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Change of Heart
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The Arrangement

S.S. Sahoo

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XAVIER
"Angela, it's not what it looks like!"
Even as the words left my mouth, I knew how cliché and ridiculous they sounded, but I couldn't help myself.
She was staring at Penny, and—FUCK! GODDAMNIT!—she was going to think that I'd been sleeping around again.
cheating on her. I was honestly just trying to be nice, and this was what I got in return.
No good deed goes fucking unpunished, I guess.
what?
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After all the progress we'd been making lately, this was the last thing I needed. For the first time, I wasn't actively

I wanted to swear at Penny, to call her a worthless bitch. She was making my life so goddamn complicated, and for Some pendant her ex-boyfriend gave her? Who cared!

Before I could yell at Penny or try to excuse myself, something even more surprising happened. Penny took Angela's hand. "It's true," she said. "My name's Penny. I was just here looking for something. We weren't

Angela's eyes widened. For a second, an emotion swept across her face. It almost looked like relief. So she *did* care! "It's none of my business anyway," she said meekly. "You two can do whatever you want, really."

"No, try to understand," Penny said. "Xavier and I ... We used to be close. But not anymore. We broke it off. He cares about you a lot more than me." Angela's eyes flicked to mine. I couldn't read the expression, but I felt my breathing catch in my throat. Like this was a

make-or-break moment. If she believed Penny We still had a chance.

I could still win her over. I could still show Angela that I'd changed.

But if she didn't believe Penny

Penny turned and looked at me, and even though she still looked hurt by how cruel I'd been to her, she must've read my expression, because she smiled gently. "Xavier ...he was actually just trying to be nice. To help me find something I left here."

I couldn't believe her grace, her kindness. She'd always been nice, but I'd never really seen her as anything more than the cute business student that was good in

bed. But clearly there was a real person in there. A person I had been so unnecessarily ugly to. Just like Angela before her "What did you leave?" Angela asked with a frown.

...from somebody very special to me. It has my initials on it. P.S."

Angela looked even more surprised now. Her cheeks filled with color. "I know where it is, Penny. One second."

Angela stepped into the penthouse, passing us both by and walked down the hall, leaving us alone. I turned to Penny,

"A necklace. A pendant from

feeling embarrassed.

myself.

"You didn't have to do that," I said. "To stick up for me."

first time, I can sense something else."

of trust, and then ...

I didn't know what to call it.

best in you. Try to give in to it, okay?"

returned, a necklace in her hand.

"That's it. Thank you so much, Angela."

Angela's cheeks flushed, but she nodded.

sure you can understand."

I laughed. "It was."

"Of course."

Em

"Of course. May I ask ...what it means to you?"

But she turned to me. "Well, that was kinda weird."

"See you at dinner? I was hoping to go for a run."

"I'm ...uh ...counting the minutes until dinner."

that would make girls weak at the knees?

But Angela smiled. "Same here, Xavier."

Then she was off, and I realized I'd been holding my breath.

I dont know what you said to Lucas

Hes back to being himself again!!!

it was mine."

"I didn't do it for you, Xavier," she said. "I did it for her. She clearly cares about you a lot. I could see it in her eyes." "Penny, I'm ..."

"I shouldn't have yelled at you. Called you ... I don't know what's wrong with me." Penny's gaze softened. She took a step toward me.

"I know, Xavier. I know that you're still angry. Angry at the world, at everyone. At yourself too, I think. But

I wanted to apologize, but my mouth just couldn't seem to formulate the words. I shook my head, disgusted with

"What?" I asked. I had no idea what Penny was talking about. She smiled. "Isn't it obvious? Love, Xavier."

Me? In love with ...Angela? That seemed like a stretch. Sure, I'd been developing feelings, but there was no need to

"You don't need to explain it. It's obvious. In the way you look at her. The way you're trying, if not always succeeding,

Was Penny right? Was that what this weird, uncomfortable feeling was? It didn't feel like anything I'd felt before. With

drop the L-bomb. Before I could defend myself, Penny put a hand to my shoulder, interrupting me.

to be more decent. Whether you can see it or not yet, Xavier, I can tell. You're in love."

...for the

Claudia, my ex, it had been this gushing fountain of giddiness followed by the deepest sorrow I'd ever known. It was these crazy ups and downs. It was what I thought love was supposed to feel like. But with Angela ...it had been a slow burn, driven by confusion and misunderstanding, and then a quiet development

Was I supposed to agree to Penny's terms? Since when had some girl I used to fuck have any right to tell me how to conduct my life? Since when had she become some goddamn sage?

She smiled, wiping a tear away from her eye as footsteps resounded behind us. I turned to see that Angela had

But it was as if my body was moving against my own mind, because suddenly I was nodding.

