

The Arrangement
S.S. Sahoo

Temptations

XAVIER

The world shook, my body a slave to the booming bass that pulsed in the air. A sea of bodies roiled and swayed around me to the rhythm of the music.

I didn't know what the fuck was going on—and I loved it.

I didn't need to think.

Just feel.

The flashing lights were hypnotic, the smell of sweat and perfume dizzying. I felt bodies grind against me, hands groping and caressing, and I lost myself in a maze of pleasure.

Suddenly a rough hand grabbed my shoulder, and I turned to find Shinji grinning at me like a maniac. He handed me a glass of what I assumed to be alcohol and a pill of who-the-fuck-knew-what.

He lifted his own glass, an identical pill already on his tongue.

I downed the thing without hesitation. Instantly, an intense warmth spread out from my stomach and into my veins.

Oh, fuck yes.

He gestured for me to follow him, and together we waded through the crowd of hopped-up partygoers.

We finally made it out of the rave, the underground parking complex practically shaking around us. Souped-up cars were lined up in rows before us, their hoods popped up, showing off the beastly engines within.

Car enthusiasts wandered in between the cars with expensive cameras around their necks. They took photos of the supercars, and of the scantily clad models bent over the hoods or laying down on the roofs.

Shinji threw his arm over my shoulder as he pushed a wad of cash into my hands.

"*Ryuuga* won last night," he yelled over the music. "You motherfucker—how'd you know? I had 10K on *~Shogun~*!"

I grinned, fanning the wad in my hands.

A cool sixty thousand.

It was convenient that they mostly gambled in American dollars. I didn't want the headache of handling millions of Yen with every bet.

"Sure, *Shogun* had better specs, but I didn't like the look of the driver. *~Ryuuga's~* man on the other hand—he looked like he had balls of steel."

"Like you'd know anything about balls of steel," Shinji shot back.

I shoved him, and we both went stumbling into a car, laughing like idiots.

A chorus of shouts chased us away. Shinji hurled back what I assumed was a string of Japanese profanities. My contribution was a middle finger.

Shinji turned back to me, bouncing up and down, urging me along.

"Come on, I want you to meet someone."

We walked into an elevator, and the thundering music was reduced to muffled background noise. Shinji threw an energy drink at me and I cracked it open, my head buzzing.

How long had I been in Tokyo now?

A week?

Two?

It was easy to lose track of time in the fast and furious world of underground racing. I tried to think back, but my memory was a blur of fast cars, gambling pits, and lots and lots of alcohol.

I'd definitely gotten the attention of a lot of women. Money and cars turned these girls on like the flip of a switch. The old me would've fucked every one.

But I was different now.

Married.

Even if my wife had basically told me to get lost.

The elevator dinged open.

I heard the warning rev of an engine. Barely a second later, three cars raced by in front of us, their tires screaming as they skidded over the cement. The smell of burnt rubber, smoke, and premium gasoline filled the air, and I inhaled it like an addict.

Shinji stepped out onto the roof of the parking complex, another fleet of supercars on display. We moved through the rows, walking toward a custom Acura NSX GT3.

I admired the sleek, aerodynamic design, the matte black finish swallowing the light around it. The hood was popped open, and there seemed to be ... an ass sticking out of it?

Fuck, these drugs were hitting me hard.

I shook my head and blinked hard, but the ass was still there.

A hot, shapely piece of ass.

"Azusa!" Shinji yelled.

The ass, it turned out, was connected to a woman.

Azusa turned around, placing her hands on her hips. She wore mechanic's overalls, so form-fitting around her curves that the outfit left little to the imagination. The front was unzipped—leaving her toned stomach and full bra exposed.

She had dark, dazzling eyes and full lips, her long black hair tied up in a loose side ponytail. She had some soot on her cheek, sweat dripping down her neck and her front.

Damn, she's hot.

Shinji said something in Japanese, and she returned a rapid-fire response, looking me up and down.

"*Kannichiwa*," I tried.

"Your Japanese is terrible," she responded in perfect English.

"Your English isn't half bad," I shot back.

"Xavier, this is Azusa," Shinji intervened.

Azusa crossed her arms as she assessed me, inadvertently pushing her amazing breasts together. I felt something stir in my loins, and I ripped my gaze away.

"You sure he's up for it?" she asked Shinji.

"Oh yeah," Shinji said. He patted me on the back. "This guy's a fucking stallion."

"Up for what?" I asked.

"My baby," Azusa patted the roof of the car fondly, "is racing in a few days. But my damned driver pissed out on me."

"Yusuke broke his wrist," Shinji reminded her.

"You can still drive with a broken wrist," Azusa said, deadpan. "Anyway, I'm out a driver. And Shinji recommended you, hot shot."

"Woah, hang on," I said. "You want me behind the wheel? I haven't raced since Monaco, Shinji."

