The Arrangement S.S. Sahoo

Tea With a Side of Disaster

ANGELA

I stood up on my tiptoes to give Xavier a kiss goodbye as he walked into the elevator. "Good luck at work today," I said. "Keep me posted, okay?"

"I will," he promised.

I smiled as Xavier disappeared behind the elevator doors. I stood there for a moment longer before spinning around to get ready for the rest of the day.

Xavier, but I could recognize Penny's voice.

some ridiculously personal questions.

The Gala was in two days, and I had a meeting with Zoe at Dustin's cafe soon. New York was still in an uproar over Xavier's latest actions.

There was an incriminating video floating around of him hurling abuses at an unknown coworker, though I was pretty sure it was Penny. The video was so grainy and blurred you could hardly make out anyone else in it besides

Now there were photos of him assaulting a reporter at the airport.

I heard he was suing for damages.

Of course he would, I thought. ~Who doesn't want a piece of Xavier Knight?~ If only we could be left alone, away from the prying eyes of the public

I guess it comes with the territory, being a billionaire and all.

I sifted through my wardrobe, wondering what I should wear.

Although the drama was centered around my husband, I was sure some eager reporters would flag me down to ask

I settled for sweats and my oversized oxford shirt. I tied my hair up in a tight bun, hiding it underneath a baseball cap.

I examined myself in the mirror. Should be good enough, I decided.

I found the large sunglasses I wore in Bali and threw them over my eyes to further obscure my face.

I picked up the dress I had ordered for Zoe to wear to the Gala, zipping it up in its protective case. It was a beautiful red dress, the skirt flaring out in frills and ruffles. It was from Miu Miu. Youthful and bold, it was so Zoe. Hopefully, the gift would help her out of whatever funk she was in.

I threw on my favorite sneakers and pushed the button to call the elevator. A jog would really help clear my mind, but my ankle wouldn't be able to stand it for a while. I shook my head, trying to will my worries away.

The Gala was just on the horizon. I had to focus.

I made my way through the busy streets of New York City, eventually walking into Dustin's cafe, the smell of coffee and pastries washing over me. Zoe was already sitting at our table, stacked folders arrayed before her.

Dustin emerged from the back, carrying two mugs of tea on a tray. "Welcome back, Angela." Dustin's voice made me pause. He was usually so happy and energetic whenever I returned from a trip. Now he sounded subdued, keeping his greeting short and clipped.

"Hey, Dustin," I shook my head. I was probably just imagining things. I sat in front of Zoe as Dustin placed our drinks in front of us.

Was it just my imagination, or did he seem a little cold?

But they never came.

her. She didn't look pleased at all.

My phone buzzed, interrupting her.

It was a text from Xavier.

XAVIER

Ok. Good luck. C u tonite.

Penny is pissed.

Paid him \$2 mill.

Worth it to avoid a police case.

The other video is gonna be trickier.

I have a PR team working on it.

"Oh," she said. Her smile was gone. She looked deflated.

"Do you not like it?" I asked. "I can get you another one."

so I could see. "Regarding the placement of the lanterns—"

We managed to settle things with that stupid reporter I hit.

"How did things go while I was gone?" I asked Zoe. She gestured to the folders in front of me. "All done! All of the details have been sorted out, and many of them just need your final approval to go through."

"Amazing work, Zoe!" I smiled. She seemed to be excited, her natural bubbliness emerging again. It was good to see her back in good spirits. "Oh, I got you something." "Huh?"

I unzipped the protective bag to show off the dress. "I bought it for you so you can wear a nice dress to the Gala. You probably don't have anything to walk the red carpet with, right?" I spun the dress around, the skirt fluttering in the air. "It's Miu Miu! What do you think?" I opened the bag with a flourish, waiting for the excited squeals to begin.

My heart sank. What did I do now?

"It's beautiful, Angela. Thank you." She smiled as she took the dress, zipping it up and draping it over the seat next to

"No, it's great. Anyway," she said dismissively, quickly changing the subject. She opened one of the folders, turning it

Zoe's lips pressed into a thin line. "Sorry, Zoe," I muttered. "One second

He wanted \$2 mill, can you believe that?

ANGELA

What did u do?

ANGELA

Yikes. 😧

ANGELA

ANGELA

Will everything be okay?

ANGELA

Xavier ...

ANGELA

Right ... 😇

ANGELA

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ANGELA

In a meeting right now for the Gala.

Good job baby •

XAVIER Ya, don't worry.

They aren't as good as dad's was though.

XAVIER jk. How are things with you?

Maybe I should push him out a window?

That bastard Henry is probably laughing his ass off.

