simple 'yes' or 'no' in response to my question," Daniel said, his roguish half-smile making a reappearance. "What you're wearing—or not wearing—when you say it is entirely up to you, I suppose."

Again, Miranda weighed her options, and again, she chose the one that would give her the most control.

"Alright, then." Standing, she made her way to the private cabana behind her, putting just enough sway in her hips to ensure that Daniel would follow. As soon as he crossed the threshold, she slid the shuttered glass door closed, then let her coverup fall to the floor. Her swimsuit followed in one well-practiced glide, and she turned in a slow circle, letting him look his fill.

"Satisfied?" she asked, an electric thrill moving through her at the sight of his cock pressing hard against his swim trunks.

Power play, indeed.

"I think I will be," Daniel said, his voice husky and low as his stare dropped to her bare pussy for a brief second before returning to her face. "But business before pleasure. Tell me more about this job."

Miranda smiled. Oh, how she loved having the upper hand. "It's a clinic database. We'd like you to use your expertise to make the information we've gained access to as profitable as possible for all of us."

He nodded, then said, "That could be a very worthwhile endeavor. But I'll have to know a lot more before I can commit."

"Such as?"

Daniel shrugged. "What sort of data I'd have access to, how exactly that access is going to be provided. How you plan to clean the funds once they've been secured. How those funds will be divided and allocated, and who else knows about them. There's a lot to consider."

"You're asking for an awful lot of information," she hedged. Knowledge was power, and she didn't like sharing so much of it this early in the game.

But Daniel shook his head. "It doesn't matter how lucrative the job is if we get caught. I'm either doing things right or not at all, which means I need to consider every angle before I can commit. And that means you giving me answers to my questions."

Unfortunately, he wasn't wrong. "Fine. I think we can come to an agreement there."

"Good." He was quiet for another moment. "Let's start at the beginning. You said you have clean access to this database. Are you using a hacker for that?"

Miranda allowed her disdain to show on her face. "Hackers are so messy. Plus, they can't be trusted. All those back doors and fail-safes. No, we'll be obtaining access to the database via the credentials of a clinic employee."

"Valid credentials." Daniel lifted a brow toward the brim of his hat. "Is this employee of yours getting a cut?"

Now Miranda's disdain had a new target. "You don't need to worry about anyone's cut other than your own," she said.

Daniel matched her resolve, and honestly, she couldn't tell if she was more irritated or turned on. Worthy adversaries were so hard to find.

"This is money, Miranda. I'm always worried about who gets what—and why—

especially when people I don't know are involved. So, is your employee in on this deal, or not? I need to know who all the players are here."

Miranda leveled him with her chilliest stare. As much as she respected his dedication, she wasn't about to let him think for a split second that he could call the shots.

"If you're asking whether she knows what she's participating in, the answer is yes. If you're asking whether she's going to be a problem, then you clearly don't know me as well as you think you do. I run my business impeccably, which means no question marks. At all. Either you trust that or you don't."

Daniel considered her for a moment. "Assuming I do, what did you have in mind for this information once it's been obtained?"

"Using information like this to its fullest potential is your area of expertise, isn't it?" she asked coyly. "What do you think we have in mind?"

"I don't have to tell you there are lots of possibilities," Daniel said. "I can think of a half dozen different insurance scams alone. But which ones are smartest will depend. After all, safety is an issue. If anyone were to suspect—"

Miranda waved a hand, cutting him off. "We have precautions in place to avoid detection. And in the unlikely event that someone discovers something they shouldn't and the authorities are notified, of course, there's a contingency plan."

"Ah." Daniel's eyes lit with understanding. "The person providing access to the database will take the fall."

After Miranda remained quiet for a beat, he added, "It's what I would do. I mean, it's her access. Her name is attached to the activity. That seems like a no-brainer."

"Yes," Miranda responded, because really, he'd already connected the dots. "We'd make sure all the evidence pointed to her alone."

