The Arrangement

## **Babies Change Everything**

**ANGELA** 

Turns out, no matter how many times you say, "Shhhh, little baby," babies don't listen. I learned that the hard way.

Bella was having a full-on tantrum as Marco's car sped uptown.

When Bella started to cry in Washington Square Park, I tried rocking the stroller back and forth. When that didn't work, I took her in my arms, but that only made her cry harder.

I looked around, desperately hoping a doula or midwife might be on a walk in the park. But no one came to my aid. If anything, people looked at me like I was crazy. Or even abusive.

I needed reinforcements.

Em was out of the question. I knew she would come running, but the last thing I wanted was to ruin her relaxation. So I called Marco. Thankfully, he was nearby, and he arrived quickly. He folded the stroller into the backseat while I

strapped the screaming baby into the car seat he'd picked up. The baby's wailing was louder than any horn blaring around us.

"I hope Lucille knows how to help," I yelled as I tried to get Bella to drink a bottle of formula. She wasn't interested.

Marco gave me a strained smile in the rearview. "I'm sure she will."

The doorman helped me get Bella and her carriage into the elevator. I held the crying baby to my chest for the longest ride of my life.

Finally, I burst into the apartment. I placed Bella down on the couch. She flailed her arms and legs in her pink striped onesie.

"Do you know how to comfort a baby?" I asked her, desperate.

When I looked up, Lucille was standing by the kitchen, staring at us.

"I've tried feeding her, rocking her

So what was the problem?!

mind.

comfortably and happily.

Lucille widened her eyes and shook her head.

Shit. "Well, can you try to help me?!" I begged.

Lucille tiptoed towards us as if Bella were a bomb that could blow up at any moment. Together, we looked down at the sobbing child.

"We must check the diaper," Lucille said gravely. I met her gaze and nodded.

..." I went through a mental list of things that babies needed.

undid the sticky tabs, horrified what I might find inside... But when I removed the diaper completely, I found that it was clean.

We had no changing table for the baby, so we opted for the dining room table. I peeled off her tiny little clothes and

I looked to Lucille for answers. She shrugged and gestured with her hands. She was out of ideas. I grabbed Em's humongous diaper bag, managing to fasten a new diaper onto Bella.

I put the baby's teeny arms through her tiny sleeves, and her tiny legs in her tiny pants, until she was all dressed.

Then, miraculously, the baby stopped crying. Her silence was the sweetest sound I'd ever heard.

Overcome by relief and happiness, I turned to Lucille with a huge smile on my face. She gave me a big thumbs-up. My relief quickly dissipated. We couldn't just let the baby sleep on the dining room table, could we? What kind of

Lucille shook her head fervently. I nodded back. We went on this way for a few seconds too long. I'd been with a baby for only an hour, and already I was losing my

I returned to the task at hand. If I could move Bella to her stroller without waking her up, then she could sleep

But then Bella woke up. And the second she was awake, she was crying.

Lucille gave me a look that in any language would mean: I told you so.

I was reaching for my cell phone to call Lucas when the door of the penthouse opened.

... is that a baby?"

I wanted to cry, too, staring down at the unhappy baby.

"Honey, I'm home!" he called. "Wait

I gathered my courage and reached for the baby. Lucille covered her eyes. I nestled one hand beneath her shoulders and her head, and the other beneath her bottom

*Is it really so bad to be in my care?* I wanted to ask her. I pulled back my hands and hoped that the baby could return to her peaceful state. But I was not so lucky.

I came home to find Angela, Lucille, and Bella all in the living room.

"What's Bella doing on the dining room table?" I asked. I couldn't help but smile as I took in the scene before me, but

**XAVIER** 

Angela fell into the dining room chair. "I don't know how to *swaddle a baby!*" she cried, her voice cracking. I approached the screaming little creature on the table. Even when she made such an awful sound, Bella was still

totally adorable.

How hard could it be?

happy that *I* was able to help her.

"Where did you learn to *do that?*" she asked.

We had some stuff to work through.

How was it possible to feel so much love?

The past few hours had been a true emotional roller coaster.

How had I moved so quickly from a nervous breakdown to loving bliss?

A baby changed everything. Now I finally understood the weight of that.

That dream that we shared was the only thing that mattered at that moment.

I thought of Em earlier. She, too, had been about to fall apart a few times in our brief conversation.

A baby was a bundle of joy. But I realized that babies also brought intense flashes of fear, pride, doubt

What was it about this baby that threw us, two capable women, into emotional spirals?

better.

again.

Good.

feel it.

world.

softly.

random.

together, forever and ever.

My husband smiled at me.

