

**The Arrangement**  
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## Mixed Signals

### ANGELA

Since we'd returned from that strange weekend in the Hamptons, Xavier and I had been ...I don't know how to describe it, except to say ...closer.

It wasn't like we were chatting all the time or even breathing much of the same air. I hardly saw him because he was so busy at work. But at night, when he returned from work, we would sit together and eat what Lucille had prepared for us.

Usually, we ate in silence, but every once in a while, I'd catch Xavier looking at me strangely from across the table. And then he'd duck his eyes down, almost as if he were shy.

Xavier Knight, shy?!

It couldn't be possible. I probably wasn't reading him right, that was all.

Still, I had to admit that, ever since we'd shared the same bed, it felt like we had passed an imaginary barrier of some kind. Like we had gone from hating each other to accepting each other to ...

Maybe actually enjoying each other's company?

Again, I was probably just being optimistic. Xavier Knight had made it clear on many occasions how he really felt about me.

But tonight, as we returned to our dance lessons with Kiki, exploring the different kinds of ballroom dancing and deciding which we thought would be the best fit for the competition, I could feel a kind of electricity in the air.

We'd never touched each other physically so much. Even if none of the dances were really clicking for us, it was still exciting.

"Mrs. Knight, please try to loosen up," Kiki chided.

We were in the middle of a waltz, and I felt stupid. *One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three.* It was repetitive, and my mind kept drifting.

Clearly, Kiki could tell because she was clicking her tongue, her arms folded. I blushed, taking a step back from Xavier and putting a hand to my neck.

"Could we try another ...kind?"

"You need to master the basic steps of every ballroom dance if you hope to learn one well," Kiki responded.

But to my surprise, Xavier turned to Kiki. "Actually, I agree with my wife. I don't like the waltz either. What's next?"

Kiki looked aside, surprised and frustrated, and then she approached the guy manning the music. I gave Xavier a small smile as if to say thanks. He wiped his brow.

I hadn't noticed how sweaty he was until now, but it wasn't gross to me. It was manly. His skin seemed to shine, each of his muscles more clearly defined than I'd ever seen them.

It made me wonder what, outside of dancing, he was capable of ...

"Angela?" he asked, smiling a bit.

I looked away, blushing. "Sorry, just got distracted."

"I could tell," he answered with a smirk.

The music changed, thankfully, and so did the subject. We were trying the tango now. But, Jesus, this was *a lot*. It was way too sexy, and every time Xavier would grab my leg or pull me to his chest, my response was to blush and stiffen.

After that came the swing. It was exhilarating and fun, but Xavier and I couldn't nail the timing, which was extremely fast.

Kiki looked like she was about to lose it with us. Her ridiculously slender frame, her narrow face, suddenly didn't look so intimidating to me anymore.

Not when Xavier seemed to have eyes for only me.

"All right," she said, clapping her hands. "Let's try the bolero. I will accompany you two. Step by step. Even if you don't need my help, Xavier."

When she spoke to Xavier, her normally shrill, commanding voice became soft and battery. *Could her seduction techniques be any more transparent?*

I'd never heard of the bolero before, but the second the music started, I knew it would be what Xavier and I danced to at the Silver Jubilee.

When the sultry Spanish music began to play, and I felt Xavier's hand press against the small of my back, all the negative thoughts left my mind.

The slow tempo, the deliberate sensual movements, the eyes fixed upon one another.

I was entranced.

Somehow, my body began to move on its own, finding the rhythm, moving in tune with Xavier's. It felt so natural and *right*.

For a moment, it felt like there was no one in the room but us. No Kiki. No other professional dancers. Just Xavier and me ...

Then I saw a foreign hand travel across Xavier's bulging bicep, and my fantasy was shattered.

"Good, Xavier," Kiki whispered. "Don't be afraid to take charge. This dance is about domination, about taking what's yours ...about being a man."

Slowly, Kiki brought her hands to where ours were clasped together, and she slithered between us, making us a strange gyrating threesome.

Xavier eyed her up and down, and I could've sworn I saw him lick his lips. As if having two women on top of him was the best gift a man could get.

The jerk!

I wanted to get out of the dance. I wanted to storm away, but the music, soft and melodic and alluring, wouldn't let me go.

