The Arrangement

A Life Unlived

I stared at my laptop screen, soaking up the photos of Xavier like a fiend looking for a fix. The last time I saw him, he

ANGELA

And I was the one that kicked him while he was down.

had looked so wounded. He'd run away, hoping to pick up the shattered pieces of his life from the bottom of a bottle.

The first picture loaded, and I felt myself fill up with emotions.

I took a deep breath.

Was that what he was doing now? Was he dealing with a broken heart?

I looked at a photo of him getting a champagne shower next to a fancy race car. I recognized the man in the topknot next to him from Marlena's gala.

Shinji, was it?

At least he was with a friend.

There was another woman in the picture, beneath Xavier's arm, laughing as she showered in the champagne, too. My heart dropped. She was beautiful. Was she his friend as well?

Maybe more than friends?

Xavier wouldn't do that. He wasn't that mean, spiteful person he was when we first met. We were going through a

I trusted him, even if we were half a world apart. I clicked through the various articles until one caught my eye.

I blinked, reading it again and again.

I shrugged to myself as I clicked on the article.

TOKYO ROMANCE: IS THE KNIGHT MARRIAGE IN JEOPARDY?

looked like Xavier, but it couldn't be him.

Huh? I looked up to the ceiling. Was there a leak? Not that I could see. Frowning, I looked back down at my laptop when another drop of water fell.

I felt moisture on my cheeks, and I realized with a start that these were tears.

That probably isn't even Xavier.

And another.

He wouldn't ...

felt like a pit opened up beneath me, and I was falling...

All of the emotions I'd been suppressing for weeks suddenly surfaced at once. Ugly. Broken. Like the splintered remains of a sea wreck.

It's over.

"Yes?"

than sitting in here.

eyes on you the whole way."

twinkling like satellites.

I nodded.

"Hey!"

me off.

"So you want me to give up?"

the same heat as Raijin."

blond hair dusted with snow.

with Leo.

I paused.

Tokyo?

"To the death, then."

Deeper and deeper into the dark.

The intercom for the elevator buzzed.

But now I would be alone. My children would grow up without their father.

I looked up, my face a watery mess. I tried to wipe away the worst of it before going to answer the call.

"Hey, Angela," a familiar voice said.

"I know this is a little sudden, but do you wanna go out for a walk with me?" he asked.

"Mrs. Knight," the doorman said. "There's someone here to see you."

"Um ..." "Just around the block. Maybe to the park," he suggested.

"Okay," I said. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

I revved *Izanami*'s engine in response, my grip tightening on the steering wheel.

"This is some high-tech shit for a street race," I noted. "Super Bowl of the underground, baby," Shinji said. He'd gotten his own headset this time.

I looked down the line to the four other racers, each of them behind the wheel of a car with serious horsepower.

I leaned forward, looking up at the night sky through the windshield. I could spy the telltale lights of the drones,

ANGELA

Leo and I strolled through Central Park, snow crunching beneath our boots. The weather was mild today. People were

I took a step away from him. "What?"

"I'm undefeated in snowball fights," he said. "And you're going to be my next victim!"

snow. It was like frosting on a cake. "Though another Lamaze class wouldn't be too bad."

"You just want an excuse to get another massage," he joked.

I crouched down, scooping up a handful of snow.

"Damn it!" I slammed my hands on the steering wheel. This asshole had been messing with me the whole race. "Just back off, Xavier," Shinji said. "*Raijin*'s driver is a crook. He'll straight run you off the road if he thinks you'll pass him."

"It isn't worth it." I couldn't see him, but I knew Shinji was just as pissed off as I was. "It's just bad luck that we're in

"Fuck that." I slammed on the gas, *Izanami's* engine snarling like a demon possessed as I raced down the street. "I'm

I laughed, breathless, trying to warm my hands. We were both covered in snow. Leo laughed right along with me, his

If things had turned out a little differently, if I'd never made that arrangement with Brad, maybe I would've ended up

"What do you mean?" I asked, pretending that I didn't know what he was talking about. He gave me a serious look.

My eyes went wide with shock. What could I say? That I was a shitty wife whose husband ditched her for some girl in

I slammed on the brakes, careening dangerously. I straightened out, but fell way behind the process.

My mind spun down a strange new path. But it wasn't altogether unpleasant.