\*\*\*

"I *love* you!!" I all but shouted.

instantly lifted her out with a father's gentle hands.

"Aren't you scared you'll wake her up?!" I asked.

When was the last time I checked my phone?

It was Hannah Flintour.

"Sure, one second."

a notebook.

all three women, young and old, were clearly unhappy.

"I was changing her diaper," Angela explained as if it was obvious.

"And she's still upset ..." I said, gears turning. "Have you tried swaddling her?"

Sure, I didn't know *exactly* how to do it. But I remembered watching Aunt Heather wrap one of my cousin's babies into a bundle a few years ago.

Bella was swaddled. And then she stopped crying.

I lifted up this amazing little bundle and cradled her in my arms. I chuckled a little bit to myself because I was so

When I looked over, Angela was standing right beside me. Her eyes told me she had fallen in love with me all over

"We're gonna make you happy, huh baby," I told Bella. She continued to cry, but I had a feeling I could make her feel

"Just kinda made it up," I admitted. And then I winked. Angela stood on her toes and kissed me. As soon as our lips touched, I felt relief and love radiating off of her body.

I could only imagine what it would feel like if the child was my own

This man was mine. And he was perfect. Our fight the night before melted away, and all that mattered was right here and now.

I wanted to apologize for everything. I wanted to kiss him all day, make love all night, and have beautiful babies

"How was it, sis?" Lucas asked me after I opened the door for him. Bella was sleeping in her stroller, but Lucas

As usual, I couldn't help but crack up at his stupid joke. I was startled by my phone buzzing in my pocket.

"I have to take this," I told Lucas and said goodbye to him and the baby. "Hello?"

"Angela, it's Hannah," her cool voice responded. "Do you have a minute?"

My brother smiled at me with the same goofy smile he's always had. "That's because he's dad material."

"I love you," he said. "Me, too," I whispered, and I felt his hand on my waist until the last possible moment.

I held my phone to my chest as I kissed Xavier. I ran my other hand through his hair. All I wanted was to be alone with

"Why?" I asked. "Let's just say, a few sour relations."

Find the perfect new venue.

Hannah went on, and for a moment, I watched Xavier and Lucas fawning over Bella. Then I needed to grab a pen and

If only he was still awake I thought as I held on to him. I wanted to make love.

Meanwhile, I was on the phone with Hannah Flintour I peeled off my clothes and climbed into bed naked, cuddling up against my husband.

caretaker would allow that? What would Em think? "We have to move her," I whispered to Lucille.

What else could I have done? I was spent. And all out of ideas.

My wife looked at me as if I was a completely different person. "Swaddling," I repeated. "Have you tried it?"

"Angela, could you grab my blue cashmere scarf for me? It's hanging in the wardrobe."

I can only imagine the suspicious look my wife gave me, but she left the room.

Angela returned with the scarf. I lifted Bella and placed the soft fabric beneath her. I began to wrap the scarf around her left side, tucking her arm by her body at a slight bend. Next, I wrapped her feet, and then I wrapped her right arm.

Her kiss felt like coming home. It felt like an apology.

She didn't pull away. Her hand was squeezing my arm, and she leaned into me. She wanted to be close to me. I could

When finally it was over, my smile showed her that last night's argument was behind us. Sure, we had our shit.

But holding this baby in my arms, with the love of my life beside me, made me just about the happiest man in the

**ANGELA** 

I bit back tears as I watched Xavier and Bella. My husband brought the baby's wispy-haired head close and kissed it

As I watched Xavier confidently comfort Bella, I felt an insane surge of adoring love.

... All striking at

He shrugged. "She was crying a lot, huh?" he asked knowingly. "Uh, yeah." I shook my head. "But promise not to tell Em. Xavier calmed her down. He was *amazing* with her."

him, but I had to take the call.

I was bone-tired. And now Zoe and I had another project to add to the list:

"Well, we'll need to find a new location that will pack a *punch* like the Natural History Museum did

The call turned into a meeting, and by the time I got off the phone, the oven clock said it was midnight.

But my eyes were closing, too. There was always tomorrow

I headed for the master bedroom. I found the light off and Xavier asleep. It was funny how much things had changed. Now Lucas had a baby, and Xavier was fast asleep by midnight.

"Okay, Hannah. What's up?" I heard her sigh. "Well, you won't believe it," she began, "but we need to find a different venue for this year's Gala." "What?!" I burst out. The Vague Gala was always in the same place — the Natural History Museum. That was part of the party's *identity*. To change it was *crazy*. Obviously, Hannah Flintour wasn't happy about it either. "Okay ..." What the heck? Did Vague have secret beef with the museum?

Alone in the kitchen, I picked up the phone again.