The Arrangement

Out of the Frying Pan...

**XAVIER** 

I screamed into the storm, desperation clutching my heart in a vise.

"ANGELA!"

I'd watched her zoom down the hill, readying myself to chase after her. That was when the flash blizzard hit.

One moment she was there, the next she was gone.

You idiot, I scolded myself.

You stupid, fucking idiot. I screamed for her again, the fierce winds burning my throat like cheap whiskey garnished with crushed glass.

I didn't care.

I'd scream my throat bloody until she heard me.

*Please hear me ...* 

I continued down the slope, trying to keep a controlled speed. My instincts urged me to speed downwards, full throttle

ahead. But I couldn't see shit in this whiteout, and I couldn't much help Angela if I killed myself by slamming into a

"ANGELA!" Nothing.

Just the angry howl of the wind.

tree at full speed.

snow.

"ANGELA!" I tried again.

uncovered a snapped half of a ski.

Angela.

I'd practically grown up on skis, but the storm made even the bunny hill treacherous. I struggled to keep my balance as the wind battered me senseless from all directions. And if I was struggling ...

Maybe Angela was still on the slopes somewhere. If I sped past her without knowing I'd never forgive myself.

Hang in there, Angela.

The blizzard was relentless, the cold seeping through the folds of my heavy skiing gear. My fingers were already going numb inside of my gloves.

A gust of wind slammed into me like a freight train. I hit the ground hard, crashing into the snow. I gasped, the wind knocked out of me like I'd been punched in the gut. My feet were stuck at an awkward angle, my skis jutting out of the

I snapped my boots out of the bindings, trudging through the slopes.

"ANGELA, DAMN IT!" I felt the rage coursing through my veins, hot enough that I could've sworn the snow around me would melt.

But it didn't.

It just kept piling, and piling, and piling, and piling I slammed my fist into the ground, fury escaping in a shout.

My gloved knuckles cracked into the snow and something underneath. Something hard. Digging underneath, I

She had to be nearby.

**ANGELA** 

I cringed against the trunk of the tree as another howl of wind ripped around me. The evergreen bowed and bent, sprays of snow scraping against what little exposed skin I had like razor wire.

Adrenaline pumped through me, my instincts urging me to go out into the storm to try and find shelter. I gritted my

It was also a very obvious reminder that I wouldn't get very far hobbling around in a blizzard. At least the tree I was

huddled up against provided the smallest semblance of a windbreak. So I sat there.

I imagined his deep velvet voice saying my name.

Was it the cold?

Fear?

Angela.

"Angela!"

"ANGELA!"

Why was I so sleepy?

I smiled, nodding to myself.

before.

He sounded ... scared.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" he asked.

"But we might get lost," I pointed out.

My ankle throbbed, jolts of pain in sync with my heartbeat.

teeth, closing my eyes and focusing on my sprained ankle.

The pain there helped center me. It focused my thoughts.

I curled up into a ball, the blizzard relentlessly slamming gusts of snow into me. I felt the cold worm its way underneath the layers of my clothes, felt it cast an iron grip around my bones.

I couldn't feel my fingers. Or my toes. Am I going to die out here?

I blinked, a sudden rush of calm flooding through me. I closed my eyes, my eyelashes frosted together. Memories

flashed in my mind unbidden. My first disastrous meeting with Xavier, all the way to the heaven we had found in Bali.

My eyes flew open, and there he was.

I smiled. My name always sounded like music on his lips. It almost sounded like he was right here with me

*Xavier's here now.* Even my own voice inside my head sounded far away. You can relax. Sleep. Xavier will protect you.

Xavier shook me vigorously. I forced my eyes open. My eyelids felt like lead weights. "Look at me, Angel," Xavier urged, yelling over the storm. His voice wavered. I'd never heard him sound like this

of the storm, I could tell he was worried.

"We won't." His voice was confident. "The layout for the resort is burned into my mind. There's a cabin nearby."

"Okay. One foot in front of the other. Are you ready?" I felt him give me an encouraging squeeze.

I nodded. I felt like I was moving underwater, my head in a weird haze. Xavier's strong arms wound around my waist,

"All right. I'm going to help you up, okay? We're going to get to some shelter."

his broad shoulders propping up my arm as he took on most of my weight.

completely safe in his arms, sturdier than the trunk of any tree.

slammed open, an angry burst of snow invading the room.

stiff, ice and snow clinging to every surface of our bodies.

tore my ski gear off, stripping down until I was completely naked.

I moved to Angela, beginning to strip her as well.

