

Here's to Revenge

BRAD

I was worried about her. The stuff she was watching, the stuff I couldn't protect her from. She was strong, that I had no doubt about.

You had to be strong after going through what she'd gone through.

But Angela, she was a warrior. The way she handled everything, the way she was so focused on making sure the battle succeeded that she didn't bother checking in with herself.

So that was why I did.

We were watching the bastard flirt his way along with Betty, the young woman who'd agreed to help, when I cast a glance at Angela. She was pale as a ghost, her eyes wider than I've ever seen them.

She wasn't blinking, wasn't moving. So I helped her get into a chair at the table, somewhere she would still have a direct line of vision to the screens.

I knew she'd put up a fight if I asked her to look away.

I brought her a bottle of water, but it was left untouched. She was going through it, and I couldn't help but feel responsible.

But then again, I knew if it were me, I'd want to see it. All of it.

I wouldn't get the closure necessary to move on otherwise.

"Can I get you another?" Lemor asked the young woman, signaling to the bartender.

"Sure," Betty said, and even my old ears could tell her voice was filled with nerves.

The bartender made the drinks, and for a split second, I was fearful Lemor would watch him pour tonic water into Betty's martini rather than vodka, but he was so taken by her chest he didn't look at anything else.

"I have to say I'm pleasantly surprised by your friendliness this evening, Ms. Watson."

"Call me Betty," she replied. I looked at Angela, who winced. While the whole situation unfolding was tough to watch, only she could really understand the magnitude of the pain.

"All right then, Betty. A toast," he said, raising his filled glass. She did the same with her second martini.

"To new friendships," he said, and I wanted to punch the bastard through the screen. She smiled a strained smile, and they clinked their glasses.

Just then Angela looked at me, and she looked like a child.

"Maybe you were right," she said. "Maybe this is too hard."

I took a seat next to her, and knowing all that I could do was tell her the truth, I started to talk.

ANGELA

After Lemor and Betty clinked glasses, I could feel my stomach churning over and over again. I didn't know if I was going to puke or faint, but it felt like it was definitely going to be one of those.

And then I had to remind myself that this was the easiest part. The real trouble hadn't even started yet.

I turned to find Brad standing beside me. When had he come over to the table? I was so focused on the screens that I had no idea what was going on around me.

The second he felt my gaze on him, he turned, and seeing how eager he was to help me, to make this all better, that made me feel even more.

"Maybe you were right. Maybe this is too hard," I said. "And this is just the beginning."

That was the thought that wouldn't escape me, that I'd have to watch that monster on the other screen, the one recording the hotel room, not the hotel bar. I'd have to watch him do what he'd never attempted with me.

I was a big girl, and I knew what was coming. But the idea was enough to make me run out of the hotel.

Sure, I'd known what I was walking into. But seeing it in action, seeing Betty, the one who had helped me, put into this situation ...

I wasn't sure I was equipped to handle it.

I took the earpiece out of my ear, putting it on the table. Brad had taken a seat next to me, and now he looked back at me, something between pity and sturdiness playing on his face.

"I won't lie to you," he said. "It's not going to be pretty. And you can walk out of this room at any moment, knowing that Lemor will never be a threat to you again."

He put a hand on top of my hand, and his warmth oozed through me, somehow calming me down. "But if it were me, and this were my nightmare, I'd stay. I'd stay and watch the sonofabitch incriminate himself on camera, make sure I had something in my mind to replay that wasn't him winning. I'd want to watch him fall."

Brad's words sunk in, and I knew he was right. I needed to feel empowered, just once, when it came to Lemor.

And sitting here in this suite, watching his every move, knowing something he didn't, that was empowering.

With a slow nod, I put the earpiece back in my ear. *You can do this*, I told myself.

After their fourth drink, Lemor asked the question.

"Would you like to come upstairs? I have a standing reservation at this hotel every weekend. Weekdays are enough Jersey for me."

Betty laughed, and it almost sounded genuine. I was impressed with her performance. If it had been me, I'd have chickened out long ago.

"I have a room here too," she said, "a little staycation."

"Oh, lovely!" he said, clearly a little bit more than tipsy. He motioned to the bartender for the bill and offered his card.

When the bartender took it, he said, "Bring this up to my suite, huh, boy? No time to wait around for it now."

And then he helped Betty off her stool, making no attempt at hiding the fact that he was ogling her.

They left the bar together, and we watched them walk to the elevator bank. For the minute and a half they were in the elevator and walking to her hotel room, we couldn't see or hear them.

That minute and a half sent my mind reeling. What if he did something to her? What if we didn't catch it? What if we were too late?

But then they were opening the door to the hotel room.

"HERE WE GO!" one of the men in black shouted, and I exhaled. We were back.

Lemor opened the minibar fridge and popped a bottle of champagne while Betty looked around the room nervously. She accepted a champagne flute, and they toasted again, and I had to remind myself to breathe.

