

The Arrangement

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Other Lovers

XAVIER

I hurried my pace, running down the hall and turning a corner. There she was. Angela, wearing nothing but a kimono, showing off a hint of cleavage, her bare legs exposed.

The SLUT!

“What the hell is this?” I said, seething.

Sitting across from her was a man whose face I had yet to see. He turned his head and smiled, waving.

“Xavier, welcome home!” Dustin said.

Dustin. Of course, it was fucking Dustin. Angela’s little pet project, the artist we had helped make a superstar. Her little boy-toy.

“What are you doing here, Dusty?” I asked, intentionally messing up his name once again.

“Dustin,” he corrected. “I just wanted to check on my bestie here. And you, of course, Xavier. I’m so glad you’re both okay.”

I was surprised then by the look Dustin gave me. Like his eyes were traveling. Like he was checking me out.

But why the hell would he be doing that if he was obsessed with Angela? I pushed the thought aside and allowed my festering anger to grow instead.

I said to Angela through gritted teeth, “What is he doing here?”

“Oh, we wanted to catch up over some drinks ...” But she trailed off, seeing that every word out of her mouth was only making me angrier.

My hands were clenched into fists. If I were a cartoon, steam would be shooting out of my ears right about now.

Why? It had nothing to do with the fact that she looked so comfortable with another man, did it?

“There’s no need to be upset, Xavier,” Dustin said, standing up. “I dropped by unannounced. Angela—”

“Angela can speak for herself. Isn’t that right?”

“Xavier ...” she said. “I ...I just wanted to talk to my friend.”

“Your friend?!”

I looked at Dustin. At his oh-so-fucking-cool hipster look, his perfectly symmetrical face. And for some strange reason I couldn’t explain, I felt jealous.

I wished I could make Angela smile and giggle the way Dustin did. I wished I could have his easygoing charm. His warmth.

I wished she would look at me the way she looked at *him*.

Was I being crazy? Maybe. I didn’t know what the hell had come over me. My brain was telling me that I shouldn’t care one fucking bit. She was a means to an end, my wife only on paper. The way I keep my role as CEO of Knight Enterprises. That was it.

But my body was saying something different. Every second spent with those two together in the same room was making my skin crawl. It felt like hell on earth.

“This is MY HOME!” I yelled. “Who enters and leaves is up to ME, understand? Not you, goddamnit. And *definitely* not Dusty here.”“Please, Xavier ...” Angela stammered.

She looked scared. She looked traumatized. She looked like she might faint right there in the middle of our living room.

And the worst part was it was because of me.

I stopped and shook my head. I had come into this room to ask Angela a favor, and instead, I’d blown up at her, screaming about the presence of this Dustin guy. But now he was gone, and I was still mad.

Mad at myself.

I needed to clear my head. I needed to get away from her. And fast.

“Angela, I ...” I began, but I didn’t know how to finish. For a second, she almost looked hopeful, like I might try to make things right.

But this only confused me more.

Without a second glance, I turned and stormed out of the room. So what if I’d scared Angela a little bit. It wasn’t my fault that I’d caught her flirting with another man.

Maybe he was her lover. How was I supposed to know? I bet he was. I bet she whored herself around and only used the innocent look to make me think she was docile and sweet.

Honestly, what did I fucking care? She didn’t matter to me in the slightest.

I certainly had my lovers, didn’t I? Maybe that was what I needed right now. Some meaningless sex to get my mind off of all this shit.

With that idea rattling through my brain, I pulled out my phone. I knew exactly which girl would do the trick.

She was cute. Shy. And goddamn was she good in the sack.

A tinge of guilt ran through me. An image of Angela staring wide-eyed at me, somehow scared, angry, hopeful, and sad all at once, was burned into my eyes.

I pushed those feelings aside.

Whatever.

I just needed a good fuck.

ANGELA

I was looking at Xavier, but I wasn’t really seeing him. I was seeing Mr. Lemor, my old boss, who had tried to ruin my career and my life for rejecting him.

I was seeing Xavier’s business associate, that creepy Frenchman, Jacques, who had tried to have his way with me.

When I looked at Xavier right now, I was seeing every violent man, every angry man, every terrifying monster that haunted my dreams.

Since the plane crash, I’d been more easily scared by everything. But nothing, nobody scared me as much as the man I called my husband.

I wanted to beg Dustin to stay, to protect me, but I also knew that it was his presence that had so outraged Xavier in the first place.

Maybe if he left, it would be better?

Finally, we heard elevator doors slide shut, and it was just Xavier and me alone. He became quiet all of a sudden, and his expression changed.

I couldn’t understand what he was thinking. I’d never been able to get inside the head of Xavier Knight. What good would it do me now?

He clearly still hated me more than he hated anyone in the world. Didn’t he?

After Xavier stormed out, all sorts of thoughts had been running through my head. So I decided to take a run and clear my mind.

Sweating, panting, moving—it helped a lot.

My leg was still hurting, obviously, but I could tell I was on the mend, and very soon I’d be back to my normal healthy self.

Healthy physically, if not mentally.

I realized that maybe it had been wrong of me to invite Dustin over. He’d tried to cover for me, claiming he’d shown up on his own, but the truth was I missed my friend’s face and wanted to let him know I was okay.

I should’ve thought about Xavier’s feelings, though. I knew how much he disliked Dustin.

Yes, I might have been scared of Xavier’s outbursts, but this time, his rage didn’t seem to be coming from a place of genuine “hate.”

He didn’t call me a gold-digger. Not once.

He didn’t bring up the fact that I’d married him for his money, however inaccurate that might be.

He seemed flustered and beside himself, barking like a hurt puppy. I wondered what it was really about.

I kept thinking about the Xavier I had met on that island and how far away he seemed right now. Maybe, if I just apologized, I could reconnect with him?

I had to try.

When I got home, I hurried into the shower. I didn’t want to show up at his bedroom door all sweaty and gross.

I wanted to be at my most presentable.

As I felt the hot water cascade down my body, I sighed, satisfied. It felt so good to be clean after being covered in sand and dirt on that island.

Every shower now felt like a complete rebirth. I cherished every droplet.

And as I stepped out, drying myself off and getting dressed, I thought about all I had to be grateful for.

I’d gotten to see my family. My childhood best friend. My favorite artist / barista.

And now I had a chance to make things right with my estranged husband. After the life-and-death experience on the island, how could a little conversation possibly scare me?

I took a deep breath, looking into the mirror.

“Just tell him you’re sorry,” I said to myself. “You can do this, Angela.”

I didn’t apply any makeup. I wanted to be as close to my genuine self as I could be when I approached Xavier’s bedroom.

Mustering up my courage, I walked down the hallway, edging closer to his door.

“Xavier,” I began to say as I raised my hand to knock.

But then I heard it.

A woman’s voice. Moaning. A man’s. Grunting.

The thump-thump-thump that could mean only one thing.

Xavier was having sex with another woman.

I lowered my hand in disbelief and slowly stepped back, eyes watering. How could I be such a fool? Of course he hadn’t changed!

Nothing had changed!

Xavier Knight would go on to screw whomever he pleased for as long as he lived, married or not. Why was I so upset? Why was I so angry?

I didn’t know, but I decided then and there to never try and apologize to Xavier ever again. If he wanted to hurt me, fine.

But I didn’t have to take it lying down.

Lucas liked to say I didn’t have one mean bone in my body, but Danny knew better from all his pranks and nasty jokes. I might not be mean, but I was a master of the cold shoulder.

Xavier Knight was about to realize who he was messing with.