

The Arrangement

S.S. Sahoo

An Old Flame

XAVIER

Penny
hey

Penny
its penny

Xavier
I know

Xavier
i have ur number saved ...

Penny
oh right 🙄

Penny
are you home?

Penny
i need to come over

Xavier
i thought u said we wouldnt fuck anymore

Penny
not for that ...

Penny
jeez ...do you have to make everything awkward?

Xavier
what do you want then?

Penny
i'm looking for something

Goddamnit. The last thing I wanted to be thinking about was fucking Penny right now. And I didn't mean fucking as in fucking her. I meant it as a *fucking* -adjective-.

Like that.

But I guess I had no choice but to let her come over if she'd actually left something here. That or she was just looking for another excuse to get into my pants.

That was yet to be determined.

Now that I had learned the truth about Angela—about what an angel she really was—and after our pizza date, which was one of the best nights I'd had in months, I didn't have eyes for any other girl.

Did my dick have a couple cravings here and there? Sure, but I was doing my best to resist temptation. Angela was clearly *not that kind of girl*. It would take time to win her over.

And get her in my bed.

At night, I kept finding myself fantasizing about her and what it might be like to strip her bare.

It killed me knowing she was only a few doors away and I couldn't touch her.

A Knight billionaire like me wasn't used to not getting what he wanted. But for once, I would have to learn how to be patient.

Angela was worth it.

When I heard the elevator ping, I braced myself. Don't give in to temptation, Xavier. She's not even that good of a lay. Just give her what she wants and get her the hell out.

But when the doors slid open and I saw Penny standing there, I was immediately struck by how *damn good* she looked.

I remembered the feel of pummeling into her, the slap of that juicy ass, the taste of her sweat as I bit into her shoulder ...

"Hey, Xavier," she said, smiling. "It's good to see you."

She was oblivious to my thoughts as she leaned in for a half-hug. I felt the press of her chest through her big, woolly sweater.

I cleared my throat, trying to clear my mind in the process.

Focus, Xavier. You can jerk off later. Do not fuck this up with Angela.

"So, what do you want?" I asked, trying to play it cool.

"I'm really sorry to barge in on you. It's just ...last time I was over, I think when we were, um ...you know ... We were taking everything off in a hurry, and my necklace must've—"

"Will you just say what the hell you're talking about, Penny?"

I was growing impatient and quickly. Penny nodded, putting a hand to her delicate neck. I thought about how she'd told me to choke her last time ...

Stop it, Xavier, my inner voice warned again. Keep your shit together.

"My necklace," Penny explained. "I lost it here."

"So? Get another. I'll write you a check."

Penny's face blushed a bit as she looked aside, aghast. "I'm not a prostitute, Xavier. I don't want your money. I came here because I actually like you."

I sighed. The bitch was trying to guilt-trip me, and it was working.

"Okay, okay," I said, trying to play nice. "What makes it so special? Can't we just replace it?"

She shook her head. "It has a pendant on it with my initials. It's irreplaceable. One of a kind."

"Don't tell me ... It's from your ex, isn't it?"

Her silence told me everything I needed to know.

"Goddamnit, Penny, it's better if you lost that thing anyway. Now go home and—"

"Please," she interrupted, her voice small. "I just ... I need it, okay?"

She refused to meet my eyes, and I could tell she was fighting back tears. I rubbed the back of my neck, the awkward silence stretching out between us.

God, I hated this shit.

Why she was still hung up over an abusive asshole was beyond me. I didn't even know the guy and the thought of him made my blood boil.

Wait ... Why do I care?

"All right, all right," I said, stepping aside. "Let's take a look."

We searched my bedroom, but no luck. So we kept up our search. At one point, I glanced over at Penny, bent over, looking under the bed ...

I felt a sudden urge to pounce on top of her, to take her from behind, to make her mine again.

Damn it, man! I clearly needed to get laid, and ASAP, or this problem was only going to get worse. She turned and slumped against the wall, looking agitated.

"I can't find it anywhere," Penny moaned. "Where is it, Xavier?"

"I don't know."

"But I *have* to find it. You don't understand!"

Suddenly, Penny sounded desperate. I get losing something important and being bummed about it, but why the panic?

Normally, my empathy bandwidth would have been spent at this point, and I would've kicked the bitch out. But maybe Angela's kindness had an impact on me or something, because, instead, I sat down beside Penny.

"You can tell me, you know," I said awkwardly. "Why it ...matters so much to you."

Penny looked at me strangely, almost like she couldn't recognize me, but then she began.

"You remember my boyfriend, right?"

I nodded. I'd never been a big fan of his, but we worked together and had to keep the relationship cordial.

When Penny had finally put her foot down and broken up with him ...well, I was there.

Not in a romantic, emotional way.

Just for sex.

Luckily Penny's asshole ex was mainly based in Paris, so I didn't have to see his slimy face very often.

"He's coming to New York next week," Penny went on.

"So?"

"And ...I kind of agreed to see him again."

I stared at her like she'd suddenly grown a second head.

"Are you stupid?"

"I guess so ..."

She wasn't even denying it.

"Look, I don't know all the details—and I don't care enough to hear them—but he was abusive, right? That's why you fucking broke up with him in the first place!"

"He says he's changed ..."

"Don't give me that shit, Penny. You know as well as I do that he's lying through his teeth."

"You don't know him like I do." Her voice began to rise, and I couldn't tell if she was trying to convince me or herself. "I can change him. I can help him through his problems."

Why was she being so stubborn?

Why couldn't she see the obvious?

Why did it make me so fucking mad?

"I know his kind," I spat. "He's manipulative, heartless, and once he gets what he wants from you he'll throw you to the curb."

Tears spilled over Penny's cheeks.

"Kinda like you?"

Her words were like a slap in the face—a splash of cold reality right over my hot head.

"Do you treat your wife like all the other women in your life?" she asked.

There it was.

The reason why her words had hit me so hard. Why seeing her so upset over her ex pissed me right the fuck off.

It was like looking into a mirror.

Angela was like Penny.

And I was like Penny's fucking asshole ex-boyfriend.

I couldn't stand it a second longer.

"You need to go," I said in a low voice.

Penny didn't even argue when I told her to leave. She stood up, her shoulders slumped. She looked like she was trying to disappear into her oversized sweater.

"I thought you'd changed, Xavier," she said quietly. "I thought maybe there was some kindness in you, but you're still the same. Heartless."

Then she walked out the door, leaving me speechless.

Was she right?

Was I really that cold?

As I followed her to the elevator, I felt a sudden bizarre urge inside me to apologize. To just say the words "I'm sorry" and be done with it. It couldn't be that bad, could it?

No, I told myself. She is unworthy of your apology. Let her go and get on with your life.

But as Penny was about to press the button to call the elevator, the doors slid open. Standing on the other side was ...

NO!!!!

Angela!