

**Chapter Fourteen, Part Three**  
**“Fallout Girls”**

**OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT – WWN IMPACT, LLC**  
**ON SITE WITH DAN DRAGOVICH**  
**GUEST HOST MIKE VELASCO**  
**SPECIAL GUEST MADISON RYLANDER**

**MIKE VELASCO:** Good evening, everyone. I’m Mike Velasco. I know this comes as a bit of a shock for all of our viewers, but Madison is a great friend to both myself and Dan Dragovich. When she came to me about doing this interview - that was this afternoon - I couldn’t say no. What you’re doing takes a lot of guts, Maddy, and I want to thank you for letting me be a part of it.

**MADISON RYLANDER:** Thanks, Mike, it’s really good to have you here.

**VELASCO:** I’m happy to help – and just to be honest with the viewers, it’s an open secret at the office that you party hard on occasion. That said, I don’t think anyone really knew how far it had gone. So, let’s start at the beginning, when did you and booze get acquainted? I feel like this wasn’t an issue when you started here.

**RYLANDER:** It wasn’t. Granted, I’ve been here twelve years. I mean, back in the day I would drink socially, but the partying – the not being able to stop – that started about ten years ago.

**VELASCO:** Ten years – so do you think it was the stress of the TV business then?

**RYLANDER:** Oh, I know it was. If you remember when I broke the Pamela Sparks corruption story, it took off after that. I started getting a lot more big stories, but not the ones I wanted to cover. My personal life was a wreck, I made some big career moves when I wasn’t sure I really wanted to. That was when the party crowd became a distraction I actually wanted. You know, something to do. They drank – and smoked. Did you know I didn’t have my first cigarette until I was twenty-nine?

**VELASCO:** Seriously? That’s late.

**RYLANER:** Twenty-nine. First time I felt adrift. In high school and college, I was super-driven, had a goal. When I got here, I started winning awards, working on “the look.” That was the first time in my life I needed to be one of the cool kids.

**VELASCO:** That's wild. And you've been clean how long now?

**RYLANDER:** I'm not – I mean not officially. It's been about a week since I've had a drink. I'm trying to hold off the detox shakes right now.

**VELASCO:** A week? You're kidding!

**RYLANDER:** Tonight was supposed to be my first AA meeting, but I guess that has to wait now.

**VELASCO:** Maddy, I thought it had been longer. It can't be healthy to put this on TV.

**RYLANDER:** Trust me, I know. This wasn't the plan but...let's just say someone from my past found out I was trying to dry out. I received a threat to leak embarrassing drunken photos to the tabloids, so I figured I'd tell the world I'm a wreck on my own terms.

**VELASCO:** Whoa, whoa. Just so we're clear here, you've spoken with WWN management about these threats, right? People who can protect you know the details?

**RYLANDER:** Yes. I spoke with Priscilla Davis about it yesterday. But if I do this myself, the photos are worthless.

**VELASCO:** Okay....um....Okay. Let's get back to what you really came here to talk about. You gave us some pictures.

**RYLANDER:** Yes.

**VELASCO:** Let's start with this one. What's going on here? You're on a bed, holding a hookah – I'll be honest Maddy, your eyes look – well, they look dead.

**RYLANDER:** I don't remember that room at all. I'm about 30 there, and that was the first time I ever blacked out. I don't know whose house that is. I despise hookah, and all I remember is finding this shot on my phone the next day. That's one of those moments where you stop and think "why the hell am I doing this to myself?"

**VELASCO:** But you didn't stop. That's what? Seven years ago?

**RYLANDER:** Right.

**VELASCO:** And I'm assuming that was not your last blackout.

**RYLANDER:** Did the same thing a week later.

**VELASCO:** But why? You're sitting there, scared out of your wits, thinking 'what have I done?' - and you go right back to it.

**RYLANDER:** You don't really have a choice at that point. You've been bit. By the time you realize you're in over your head, you can't stop. You need it - physically. Before you have an experience like that, you still think you can stop. After that, you *know* it owns you.

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**Tuesday, March 23, 2038**  
**Seven Days Until Interview**  
**7:36 A.M.**

Normally, getting to the office at 7:30 meant that Sinéad had time to get herself in order *before* Priscilla showed up.

That was not the case today.

Instead, she arrived to find the lights on and the ripped-up contents of Madison's file scattered on the floor.

At least the ceramics were intact.

Priscilla emerged from her dragon lair and leaned against the door frame.

"Hey Sinéad. I need you to schedule a nine-thirty press conference out front of the building, and where's the file Patzen gave you? We're really going to need that after last night."

Sinéad had hoped the whole Madison kamikaze maneuver would take Priscilla's mind *off* Patzen.

She steadied herself, trying to convince her brain that things were okay - but her boss seemed ready to spontaneously combust. Priscilla's normally tight ponytail was frizzed and pulled back with a scrunchie. She wasn't even wearing makeup.

Telling the normal Priscilla what happened last night would have been hell. Telling *this* Priscilla was downright terrifying – but there was no getting around it.

“Patzen refused to give up the file.”

Priscilla's eyes almost bugged out. “You're not serious.”

Sinéad shook her head. “He showed it to me, but said he'd only give it to you personally, and only if we promise never to call him again. And then he got up and left.”

Priscilla peered over the top of her glasses. “And you let him?”

“He didn't exactly give me a choice. He literally got up and walked out.”

Priscilla folded her arms in resignation, exhaling hard. “Okay. So, what was in the file?”

