

A Little R&R

ANGELA

I watched as the sun set over the horizon, the lights of New York twinkling like stars in the night sky.

All of the details for the Gala had been double and triple checked, all of my Is dotted and the Ts crossed.

Zoe had done an amazing job. She really did have a talent for event planning, and I only wished she would be there with me to see all of her hard work pay off.

Guilt assaulted me, and I wanted to sink into my bedsheets and disappear.

And whose fault is it that she won't be at the Gala?

My eyes shifted to my reflection in the window.

Ding, ding, ding.

I ambled into the living room, curling up on the couch.

At least Xavier would be home soon.

He must be exhausted after his all-nighter at the office.

While the trip to the Alps was mostly pleasant, not including the blizzard, of course, it hadn't done much to recharge the battery, so to speak.

If anything, it had ended up causing more stress than it was worth.

The two of us had returned to New York exhausted, fresh out of an averted icy doom and straight into the fire that was our professional lives.

Some say the world will end in fire ... I mused.

Maybe we were going about all of this the wrong way.

Heck, if I thought about it, we'd been trying to solve a lot of our problems with money ...

I thought of a mental checklist, striking off items one by one.

1. Swiss Alps getaway.

2. Zoe's Gala dress. Very inconsiderate.

3. Zoe's earrings as a peace offering. Way off the mark.

4. Feeling estranged from your family? Offer to buy them a house!

That last one in particular made me cringe with shame.

Had there been other times? I was afraid that there probably were, but I'd gotten so used to having wealth that I'd forgotten about them and accepted that as the norm.

I bolted up from the couch, an idea coming to mind. I felt a smile spread across my face.

I needed to get back to my roots.

Back to worn-out jeans instead of designer dresses, cramped metro lines instead of private cars.

I still had some time before Xavier got back.

I threw on my joggers, preparing to head over to the closest Duane Reade.

It was time to bust out the Ben & Jerry's.

XAVIER

I rode the private elevator up to our penthouse apartment, the weight of responsibility heavy on my shoulders.

They're trying to vote me out of CEO. They're trying to take everything away from me.

I stayed in my office for a moment longer after Penny left, jaw hanging open like an idiot. Her revelation was like a splash of cold water to the face, my flames of rage put out.

All that remained was dust and ash.

I had always assumed that I would be the head of Knight Enterprises, no matter what. I mean, my fucking last name was plastered all over the building, for Christ's sake.

Now there was a very real possibility of losing it, and it had forced me to see things in a new light. A new perspective.

I hated that new perspective. Despised it with everything inside of me.

I thought about it. I thought deep and hard, trying to push my massive ego aside for just two minutes. I tried to distance myself from the problem a little bit to get an objective view of the situation, and I came to a single realization.

I'd vote myself out of CEO, too.

Knight Enterprises had taken hit after hit because of my ego, and it was sort of a miracle the company still remained afloat.

That miracle's name was Brad Knight.

Miracles didn't last forever, and it looked like I'd need another one now if I wanted any hope of keeping my title as CEO.

I collapsed into the plush bench of the elevator, my head in my hands.

I said some fucked-up shit to Penny.

I didn't blame her for Dad's death. Not really. I just thought of the most spiteful, hurtful thing I could say at the moment and the words floated to my lips as naturally as I breathed.

You really are a piece of shit.

At least Angela was waiting for me up above. I really didn't deserve her. Especially now that our livelihood was in jeopardy ...

My breath caught in my throat, a realization smacking me over the head.

You're going to have to tell her.

Before I could come up with a plan, the elevator doors dinged open.

I walked into our apartment, my feet dragging like I was lining up in front of a firing squad.

Give me the firing squad over this nightmare any day, I thought.

"Welcome home!"

I looked up and there she was. My own personal angel, dressed in her silk pajamas, her hair tied back in a loose ponytail, her feet encased in fluffy panda slippers.

Her hands were behind her back, hiding something from me.

She took one look at me and nodded knowingly.

"Rough day?" she asked.

"You have no idea," I laughed, not an ounce of humor in the sound.

"Well, let's fix that," she bounced up to me, shoving something into my chest. I looked down to find a tub of *Ben & Jerry's Caramel Cookie Ice Cream* and my Armani silks bundled together.

She held up her own tub of vanilla ice cream and grinned up at me.

"What's this?" I asked.

"Get changed," she demanded as she took my hand and led me around the corner to our living room. The sight stopped me dead in my tracks.

Our sleek and sophisticated living room had been transformed into some kind of pillow-fort abomination. Blankets made impromptu tents, cheap Christmas lights were strung along the entire thing like barbed wire.