I glanced at the car, and I couldn't help but imagine myself driving it. I pictured the engine screaming beneath me, the feel of the car shifting gears at my touch.

"You've got the blood of a racer, Xavier," Shinji said, leaning in. "Besides, Azusa would be ever so grateful." He wiggled his eyebrows at me.

"Fuck off with that," I laughed, punching his shoulder.

Azusa watched us, a twinkle in her eye. She opened the driver side door.

"Get in, hot shot. We'll see if we can't seduce you yet." She threw me a wink.

I got in, the leather racing seat molding to me like I was meant for it.

She leaned down, her arms draped on the roof so that her chest hung right in front of my face. She smelled like an exotic flower.

I shook my head.

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

"Wait, you can drive manual, right?" she asked, nodding over to the stick shift.

"Seriously?" I scoffed.

She grinned.

"3.5-liter, twin turbocharged V6 engines. State of the art chassis. All you could want in a car."

"The gearbox?" I asked.

"Six-speed, sequential-shift racing." She turned to me, a look of approval in her eyes. "You know your stuff."

I laughed. This chick was a total gearhead. I found myself more interested in her, our mutual love of cars an easy draw. I ran my hand over the dashboard.

"She got a name?" I asked.

"*Izunami*."

"Beautiful," I breathed.

"So, are you in or are you in?" she asked, her eyes shining.

I placed my hands over the steering wheel, gripping it tightly.

"I'm in."

"FUUUUCKKK YEAHHH!" Shinji yelled, punching the air. "WE GOT A SQUAD!"

"Hey! Simmer down!" Azusa laughed.

She turned to me with a devious smirk.

"Show me how good you are at handling a stick, hotshot."

ANGELA

I stared at the image on the ultrasound, my mouth hanging open in disbelief.

I blinked, rubbing at my eyes. The image was still there.

"Congratulations, Angela," Dr. Carmichael smiled. "You're going to have twins!"

Twins?

"Hey, Doc," I began.

"Leo," he reminded me.

"Hey Leo," I amended. "Can you pinch me?"

He laughed at my dazed expression.

"Sorry, Angela, but I took an oath. *Do no harm*, and all that."

"I won't tell if you don't," I promised.

"Maybe if you caught me on my off hours," he said with a wink, "otherwise, you're just going to have to take my word for it."

"Twins," I repeated. "Wow."

"That's usually the reaction to the news." He began cleaning up the gel on my belly. "Your husband couldn't make it again?"

My heart skipped a beat, my face falling.

"Oh, no," I said. "He's ... busy."

He smiled, trying to cheer me up. "Well, you can call him with the news! I'm sure he'll be thrilled once he hears."

I nodded, though I didn't believe it.

He probably wouldn't even pick up.

Dr. Carmichael finished cleaning me up, then stood to leave. "Well, I'd say this checkup was a success! I'll see you next —"

"We had a fight, actually," I said before I could stop myself. Where did that come from? Why was I telling *him*?

He sat back down.

"Are you okay?" he asked with genuine concern.

"Y-yeah," I stammered. "Sorry, I didn't mean to put this on you."

"It's no problem." He shook his head, smiling. "If you'd like, we can talk about it."

I hesitated. Should I really be talking about this with my doctor?

"We're ... spending some time apart," I said slowly. "The pregnancy came at an awkward time."

Dr. Carmichael reached forward to place his hand over mine, and he gave it a gentle squeeze. His touch was warm and comforting.

"Pregnancy can be a very stressful thing," he said. "It's natural for it to cause some friction between couples sometimes. Things are going to be okay—I promise."

I nodded, taking his words to heart. I looked into his eyes and found that I felt calmer. More in control.

"Thanks, Doc...er... Leo. That helps a lot."

He smiled, giving my hand another squeeze before standing up.

"I'll see you again in a few weeks."

I sighed as I hung up, Xavier's voicemail cutting off.

I left Japan almost two weeks ago. Was he seriously not coming back? I'd hoped to at least be able to call him, text him, anything.

I hoped he was okay.

Was he even thinking about me?

I cradled my baby bump, slowly but surely getting larger.

Was he even thinking about our kids?

These days I walked around with a gaping wound in my chest. It felt like there was a crater where my heart should've been.

I trudged around like a zombie, only going through the motions of daily life.

I sat cross-legged on my bed. The silence in the penthouse was deafening.

Lucille was on an extended vacation with her husband in Italy, and she wouldn't be back until after the new year.

I felt so alone. The walls around me were closing in.

Then, an idea hit me, and I opened up my phone once again.

Angela

hey girls! Anyone up for a sleepover at my place soon? I have news to share



Dustin

OMG. YES. I've got news too



Em

we HAVE to catch up! I'll tell Lucas that I'm going to have a girls night out



Zoe

yes yes yes yes!

I smiled as we texted back and forth, planning for the night.

I think this is just what I need.