“No clue. He showed me a current photograph and a name, that's it.”

Priscilla squeezed her hand into a fist. “He's banking that we want the file so bad that we'll cave.”

Sinéad thought she knew what that meant, but she didn't want to think about the consequences. “So,” she ventured, “do I dump his file to CNN?”

“No,” Priscilla snapped. “He guessed right. I didn't expect Madison to shoot her own file, and we can't afford to have both her and Constantinos off the leash. Tell him I'll give him whatever he wants.”

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**9:31 A.M.**

Vinya scarfed another handful of ghost-chili popcorn. “Ready for the circus?”

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She'd bought snacks on the way to work and camped out at Nina's workstation to watch the press conference on the jumbotrons. Thankfully, none of the other reporters who worked at this table were here, and there was a vacant station where Emma Poissonier used to sit.

There was some weird sadistic pleasure in the idea of watching psycho-dragon-lady front the cameras after Rylander's stunt. Given how she treated Nina, the big boss was probably involved in whatever extortion attempt was going on, and Vinya wanted to watch the whole thing go up in flames.

Nina, on the other hand, didn't seem interested. She was glued to her computer, watching the playback of Madison's interview for the fourth time while taking copious notes - dissecting how Velasco squeezed every last drop of emotion out of Madison.

Vinya threw a piece of popcorn at the back of Nina's head. "Come on, you can geek out later, the show's about to start."

Nina glanced up the giant screens and shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't like listening to Priscilla when I don't have to."

"Suit yourself. More popcorn for me."

On the screen, a haggard Priscilla came to the microphone in front of what looked like a wall of WWN logos. Actually, it was a sad-looking pop-up background set up outside the front door - Vinya had seen it on the way in.

On screen, Priscilla straightened a stack of papers. "Good morning and thank you all for coming. As you can imagine, we've received a lot of media requests since last night, and I wanted to set the record straight."

"And you want a piece of the attention." Vinya interjected.

Nina shushed her aggressively - so she *was* watching.

Priscilla continued. "As all of you know, Madison Rylander did something very brave last night by confronting her alcohol issues on national television. As she said, she intends to take a brief leave of absence during the early stages of her recovery. While I can't confirm any details, I can confirm that the leave itself has been finalized. While we were unaware of her plans to go on TV last night, we were familiar with the struggle she

was going through. And yes, she and I did discuss her issues with an acquaintance who was threatening blackmail.”

“No s\*\*\*,” Nina said under her breath.

That might have been the first time Vinya ever heard Nina curse. She turned back into the TV.

“I can’t really go into detail about that situation,” Priscilla wrapped up, “but I do want to say that we love Madison, and she has our full support here at WWN. I will not be taking any questions at this time.”

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### **10:30 A.M.**

Nina put the finishing touches on her final list of pope questions, thankful that Vinya and her ever-running mouth had vacated the space.

The list looked perfect - frontloaded with Priscilla questions, with Dan getting about a third of the total content. It was everything that the people upstairs could have asked for. Priscilla would be happy. Dan would grudgingly accept it. Both of them would back off.

She saved the document, attached it to an email, and fired it off to Dan and Sinéad (nothing *ever* went direct to Priscilla).

Knowing both of them, the replies should come fast and furious. The neuroses of the people around here could be grating, but at least they were more prompt than anyone in Appleton.

Nina clicked out of her email and finally allowed herself to come out of her work-trance for the first time this morning.

There were a few personal things she needed to take care of, and they would keep her from clicking “refresh” every two seconds waiting for a reply. She’d been eyeing a local MeetUp that did *Star Trek* episode viewings - it looked like she could make the one next week, so she clicked “RSVP” and entered her info.

Then she went googling for a good local fishmonger. She wanted to show Aiden how to *properly* cook a whole trout on Friday - and she had absolutely no intention of trusting what passed for “fish” at Safeway.

Then the computer let out a soft “bloop”. True to form, Dan was in first. The subject line said it all.

*Really? Are you sure? - RE: Final Questions*

There was no text in the body of the email. Nina smirked and fired off a response

*Dan,*

*Yes, I'm sure. I think I have a good idea how to handle this. Trust me.*

*Nina*

She went back to fish research. Trout could be good - although it looked like one place was offering barramundi. It was almost impossible to find that one fresh in the U.S. Her mouth started watering at the idea of drowning the fillets in butter and lime.

Unfortunately, another bloop pulled her back. It was from Priscilla - and not sent via Sinéad. Impressive.

She clicked it open.

*Nina,*

*This looks incredible! You have a real talent for phrasing. I have some minor line-edits but good work. He won't know what hit him.*

*-P*

That was delicious enough to get the fish entirely out of her brain. Time for the real fireworks.

She closed the email, pulled her phone out of her handbag, and dialed Madison's cell. She didn't know what sort of shape Madison would be in, but she wasn't going to rehab for another few days. The phone barely rang once before an anxious voice answered.

“Hello?”

“Hey - it’s Nina. I just wanted to see how you were holding up.”

There was a sardonic snort on the other end of the line.

“How do you think? I haven’t gotten out of bed, I’m bored out of my skull, and I feel like I’m losing my marbles.”

“Well,” Nina offered, “at least you’re taking care of yourself.”

There was a pause, and Nina wondered for a second if she’d lost signal, but then Madison came back on.

“Look, kid. I only answered the phone because I figured you wouldn’t be another idiotic sympathy call. Please tell me you have brain-work before I go postal.”