The Arrangement S.S. Sahoo

Anything for You

ANGELA

"NO!" Dustin stopped in his tracks, eyes as wide as mine.

"...and I walked in and she was on the counter, making out with MY BROTHER!"

Xavier and I loved each other. We were at SoHo 149, one of the city's most exclusive galleries, setting up for Dustin's showing that evening. I was

"I know," I said, wanting to tell him about what I'd seen with Xavier too but knowing I couldn't. Dustin still thought

helping him unload paintings from the rental van and revealing what I'd seen between Em and Lucas the previous day.

"Nothing!" I exclaimed, still not quite believing it myself.

"What did they say to you?"

But it was still weird.

"Do you have plans tonight?" "Why?" he snapped, his head whipping up to face mine.

"What is it?" he asked. He was back behind his desk, leaning over his computer, checking something.

"I... My friend, he's having an art show. At SoHo 149. And I thought it would be nice for

"Yes," I said, softly but sturdily. "You would bring more people and more publicity."

certain he'd be able to notice my quivering voice.

"You're transparent, you know."

And hoping he wouldn't use it against me. But he just laughed.

"For your honesty," he said, his sarcasm biting into me.

"But I thought it'd be good for you, too." Now he looked at me again.

"Do you want a medal?" "What?"

"My friend, the artist, it's Dustin. The one Mr. Graden's wife saw me shopping with. I thought it'd be good to have you

I bit my cheek, waiting for his response. The idea had just come to me a few seconds before I said it aloud, and I knew

She had the nerve to come into my office like she was entitled to be here. My day was already on the downswing. Dad

had come by to let me know Graden hadn't been answering any of his calls and asked if he'd said anything to me about

And now I was pissed she was here in my office, looking all nervous and gentle, even though we both knew better. It

"But I thought it'd be good for you, too," she said, about me making an appearance at her friend's art show.

XAVIER

"You want me at an art show? To what, get more people there? Get more press?" He was scanning me for answers.

it would either be smart or devastatingly stupid. It felt like I was waiting for Anubis to weigh my heart.

in the gallery so the press could see you and me together, that we're both friends with him."

the proposal. I didn't tell him about what happened when we'd gotten happy hour drinks or how he hadn't been taking any of my calls, either. I couldn't.

I was pissed that my dad kept looking over my shoulder, waiting for me to screw up.

was part of her game, being soft-spoken. It was how she got away with all the shit she pulled.

in the gallery so the press could see you and me together, that we're both friends with him."

photo in the press of me and the guy she'd been shopping with would calm him down.

But no woman who got herself into a marriage with a Knight, who chose money and name over dignity, could be gentle. Underneath her softness was a dragon breathing fire, and I wanted to make sure the girl knew she couldn't burn me.

The fucking balls on her, to try and spin it around like that.

So, yeah, I was pissed about the Graden deal.

I looked at her, watched her avert her eyes from my glare, her hands holding each other tight. Her cheeks grew redder and redder by the second. She's an expert, I reminded myself. An expert at playing the part.

But then I thought of Graden and the deal I'd been so close to landing before she fucked it all up. Maybe having a

I waited a few more moments, letting her linger in the tension. I was sure she was going crazy, waiting for my

"My friend, the artist, it's Dustin. The one Mr. Graden's wife saw me shopping with. I thought it'd be good to have you

"What time?" I asked finally. Her eyes met mine immediately and went wide. "Eight thirty."

"Make sure the *Times* is there," I said, and then I sat back down at my desk.

Maybe he'd believe my wife was loyal.

response, and I loved having that sort of power.

I cleared my throat. Leave me the fuck alone.

If I was going to be in the press at some downtown no-name art show, it had better be the *Times*. I cast a glance back at my wife, who was still standing there, an expression on her face that looked like she couldn't tell if this were reality or not.

"Sorry. Sorry," she said then pushed the office door open. "Thank you, Xavier," she said, turning back to me before

And then she was gone.

walking out. It sounded genuine, but I didn't so much as acknowledge it.

I'd thought that coming to Xavier's office would be a good idea because he'd have to let me in and he couldn't scream. I was his wife, after all, so what would his colleagues think if he called me curse words? But now I was realizing how out of place I looked. My hair was in a messy bun and my ripped jeans and white T-shirt, while perfect for a day helping to organize a gallery, were not typical business-office attire. And then there were my Converse. But it was too late; the receptionist had already seen me. "Hi, I'm here to see my husband. Xavier Knight?" "Oh, absolutely," she said, rushing around her desk and motioning for me to follow her. "Come this way." I couldn't believe it. The woman, probably around my age, was treating me like she was ...intimidated or something. I don't think I'd ever intimidated anybody in my whole life. "It's beautiful outside," I said, trying to put her at ease as we walked through the halls. "Oh, absolutely, Mrs. Knight," she responded quickly. What is happening? When we got to Xavier's office, she knocked on the closed glass door. Everything was glass: the door, the walls could see everything inside the office, including my husband. He was dressed smartly in a black suit with a pale blue button-down, and he was rubbing his temples when the receptionist knocked. He saw her, then me, and stood up slowly. Then he walked over to the door and opened it. "You know to call me before you let a visitor in," he said, his words directed at the receptionist. "I...I know," she stuttered. I wanted to hug her. "It was my fault," I said. "I have something to talk to you about that couldn't wait for home." "Well, come in, dear," he responded, emphasizing the last word and opening the door farther. I stepped inside the office, wondering what I'd gotten myself into. "Close the door behind you," he instructed. I weighed my options, realizing I didn't have a valid reason not to. One that I could verbalize, anyway. "Sorry to interrupt your day," I said softly, hoping we could be civil. I'd broach the subject lightly, casually, and maybe he wouldn't be so put off. I clasped my hands in front of my hips, trying to stop them from shaking.