She nodded, helping me get her clothes off.

"We need to get these frozen clothes off of you," I said.

I just needed to get some heat back into her frozen bones.

Angela was practically vibrating next to me, her lips turning blue from the cold.

leave us alone.

I turned to Angela.

my mind.

"I'm sorry. About before."

were both fine.

completely healthy.

We'd gotten pretty lucky, all things considered.

The Latest Drama in the Knight Saga!

woman's voice arguing with me as I spit abuse at her.

I frowned, clicking on it.

Penny ...

Was this about the blizzard?

Another news alert flashed.

Who the fuck was behind this, this time?

I thought back to our time in the bathtub.

"There's nothing to be sorry about," I assured her.

"I understand. Really. Just get some rest now."

"No, really," she insisted. "It's just there's a lot going on, and—"

I leaned over, gently turning her face to mine so I could kiss her.

**XAVIER** 

"Are you all right?" "Y-y-ye-ye ..." she stuttered through the clattering of her teeth for a moment before giving up and nodding.

I stomped around the cabin, ripping blankets and sheets off of the furnishings, leaving them in a heap beside Angela. I

Normally, seeing her nude body, I would've been driven mad with lust. But right now, sex was the furthest thing from

I spooned her, our bodies bare in the firelight. I wrapped the blankets around us, cocooning her in as much warmth as

"Xavier ..." Angela's voice was barely a whisper. "Hmm?" I pushed my lips against her hair, breathing in the smell of her.

Angela's shaking slowly subsided, and I felt her exhausted body go limp against mine.

I sat in my impromptu office in my room back at the chalet, sifting through the pile of emails in my inbox. Angela was taking a nap, her ankle bandaged by the on-site medical staff.

There'd been quite a scare yesterday after Mr. and Mrs. Knight went missing in the flash blizzard. The resort security

team had found us quickly the next morning, and we'd been whisked away on snowmobiles to make sure that we

Other than Angela's sprained ankle and a few bumps and bruises between the two of us, we were otherwise

A flash of red on the laptop screen caught my eye. An automatic news alert.

My stomach dropped as I saw a grainy video of me at The Hatchback, furiously rambling and clearly drunk. I heard a

Xavier Knight — Womanizer, Drunkard, Horrible CEO? Can Knight Enterprises survive yet another scandal?! I felt bile rise in my throat, anger making me see red.

My phone rang, shrill and urgent. I glanced at the caller ID. "What the fuck is all this?" I demanded into the phone.

I scanned my surroundings, willing my gaze to pierce through the wailing wall of snow around me. Hang on, babe. I'm coming.

I started shaking.

It was better to conserve energy and wait for help than to exhaust myself and get lost in the storm.

Frosted head to toe in snow and ice, his hands squeezing my shoulders, rubbing at my arms, shaking the life back into me. My very own knight in shining armor.

"Hey, Mr. Knight," I mumbled, amused at myself for the play on words. My head drooped.

I closed my eyes. The darkness felt so warm. So comfortable "Angela!"

"I think I sprained my ankle." He looked down at my leg, and although I couldn't quite see his facial expression underneath his goggles and the blur

"Let's go."

I kicked open the door to the log cabin, the gale of the storm nearly blowing the door off of its hinges. The door

I pushed the door closed behind me, struggling against the force of the wind. This damn blizzard really didn't want to

Although the cabin wasn't very far from where we were, the walk here felt like a cross-country trek. We were frozen

We hobbled towards the fireplace, and I set Angela down on the animal-skin rug before it. I reached over and flipped

I nodded, taking courage from having him next to me. We might have been in the middle of a blizzard, but I felt

the switch to turn on the gas fireplace. No firewood and matches here.

I possibly could. We stayed like that for a while, our bodies entwined, the heat of the fireplace slowly filling the room. The only sound was the raging howl of the blizzard rattling against the windows, our breathing, and the steady beat of our hearts.

moments, I could feel her deep, steady breathing as she fell into an exhausted sleep. I sighed, settling down with her safe in my arms, before eventually falling into a fitful sleep. \*\*\*

She nodded and smiled at me, though I could tell her heart wasn't fully into it. She turned back over, and within

My gaze drifted over to my sleeping wife. The laptop screen had no hope of holding my attention. I admired how beautiful she was, the shape of her perfect lips, how her long eyelashes cast shadows on her cheeks. Really lucky.

Then another. *Is this how Xavier Knight treats his employees?* 

Penny? Henry?

"Get back to New York now," Penny said. "We need to talk."