"Xavier," Penny said, pulling me back to planet earth. "Don't fight it. The change. I can see that Angela brings out the

Penny looked at it, turning it so that the engraved initials were visible. Then she held it to her chest, looking beyond grateful.

"Is this it, Penny?" she asked sweetly, handing it over. "I found it in my room the other day. Lucille must have thought

"Thank you again. So much. And best of luck with everything." Then, with that, Penny turned and walked out the door, leaving us both speechless. For a second, I looked at Angela, wondering if I owed her any more explanation.

Penny's eyes flicked to me and then back to Angela. "It's from someone who I care about very much. Something I'm

overthink it. Before I could stop myself, I shouted her name. "Angela!" She turned, surprised. "Yes?"

What the fuck? Was that the best I could possibly manage? I used to be so smooth. What happened to the Xavier Knight

ANGELA

Angela

Angela

Angela

I knew it would all work out.

Of course, Em.

(3)

Angela

Um ...

Angela

Good, I think?

Angela

Angela

It's confusing.

Angela

Thanks.

I'm not sure.

She nodded and headed for her room. I wondered if she needed to run just to get away from me, but I decided not to

Bm But thank you SO SO SO much angie Em

Em How is everything with xavier?

Em

Im here if you need to talk about it ok?

much to text. And she'd probably misinterpret it. And

Well

Em

Anyway.

Xavier.

wished she knew what I did

That he was about to propose!

clarity and fresh insight.

"Oh shit, you're right."

"Like what?"

"You mean here?"

movements.

"You think so?"

"I know so."

this apartment felt intimate now.

But of course, as always, it ended.

Unknown Number

Unknown Number

Unknown Number

Try again sweet Angela

Unknown Number

Unknown Number

I will have you

It has been too long ...

Hello again beautiful lady

"Mrs. Knight," he responded with a bow.

"Mr. Knight," I said, nodding and curtseying politely.

"Don't jinx it, Xavier!" I chided him playfully.

"Like a capitalist. It's sexy."

"So," I began, "are you nervous?" "About today? Like you said, it was weird but—" "Not about today," I said, laughing lightly. "About this weekend. The Silver Jubilee is finally here!"

We both laughed, realizing we were totally out of our depth.

"There's no way we're gonna win, is there?" Xavier asked.

Xavier's grin widened. "I like when you talk like that."

I blushed. Does everything have to be about sex with this guy?

"Why not! The apartment's big enough to feel like a dance floor, isn't it?" I lowered my utensils, smiling, accepting the challenge. "Okay," I said. "I'm in." We swayed in tune to the beat in the middle of the apartment, our bare feet sliding across the hardwood floor. Our

I found myself enjoying the dance for the first time. The rhythm of the bolero in a space as comfortable and familiar as

hands delicately touched one another, making sure not to hold on too tight so that we could easily complete our

"I don't think we needed to practice, Angela," Xavier said in between turns. "We're masters at this point."

I smiled. I had never felt so safe in anyone's arms before. I wanted the song to go on and on forever. To give us an

me. And when I turned, I caught Xavier looking back at me. He quickly turned away and ducked into a hallway.

...like someone's eyes were on

Angela

Angela

Angela

I told you to leave me alone!!!!

WHAT DO YOU WANT?!

Angela

NO

YOU WON'T!

Angela

Angela

Mr. Lemor???

Who is this?!

He dipped me back, continuing. "I'm only saying, even if we don't win, we're good at this."

"It has been a while since our last lesson, though," I said, changing the subject. "I hope I remember all the steps."

"Well," he said with a shrug, putting down his fork and knife, "why don't we practice right now?"

It was so hard keeping secrets from Em. Of course I was happy that my brother was being sweet with her again, but I

And then with Xavier, I knew I could probably tell her all about the strange Penny incident, but it just seemed like too

Running had helped clear my head so that, when we sat down for dinner, I was able to look back at the day with some

We were eating quietly, some Spanish music playing in the background, when I decided to spring a question upon

I frowned, feigning offense. "Maybe that's how you feel, but I am a Knight, and Knights win competitions, don't we?"

I laughed, amused and a little struck by disbelief. Xavier was acting like a schoolboy with a crush, and it was adorable. When I returned to my room, though, I noticed a flurry of new texts on my screen. At first, I thought it was Em.

Then we both turned and walked our separate ways. I felt the nape of my neck tingling

But when I saw who the sender was, my smile instantly evaporated.

Unknown Number Wrong! 🙃

Unknown Number You of course **Unknown Number** I want you

Dont you ever learn? **Unknown Number** No one says no to me ...