"And the money?" Daniel asked, and she'd give him this. The man didn't mince words.

Neither did she. "What about it?"

"For starters, how much of a payday did you have in mind for this little endeavor?"

"Enough to not call it 'little,'" Miranda said. "But exactly how lucrative this effort is will be somewhat up to you. The more you can scam, the bigger your cut. We'll clean the money through a proven system."

"Proven how?" Daniel asked, and Miranda smiled.

"A lady never tells her secrets."

Daniel smiled right back. "And a businessman never enters into an agreement without having the proper information."

Damn, he really was good. "We're doing the same sort of work at Remington Memorial. We access the database, utilize the information there for various purposes, then launder the money, mostly through a handful of charities and organizations that we've either founded or chair."

"Charities." He raised a brow. "How altruistic."

"It works nicely."

He looked around the luxuriously appointed cabana, a crooked smile forming on his mouth. "I see that it does." Tilting his head, he assessed her for a beat before smiling. "It seems my intuition has served me well. I knew you were a smart woman. Hungry for it." His stare lingered on hers, sending a satisfied thrill up her spine. "I'm impressed. You've thought everything through quite thoroughly."

"I wouldn't have wasted your time if I hadn't," Miranda replied.

Daniel smiled. "Well, then I suppose we've saved the best for last. Let's talk about my cut."

Miranda sidled over to the spot where he stood, swaying her hips enough to make sure his attention landed on her naked body. "We're prepared to offer you a third of the proceeds," she purred, reaching down to run her palm over his cock. "With additional benefits, of course."

"A third doesn't exactly sound like a partnership," he said. But the subtle tilt he made into her touch betrayed him, and Miranda didn't hesitate to use it to her advantage. Skimming her fingers upward to catch the shiver on his bare abdomen, she stepped back to retrieve her coverup even though the feather-light linen did little to hide her nakedness beneath.

"It's what's on the table," she said. "The more profitable you make the information, the bigger that thirty percent will be."

"In order to do that, I'll need to work all angles." A predatory gleam flashed through his gray stare, turning it to titanium. "You understand it won't just be insurance companies. The patients will be fair game, too. Bank accounts, savings. Whatever I can get my hands on."

Miranda lifted one shoulder in a haphazard shrug. "When aren't they?"

Daniel smiled. "I'm liking this offer more and more." His pause told her she wasn't going to love what he said next. "One thing, though. I want to be there when your employee pulls the information from the database."

The word 'no' formed, hot and fast in her mouth, but she forced herself to ask, "Why?"

"Let's just call it a precautionary measure," he said smoothly. "Since I know you're fond of those."

"A precautionary measure," Miranda repeated, and Daniel nodded.

"Just because you trust your contact doesn't mean I do. Once she gains access, I'd like to pull the information from the database personally to ensure its integrity."

Miranda paused. She wouldn't be anywhere near the clinic when Carmen gained access. Royce would be overseeing that little endeavor. What could it hurt if Daniel went with them to make sure Carmen delivered everything she'd been told to?

"Suit yourself," Miranda said.

“Excellent.” Daniel’s gaze drifted over her, her nipples tightening as he moved closer and slid a finger over her collarbone. “I have a feeling we’re both going to enjoy this relationship very, very much.”

For a minute, she considered giving in to the impulse to lower his swim trunks and give him a taste of that enjoyment. But there was a more important message to leave him with, at least this time, so she let him linger for only a second before edging out of reach. “I truly hope so. I’ll be in touch soon.”

He took the hint better than most, stepping back with a smile. “I’m looking forward to it.”

She waited until he’d made his way just shy of the threshold before adding, “Oh, and Daniel? Do us both a favor and don’t cross me. You won’t like where that road leads.”

His brows raised, but his smile didn’t falter. “Are you threatening me, Miranda?”

“I absolutely am,” she said, throwing more teeth than necessary into her smile in return.

“Well, then, I think we’ll get along just fine.”

And with that, he walked out the door.