We could've met after Em's pregnancy appointments, gotten to know each other

I slid sideways into the drift, throwing the throttle wide open. I zoomed past him, and for a second, I felt the thrill of

I lost control as my car spun wildly. I strained against the steering wheel, fighting for control, but it was no use. The

Xavier was okay. He was still alive, at least. His eyes looked sunken, deep bags weighing them down. He was thinner than the last time I'd seen him, and not in a good way. I remembered that he used to race cars when he was younger, especially after his heart was broken by DiDi, his ex.

I shook my head. rough patch right now, but he was my husband. We'd pledged our lives to each other.

It was probably another fabricated story. As a Knight, I'd become used to this. There was a blurry photo of a man and a woman outside of a nightclub sharing a passionate kiss. Sure, it kind of I closed the tab, shaking my head. The things reporters would do for a scoop A drop of water fell onto my laptop.

Was I crying? I tried to wipe the tears away, but they kept coming. He wouldn't do that. I choked out a sob, covering my mouth.

I collapsed into myself, the tears falling uncontrollably. I cried out what was left of the broken remains of my heart. It

I saw the future we had together go up in smoke. I once had fantasies of watching our children grow up together. I imagined we would take them to their first day of school, drop them off for college I imagined growing old and grey together, surrounded by beautiful grandchildren.

"Leo?" "Are you okay?" he asked. He could probably tell how messed up I was just from my voice. "Yeah." I took a deep, shaky breath. "Did you need something?"

XAVIER "You ready to go?" Azusa asked, her voice buzzing in my earpiece.

"That's what I like to hear," she said. "This isn't a typical circuit, X. They'll update me with the path as you go. I'll have

I looked around at the empty penthouse, to my laptop stained with tears. Being with Leo would be infinitely better

This was going to be tough. An eager crowd lined the streets, shaking with anticipation.

"Let's make some noise." The cloth fell.

making snowmen and snow forts while others glided along the ice on skates.

As usual, a model walked to the center of the road, a red strip of cloth in her hands.

"The first part is straight down 600 meters, then a sharp left," Azusa reported.

The fresh air was helping me clear my mind. I'd tried to hide the evidence of my crying with some makeup, but my eyes still looked puffy and red. "So, I'm sorry this isn't another Lamaze class," he began. "But I thought you might be the kind of girl who likes walks in the park."

"I do, actually. I used to walk here all the time." I never got tired of Central Park. Especially now, seeing it covered in

"Well, you are good with your hands. You should consider being a masseuse if this whole doctor thing doesn't work

out." "Do you know what else these hands can do?" He wiggled his fingers at me, a mischievous grin on his face.

He reached down scooped up a handful of snow, tossing it right at me. It hit my coat with a dull thud.

"Next right!" Azusa ordered. I hit the brakes, flicking the steering wheel to start drifting into the turn. Her directions came at the last second, so I had to take my turns aggressively. I began to come out of this one when the driver in the white Lancer Evolution cut

XAVIER

going to teach this fucker a lesson." "Don't scratch the paint," Azusa murmured. "Next left!" **ANGELA**

We sat down next to each other on a bench, catching our breath.

Suddenly, I could see what life could be like without Xavier.

"I saw the news, Angela. About your husband."

"I need to talk to you about something," he said.

victory coursing through my veins.

The headlights of an oncoming car!

Was this going where I thought it was going?

"Angela, I—"

Suddenly, my phone rang.

Then his car bumped mine.

"Final turn, X!" Azusa said. "Last left, and you're home free."

scream of the tires deafened me, and I was blinded by the bright headlights.

"Are you feeling better now?" Leo asked.

Leo gently took my hands in his. Even after the snowball fight, they felt warm and comforting.

I saw the turn coming, and again I saw the white Lancer Evolution angle himself in front of me to cut me off. *Not this time, prick.*

XAVIER

ANGELA

"I've seen how much you've been hurting the past few months," he said. "And I hate to see you like this. I hate to see you hurting because of him." My heart beat like a hummingbird's.

The world around me seemed to fade away. It shrunk until it was just me and Leo sitting on the bench, my hands in

his. He looked at me with such open concern and vulnerability that I was caught off guard.

"Is this Angela Knight?" an unfamiliar voice asked.

Whatever spell I was under shattered, and suddenly I was brought back to the real world, in the middle of Central Park. I slipped my hand out from Leo's, reaching for my phone. His expression was unreadable. "Sorry ..." I mumbled. I glanced at the number. I didn't recognize it. I picked up the phone.

I gasped, fear clutching at my heart. "Oh my god," I brought my hand to my mouth. "Please, no

"Speaking." "I'm calling because your husband has listed you as his emergency contact." "There's been an accident."