I felt the heat of Xavier's body against mine, the coldness of Kiki's fragile little hand. With every movement, his eyes seemed to flick from her to me, as if he couldn't decide which partner he preferred.

"Never be afraid to make a choice, Xavier," Kiki purred. "This dance, unlike the others, can even be performed alone ..."

I understood what she was saying. She wanted Xavier to cast me aside, to let me flail around on the dance floor by myself.

Was she crazy?

The competition was supposed to be about the two of us showing Xavier's company how strong a couple we were. I needed to put aside my feelings—confusing as they were—and consider this from a purely professional perspective.

How was dancing with Kiki going to help Xavier?

He didn't seem to care. Not right now. He smiled and twirled her, clearly enjoying the way her body lurched toward his with complete abandon, with passion.

I must've looked like a Tetris block in comparison, fitting into the right place, but a complete and total square.

"Angela," Xavier said, taking me by surprise, "you're a natural."

Now he was spinning me. What the hell was going on? Did he want me or Kiki or both of us? Once a playboy, always a playboy, I guess.

When the song finally finished, I stepped back abruptly, taking a deep breath, trying to compose my thoughts. Kiki continued to hold on to Xavier for a few seconds too long.

Again, I found myself upset, consumed with a jealous rage that I could hardly understand. It wasn't like Xavier and I were a *real* couple. He could look and touch whichever girl he pleased.

Perhaps I had been lulled into a false sense of security. Just because we were enjoying being around each other didn't mean Xavier had any feelings for me.

Of course, he doesn't, Angela, I chastised myself. He's never cared for you.

With that stinging thought in my head, I turned and headed for the door. I was going to shower and change and try not to think about those first beautiful moments of the bolero, where it had just been Xavier and me ...

And no one else in the world.

### XAVIER

I never knew Angela had it in her. When my father first asked us to do this dance competition, I was dreading it. The idea of having to dance with someone so clearly innocent and unused to being touched sounded terrible.

How was she ever going to be able to dance if she could barely hold my fucking hand without shuddering? When we'd first begun, I felt like I'd been proven right.

The girl was uncoordinated as fuck, stepping on my feet, saying "sorry" every other second like a moron.

But then the bolero began and ...

It was like I was dancing with another woman entirely.

When Kiki had joined in, I had been amused by Angela's reaction. She clearly didn't like our dance instructor, and could you blame her?

Kiki was thin as a twig with Khaleesi-bleached hair and the slinking movements of a cat. She was many men's conception of pure beauty, but not mine.

No, if I'm being honest, I found Kiki totally repellant, especially the way she clung to me.

But I entertained her obnoxious come-ons because I enjoyed seeing how hot and bothered it made my wife. Was that cruel? Maybe slightly.

Jealousy was a new color on Angela's otherwise so angelic face. It did all sorts of crazy things to me.

The idea that we'd get to do this dance again in front of hundreds of people excited me now beyond measure.

On the ride home, I wondered if I should tell Angela how much I enjoyed dancing with her but decided against it. I'd always kept my cards close to my chest when it came to courting someone.

I wasn't about to change my methods now.

### ANGELA

Xavier and I hardly spoke on the way home. The dance had confused and irritated me. I didn't like these things I was feeling, this attraction to Xavier and jealousy of Kiki.

I went straight to my room when we got home. I threw my purse on the bed and then stopped in my tracks.

A necklace was sitting on the dresser waiting for me. I picked it up and saw the pendant was engraved. "For P.S."

What was wrong with him?!

It wasn't enough to flirt with Kiki right in front of me. Did he seriously think leaving me this used necklace, obviously for another girl, was going to win me over?

Like I was some cheap afterthought. Like Xavier could regift jewelry and think I wouldn't notice.

Before I could help myself, I screamed with anger.

Then I took the necklace and threw it as hard as I could.

It ricocheted off the far wall of my room and then skittered under my bed.

I collapsed on my mattress.

I was so upset I couldn't even think straight. How could Xavier have been so stupid, leaving me a necklace for another girl? Was he just trying to mess with my head?

At this point, I was done making stupid guesses. Maybe Em was right. Maybe it really was time to end the arrangement once and for all.