way towards a lighthouse.

The Arrangement

**Darkest Before Dawn** 

## I waded through the crowd of confused attendees, flinching at every murmur of disappointment and annoyance.

**ANGELA** 

"What kind of event is this?" a haughty-looking man in a masquerade mask whined. "If I wanted to prance around in the dark I'd go to one of those nightclubs my son always

"Would you stop stepping on my foot?" a woman that seemed to be wearing a ballerina outfit, the tutu replaced with a

pool floaty, hissed.

Her companion, another woman wearing a bathing suit ringed with a tutu, glared at her. "That wasn't me, Elaine. Blame the painted man next to you."

The painted man, for his part, simply shrugged.

I felt a bead of sweat roll down my forehead, my eyes locked on the distant electrical tent like a lost ship making its

Except the lighthouse was dark, and I'd probably maroon myself against the cliff face. A woman bumped into me, causing me to stumble.

"Watch where you're going," a dreadfully familiar, French-accented voice said.

Oh please, not now.

Darla turned to affix me with her glare, her eyes lighting up when she realized it was me.

"Oh, Angela, *ma chérie*," she gushed. She took one look at me and smiled, leaning in closer. She could sense my panic. She was a shark, and there was blood in the water.

"Interesting choice, to have all of the power go out. Please, do tell me, what was your inspiration behind it?"

Everyone was looking, and I felt the hairs rise on the back of my neck.

"There are just a few technical difficulties, Darla. I'm actually on my way to try and figure it out ..." I tried to step around her, but she blocked my path. She entwined her arms around mine, smiling brilliantly at me.

"Oh, don't be so modest! You don't have to pretend," she gushed. Her voice rose, drawing the attention of everyone around us. "You're the event planner! The *person responsible* for such a ~wonderful~ event."

"Please," she continued, pouting. "The suspense is unbearable. Won't you tell us what's going on?" A murmur of agreement rumbled like a wave in the crowd around me.

"Um," I stuttered. "It's not really—" "What was that, *ma chérie*?" she interrupted. "Please speak up a little. I'm sure everyone is eager to hear what you

have to say." My head spun, the Gala around me seeming to sway back and forth at an alarming angle. The salad I had for lunch

If I was going to throw up, I might as well throw up on Darla. That would show her.

seemed determined for freedom. I could feel its escape attempt worming its way up my throat.

I moved towards her, preparing for biochemical warfare, when a voice cut through the crowd.

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen." I'd recognize that strong, confident voice anywhere.

Darla gulped, releasing me and taking a small step away.

Darla. I watched Darla shrink in her dress. "But please, have some patience."

Murmurs sounded throughout the crowd, many of them doubtful.

I nodded, squeezing my way through the wall of attendees.

At least the orchestra had begun to play again.

Steve, the head electrician, turned to me.

wiring in these things."

lucky there wasn't no fire."

"How about the backups?" I asked.

"Three hours?!" I practically shrieked.

"Sorry, ma'am," Steve said again.

these old ones outta the way and the new ones all plugged in

My shoulders slumped, despair rearing its ugly head.

I stepped out of the tent, sucking in a gulp of fresh air.

"You're going to ruin your dress, sitting there like that."

"Can you fix it?"

I gulped.

get here."

"Will do."

Three hours.

What was I going to do now?

I looked up.

"Hey, Angela."

"It's okay."

either, so it's my fault, too."

"So, you forgive me?" I asked.

running for another three hours."

"I used our emergency fund, duh."

"Oops." I blushed red. "Sorry."

I sighed in relief. "But what did you do?"

"Oh, it should arrive any second now

But Apollo's side remained dark.

She held up a finger. "Wait for it

"Zoe! You're amazing!"

The Gala looked magical.

I connected the dots.

"And Apollo was given the paper lanterns!"

Zoe nodded, smiling from ear to ear.

"How'd you get it all here so fast?"

"A to Z," I agreed.

Hannah Flintour.

I laughed, stepping back to look her in the eyes.

Hannah Flintour had even cracked a small smile.

In the end, the evening had gone well.

So why did I feel so empty?

"Well, dropping the *Knight* name certainly didn't hurt." She winked.

"Mhm, already forgiven."

praises."

Light.

I turned around.

"Emergency fund?"

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't." She smiled.

"The dress suits you," I said.

"Zoe?"

"Fix this," she whispered back, her subzero tone taking me back to that Swiss blizzard.

Yuck.

all about chaos, right?"

Marlena winked at me.

do with themselves.

Small mercies.

Hannah Flintour. I swallowed the bile rising in my throat.

She sliced through the crowd, quickly taking in my panicked expression and the malevolent intent of Darla's arm laced with mine.