... I

...for you to come," I got out,

stop ignoring me Lucas angie, come on I was in the elevator of Xavier's office building when I saw Lucas's messages. I wanted to respond, I did, but I still couldn't figure out what to say. So I dropped the phone back into my bag. The elevator opened smoothly, and I stepped out onto the 38th floor. I saw the reception desk and walked over.

help but feel good. I had used the Knight name to secure SoHo 149 for the evening. When I contacted him last week, Mr. Johnson was less than receptive to the idea of an unknown using his gallery, but I assured him that Dustin had world-class talent because, well, wouldn't a Knight know? He said he'd need some time to think about it, so when he finally called me back last night, I was surprised. It took about half an hour to convince him, but he eventually agreed, and even though I was shaking on my end of the phone, I was proud of myself for keeping my voice level the whole time. Or at least, the majority of the time. SoHo 149 would allow Dustin to have his first real art showing at a place that would all but guarantee him patrons, which was obviously important for a newcomer. And not just patrons but people who knew and cared about art. When I told him I'd arranged the gallery for his showing, I thought he was going to faint. "Thank you, thank you!" he sang, and then he ran around the coffee counter to hug me. He lifted me off the ground and twirled me around, and it was enough to take my mind off the whole Em-and-Lucas thing. For a while, anyway. Dustin left the coffee shop immediately and rented a van, put his twelve most favorite paintings into the trunk, and I met him downtown. Mr. Johnson closed the gallery for the afternoon so Dustin could set up. Because everything was so last minute, the whole process was rushed, but SoHo 149 was booked through for the next month. When I gave Dustin the option of waiting, he screamed, "No! No more waiting!" So that was that. "It'd be funny if we did all this and no one came," he said, pulling me out of my thoughts. "Like if we were a tree in the forest and nobody saw us fall, did we really?" "Dustin, you're at SoHo 149. That's the best of the best, according to *The New Yorker*, anyway. People will come." "You're right," he said, stuffing more noodles into his mouth. Then he looked at me. "Do you think Xavier might stop by?" My stomach dropped. Xavier. I still hadn't told him about any of this. It wasn't like we talk a lot anyway, but I knew he'd be mad. He always was. Dustin's eyes were pleading with me now; we both knew that Xavier attending meant there would be more socialites and press in the gallery. "I don't know, Dustin ..." "Could you ask? Please?" I looked at my friend, at the nerves clearly taking over his body. I took a deep breath and nodded. What kind of friend would I be if I didn't put myself on the line? Lucas

My best friend and my brother. How long had they been lying to me about it? Were they making out at my wedding? At my college graduation? It felt like a clichéd betrayal. "I was so shocked that I just ran out." "Have they tried to call you?" "Em's called me, like six times. And Lucas's left a couple voicemails. But I still don't know what to say to them." "Well, how do you feel?" he asked, and it dawned on me that there could be a world where I wasn't mad. Where I was happy that two of my favorite people found each other. "I don't know." We pulled the last two bubble-wrapped paintings out of the trunk and walked them into the gallery, laying them out on the tables beside the others. There were twelve altogether, but I couldn't see any of them under the protective layers of plastic wrap. "Can we unravel them?" I asked. He was circulating the space now, looking from empty wall to empty wall. It was a fairly large gallery, with an openconcept layout that used pillars to give it shape. The walls were white, and the floors were wood, I assumed so that all of the attention would be on the artist's work. "I want to nail down the sequence first," he responded, still scanning the walls. I could tell he was nervous, even though he was still acting like his confident self. From the second we got to the gallery and met Mr. Johnson, the owner, up until right now, he had been balling his hands into fists and slowly tapping his legs with them. "It's going to be amazing," I said, going over to stand next to him. I put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed. He looked down at me and smiled, and then he turned back to the walls. "I'm thinking we go black and white and let it bleed into color, and then for the finale, I'll give 'em gray scale. A metaphor. Rules, chaos, then the realization that neither exists without the other." I was stunned. Who knew Dustin Stirling was so eloquent? "I have no idea what you said, but it sounds great." He nodded. "I thought so, too." I ordered us lunch, and it came almost immediately. We sat on the cold floor and dug into our lo mein, and I couldn't