I looked up to find Zoe waiting patiently. I heard Dustin clear his throat from behind the counter, shaking his head disapprovingly at me. I felt my heart skip a beat, Dustin's frown causing alarm bells to go off in my mind.

serving much purpose other than to illuminate the pathways. But I was thinking

"So as I was saying, the placement of the lanterns in the original plan were scattered around Hudson Yard, not really

I nodded along as Zoe explained the changes she'd made to the plan and all of the gritty little details she'd figured out

She went on about the logistics of the event, the number of expected guests, the amount of parking available, the

He assured me that things were going to be fine at Knight Enterprises, but I had a bad feeling that refused to go away.

Sure, Xavier's dirty laundry had been aired to the public before, and we had always somehow managed to make

It wasn't that I didn't trust my husband's ability to keep the company afloat, but Brad really was the rock that

I felt like a student being caught on their phone by the teacher.

"Sorry," I said again. "Where were we?"

drinks and appetizers that would be served

I found my mind wandering back to Xavier.

Something felt different this time.

But that was when Brad was still alive.

anchored the Knight Empire steadfast in New York.

Maybe this was the straw that broke the camel's back.

An uncomfortable silence filled the space between us.

"Unbelievable," Dustin muttered under his breath.

This was our first real crisis without Brad here to bail us out...

Maybe there had been one too many scandals.

Did she ask me a question?

"Huh?"

tense.

"Dustin ..." Zoe said.

What was going on?

"...do this anymore."

"Zoe?"

in her stuff.

them at all.

I shook my head, helpless.

"Do you know?" I asked.

attending her little brother's party?"

I groaned, guilt crashing into me.

annoyed too, wouldn't you?"

But that was no excuse.

"You do," Dustin laughed.

Dustin was right.

company ...

"Oh, boy ..."

I stood up, alarmed.

"Wait, Zoe. I'm sorry. What's wrong?"

and I was too stunned to do anything about it.

I was dimly aware of Dustin sitting in front of me.

Dustin let out a long sigh, shaking his head in defeat.

Dustin was silent for a while, contemplating something.

"I didn't even know she had a little brother," I admitted.

It dawned on me, the stacks of paperwork on the table an unavoidable hint.

"I didn't even realize," I said. "I've never had an assistant before

"Yup, keep racking up my wrongdoings. I deserve it."

It was like offering to buy Em and Lucas a house all over again.

Zoe sighed, starting again.

over the weekend.

everything better.

"Angela?" I blinked to find Zoe looking at me expectedly.

"Sorry, my mind was somewhere else," I said. "Could you repeat that, Zoe?"

I waited for Zoe to say something, but she just stared down at the table in front of her.

I heard the door open, the chime jangling as Zoe disappeared into the streets outside.

I felt myself flush hot with embarrassment. What was going on with me? I saw Dustin shaking his head at me again. Did I make him angry somehow too?

"I can't do this anymore," she repeated. She stood up and gathered her things in a rush, the dress I got her bundled up

"What's wrong?" she asked, incredulous. "You're a horrible boss, Angela. That's what's wrong." She pushed past me,

I sat back down, a numbness spreading inside of me. I stared at the mountain of documents in front of me, not seeing

"What was the last thing she said?" Dustin demanded from behind the counter. His eyes narrowed at me, his voice

"You deserved that," he said matter-of-factly. "What did I do?" I asked. "Do you really not know?" Dustin countered, more surprised than angry.

"Did you know that Zoe's little brother's birthday party was this last weekend?" he asked.

"Oh, gosh." I put my head in my hands. "Even if she didn't have a birthday party to attend, shoving all of this work onto her wasn't very fair, Angela. Especially if you're in the Alps, skiing, while Zoe is here working her pretty little butt off."

"There's a lot of things you don't know, Angela." He sighed again in frustration. "Guess what Zoe was doing instead of

I thought back, all of Zoe's behavior suddenly making sense. She reacted similarly when she learned that I didn't give her credit for the Gala's theme. She probably felt underappreciated and betrayed back then, too. "Giving her that dress probably didn't help either," Dustin continued. "She doesn't want to feel like a charity case."

"She feels underappreciated. You were barely paying any attention to all of the hard work she put in. You'd be

I was too caught up in my own drama to realize Zoe was hurting. There was so much going on with Xavier, with his

I sat wallowing in despair for a while before Dustin spoke up again. "So what are you going to do now?" he asked. I looked over the piles of event details that Zoe had painstakingly arranged for me. She was an amazing assistant, and

Who was I turning into? Since when did I flaunt money around like it would fix all of my problems?

more than that, a genuinely kind person. And now she probably hates my guts.

Who was I becoming? Dustin's question bounced around in the echo chamber of my mind.

Why didn't I notice sooner?

"I have a Gala to run in two days," I muttered. And I just lost Zoe.

I felt myself spiraling, running through all the things I could have said, all the things I could have done...

I'd always secretly prided myself on my empathy. I loved being kind to people. I loved being able to sense that someone was hurting and being able to extend a helping hand. I stood up, collecting all of the folders dejectedly.