She presented this madness to me like Dr. Frankenstein showing off his monster.

"It's alive ..." I muttered under my breath.

Angela grinned, her eyes twinkling mischievously.

"We're having a slumber party," she demanded. "And I won't take no for an answer."

ANGELA

I squealed with delight at the sight of Xavier eating ice cream inside the pillow fort with me, his legs crossed underneath the glow of the Christmas lights. I'd seen the reluctance in his eyes that bordered on horror, but he eventually gave in to my demands.

"Don't get used to this," he said around a mouthful of caramel cookie. "I always thought pillow forts were childish, even when I was a kid."

I stuck my tongue out at him.

"Whatever, your highness. This is how us commoners had fun."

Xavier snorted, and I almost choked on my spoonful of vanilla.

"So you haven't talked to Zoe since?" he asked me.

"No," I sighed, deflating. "I've picked up and put down the phone a million times to try and call her, but I feel like bothering her more would be considered harassment at this point."

"If it was bothering her so much, she should have said something," Xavier said. He spooned out the last bits of ice cream before throwing the empty tub into a trash bin from across the room.

I clapped politely, and he rewarded me with a smirk.

"Besides," he continued. "You'll rock the Gala, even without her."

"Maybe ... but it was my fault for not considering how she felt." I handed him my empty tub of ice cream, and he repeated the action, sinking it into the trash bin. "Do you play basketball?" I asked, impressed.

"No. I'm just naturally athletic." He winked, and I rolled my eyes, though I couldn't keep the smile from creeping across my lips.

"How about Penny?" I asked, my voice small. He had told me about his outburst in his office, and my heart ached for both of them. Clearly, they were hurting.

It killed me not knowing how to make everything better—how I could help.

Xavier's mood soured. I crawled over to him, curling up into his lap. I felt him sigh as his arms wound around me, his breath tickling the top of my head.

"I don't know," he said finally. "I guess I owe her an apology, but ..."

"But?"

"There's going to be an important meeting at work soon." The tone of his voice changed, and I suddenly had nervous butterflies flitting around in my stomach.

"A meeting for what?" I asked.

Xavier didn't answer. I twisted around in his lap to look up at him.

"Xavier?" I tried to sense what he was thinking about, but I couldn't glean anything from his face in the low light.

"Just about the future of the company," he said finally.

"Oh, I see," I said, though I really didn't. "Will everything be all right?"

"Yeah," he said, and his voice was filled with such fierce determination that my heart began to pound in my chest. Why was he so tense? "Everything will be fine."

The mood in our little pillow fort had suddenly become very stifling.

Oh no, none of this.

I squirmed out of his lap, reaching for a pillow. I spun around, hurling it straight for his face. It slammed into him, and he just stared at me in shock.

"Aha! Direct hit," I crowed.

He grabbed the pillow, his voice dropping to a growl. "You're going to regret that," he warned.

I smiled, seeing the tension eased away from his shoulders. I felt lighter than I had in days.

"Don't underestimate me, Mr. Knight," I replied, confident in my pillow-fighting abilities.

And then war broke loose.

XAVIER

We lay down in a heap together, breathing heavily, the pillow fort in ruins around us. Angela was lying down on top of my chest, her hair a mess, sweat dripping down her neck, her silk pajamas sliding off of her shoulders.

Her breath tickled my neck, and I felt myself stir and harden underneath her.

She definitely noticed, grinding herself into me, the only thing between us thin sheets of silk. Angela moaned, the sound sending desire rushing through my veins.

But there was something I had to make sure of first.

"Angela," I began.

"Xavier," she moaned back. I gritted my teeth, willing control over myself.

"About our plans for the future," I continued. "About having a family ..."

She put a finger to my lips, looking down at me, the curtain of her hair cutting us off from the rest of the world.

"Can we wait to have this conversation until after our work troubles are behind us?" she asked. "It's not that I don't want to start a family with you, Xavier. It's just ..."

"It's okay." I remembered my conversation with Ken. "I'll wait as long as you need."

Be patient with her. She's worth it.

She smiled down at me, radiant.

"Thank you," she whispered, bending down to kiss me. Her lips trailed to my ear. "Though that doesn't mean we can't have any fun ..."

She began to drag her lips down my neck, unbuttoning my shirt as she kissed down my chest ...

I groaned, enjoying the feeling of her lips on my skin before the thought of the impending meeting flashed into my mind.

I couldn't tell Angela.

But I sure as hell wouldn't let them take the company away from me. I'd protect my position. I'd protect the security of our future together.

Whatever it took.