"I know you're all anxious," Hannah addressed those that had gathered around us, saving a particularly icy stare for

"Of course this is all part of the program," another voice spoke up from the crowd. She squeezed her way to the front,

a kindly-looking older woman looking resplendent in her flapper dress inspired by the Roaring Twenties. "Dionysus is

I gasped, tears of relief springing to my eyes. Marlena Marlboro!

I smiled, wishing I could go hug her without making a huge scene. Hannah stepped close to me, gently urging me along towards the electrical tent. "Thanks," I whispered.

I trudged towards the tent, passing by countless scenes of unsatisfied attendees milling about, confused about what to

I finally arrived at the massive tent, the usual hum of the electrical generators dead silent. I walked in to find a few technicians huddled by one of the generators, mystified expressions on their faces. "What happened?" I asked.

"Sorry, ma'am," he said, turning to me. "The generators just up and went kaput. There must'a been some kinda faulty

He shook his head. "Fraid not. These things need to be returned to the factory for some heavy maintenance. We're

"How long?" "Three hours, at least."

He nodded, looking apologetic. "They've got to load 'em up and ship 'em all the way over here. By the time we get

I shook my head. "It's not your fault, Steve. Keep me posted on the status of the backups, okay?"

"Dead, too." Steve shook his head. "Never in all my years have all the generators blown out at once." His team around

him nodded, looking as confused as he did. "We've put in a call for backup generators, but it'll take a while for them to

Miserable. Absolutely miserable. I walked over to the side street next to the tent, sitting down in a heap on the curb. I stretched my legs out, staring at the ridiculous high heels on my feet.

I looked out at the darkness of the Gala, and I couldn't help but see it as a reflection of how I felt at the moment.

"Thanks." Silence stretched on between us, heavy in the air.

I'd been so horrible to Zoe. I even suspected her of sabotaging the event we worked so hard to pull off. Shame rushed

"I'm sorry, Zoe," I blurted out. The words came in a rush. "I shouldn't have treated you the way I did. I was just so

"It's all right," Zoe repeated, laughing. "Dustin talked to me about it. It probably didn't help that I stayed quiet about it

I stood up, smiling as I saw her in the dress I got her. Zoe couldn't have been behind this. There was no way she could

have sabotaged all of the generators at once. I couldn't believe the thought had even crossed my mind.

through me, and I said the words that had been echoing around in my mind.

caught up in my own drama that I didn't realize how awful I was to you."

"I know, I know, I'm horrible. You can call me whatever—" I paused. "Wait, what?"

Hope flared inside of me, a tiny flame that the slightest breeze could blow out.

I stepped forward and hugged her, tears of relief springing in my eyes. She laughed again, hugging me back. "Oh, I'm so happy you're here," I gushed. "Everything we planned turned out great!" My face fell. "Well, it was, until the power went out."

"Yeah, I noticed." Zoe looked up at the Gala in the distance. "But don't worry about it. I've got it all taken care of."

My eyebrows shot up to my hairline. "You took care of it? How? Steve told me that the power wouldn't be up and

"I explained this to you in Dustin's cafe," Zoe reminded me patiently. "Although clearly you weren't paying attention."

... ah!" She gestured for me to turn around. "Feast your eyes, and sing my

Trucks began to arrive on the scene. Some on Apollo's side, others on Dionysus's side. The crowds began to gather around them, and I strained my neck trying to get a better view. Then a miracle happened.

as more candles were handed out, tiny orbs of light chasing away the darkness.

I blinked furiously, rubbing my eyes for good measure. Was I seeing this properly?

I squinted my eyes, looking closer. The trucks on Apollo's side were handing out something too. But what The two sides began converging in the middle, and suddenly I saw it. Apollo's patrons received paper lanterns!

The two sides came together, as people from Dionysus began placing their candles within Apollo's paper lanterns.

A warm bed of candlelight cocooned the Gala in a warm orange glow, flickering like stars in the night.

"People that represent Dionysus were given a candle," Zoe explained. "Fire. Raw, wild, and chaotic."

"Chaos given form. And thus . . ." She spread her arms out in a dramatic flourish. "Beauty is born."

The people in the Dionysus trucks handed out tiny candles to the crowd. The light slowly spread throughout the Gala

I hugged her again, squealing. "Oh, Zoe! You're a genius! A visionary!" "Mmm, yes," she purred. "Keep it coming."

"Will you come back to work with me? Not as my assistant this time. As a partner." "A to Z?" Zoe smiled.

I watched as the last of the equipment was loaded onto the final truck, the fleet of vehicles preparing to leave Hudson Yards. The Gala was a roaring success.

Smiling.

I'd reintroduced Zoe as my partner to Hannah, and our future prospects with her seemed bright.

The final truck disappeared, and I was left alone. I looked around at the empty Hudson Yards, a feeling of melancholy washing over me. I sighed, calling Marco on my phone.