"You know, Betty, you're always welcome to come back to the Gelsa team for good, full-time. I miss having you around the office. Getting to see you walking down the hallway ...," he said, directing his comments to her breasts.

"In fact I'd love to have you working on my team, under me, directly."

"What's your proposal exactly?" she asked, leaning closer to him.

I had to swallow the bile in my throat. I had no idea how she was keeping it together.

"Well, we can arrange something, I'm sure. If you make me happy, I can make you very, very happy. Anything I say at Gelsa goes, my dear. It's time you left Curixon."

He twirled a piece of her hair around his finger, his face just inches from hers. "If you keep me company, I'll make sure you have a real part at Gelsa. No more assistant work. Let's get you into management."

"So if I sleep with you ...you'll recruit me into management? That's more than a six-figure salary."

"And you'd deserve every penny of it."

"That's it, boys!" another man in black shouted, and two of them raced to the door.

"Move, move, move." Then they were out of the suite, and I hoped that they'd get there in time.

"So?" Lemor asked her, lowering his face even more. She was visibly shaking now, that much I could make out.

I could see the champagne in her hand dancing inside the glass.

"Hurry up," I whispered, willing the men to get there already.

"So ...," Betty answered, so quietly I just barely made it out.

And then he was kissing her, her champagne flute falling to the ground as he pushed her back onto the bed, straddling her. I threw my earpiece down and pushed my chair away from the table.

"NO!" I yelled, feeling the tears and the vomit coming. Brad put a hand on my shoulder.

"It's okay, Angela, it's okay ..."

But I just pushed him off. I couldn't believe it. Lemor was all over her, touching her, and she couldn't push him off ...

"Look!" Brad said, pointing to the screen.

I wiped my eyes and looked. There they were, barging through the room and yanking Lemor off of her. He was thrown onto the ground by one while the other helped Betty race out of the room.

My breathing was all over the place, and Brad held out the bottle of water to me. "It's done," he said as I gingerly sipped.

"It's all over. We'll keep him in a separate room until the police come. We'll have the tapes ready."

"Where does she go now?" I asked between panting breaths.

"Home," Brad said. "We all get to go home."

I thought of the penthouse. It had never seemed so safe.

I woke up Saturday morning to some thudding noise. On my car ride home from Tribeca last night, I couldn't stop thinking about Betty's strength. How she had persevered in a situation unfathomably hard to persevere in.

It was inspiring.

I wanted to feel that kind of strength. The last time I'd felt like that was when I interviewed for Mr. Kinfeld, when I'd felt certain that my qualifications would make me the right fit for the job.

But ever since my rejection, and with everything that had happened with Dad and the Knights, I'd lacked that sense of certainty. I hadn't felt in control at all.

I missed the feeling of having a job I knew I'd be good at. A job that made me feel productive, like I could make a difference.

With Lemor no longer a threat, I could start applying again, really applying, without fear of what he might do. The thought made me smile, even though my hands were still shaking intensely from everything I'd watched in the hotel room.

When I'd arrived back in the penthouse, I was exhausted and fell asleep almost immediately. And if it weren't for this thudding, I bet I could've slept even longer.

I didn't bother changing out of my PJs as I walked out of the room. Xavier didn't usually wake up until the afternoon on Saturdays. I thought the thudding was coming from the kitchen, but as I neared the door to Xavier's room, I realized it was half open.

And before I could stop myself, I had taken one step too many—and had a clear line of sight into Xavier's room. Where he was intimately entangled with not one but two women.

My gasp came out before I could stop it, and it was loud enough to the attention of all three. I had never felt the heat rise to my cheeks so quickly.

They were all ...so naked. And so tangled up, like gum in curly hair.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry," I stammered, but Xavier just laughed. And the women joined in.

"Come on, sweetheart, join us! It's warm in here," he said, as demeaning as ever. The women kept laughing. I was humiliated.

"That's my wife," I heard him say as I ran back to my bedroom.

Angela
Em

Angela
I need you

Angela
Em???

Em wasn't answering, but I needed someone to vent to. And fast. I put on the first jeans and blouse I could find and sprinted from my bedroom to the elevator, faster than I'd ever run before.

I didn't open my eyes beyond a narrow squint until the doors closed.

When I got to Em's flower shop, the beautiful arrangement of flowers outside the storefront distracted me from the scene I'd just endured in the penthouse. Em had organized shelves of cute potted plants, with a couple larger potted plants on either side of the door.

The flowers were brightly colored and in full bloom, and it all just looked picture-perfect.

Unlike my marriage.

I was so caught up in my own mind that I opened the door without wondering why it was closed. Em never closed the shop's door during business hours.

"You'll never guess what Xavier just did to ...," But I trailed off when I realized what was happening. Em was sitting on the counter, making out with a man who stood between her legs.

I was about to stammer an apology and run back outside when the man turned to see who was speaking. And that was when I saw the man's face. It was Lucas.

My brother Lucas.

My brother Lucas making out with my best friend.