Reminders

ANGELA

With a groan, I pressed my palms into my eyes and rolled onto my back.

My head pounded, my mouth tasted like chalk, and my stomach churned.

What the hell happened last night?

There was a light rap on the door.

"Yes?"

Xavier stepped into the room, a glass of water in one hand and a big smile on his face. "Good morning."

I squinted against the light that filtered through the tree outside the window. We were in my childhood bedroom. Star stickers were glued to the ceiling. Twinkle lights wrapped around wooden bedposts.

"Good morning." I scooched to one side of the bed and pulled my polka dot sheets to my chin.

Xavier didn't belong here, not with his tight, ten-thousand-thread-count T-shirt and broad shoulders.

Xavier sat on the edge of the mattress, making the springs squeak. He handed me the glass of water and an aspirin.

Grateful, I swallowed the pill then placed the glass on my nightstand. "What happened last night?"

A glint sparked in Xavier's eyes. "You don't remember?"

Xavier's expression dropped. "Really? Nothing at all?"

"No, why? Did something happen?" My heart rate picked up a little, the throbbing in my head growing louder. *Was someone hurt?*

"Nothing after the third shot of tequila," I admitted.

"It was our first time," Xavier said, taking my hands in his.

Xavier nodded. "I can't believe you don't remember it. I mean, it didn't exactly go the way I thought it would, but the

way you pressed yourself against me, I couldn't resist."

My stomach flipped over. "You don't mean

Did Xavier and I have sex last night?

"Hey, hey, shh," Xavier hushed, wiping my tears with his thumbs. "I'm teasing you a little. It was just a kiss. I promise

No, it couldn't be. We couldn't have, but the way he was smiling at me

I couldn't breathe.

Tears brimmed in my eyes. "Please tell me you're joking."

"Yes." Xavier frowned. "What did you think I meant? That we slept together?"

"In your dad's house? With your brother sleeping less than five feet away? While you were drunk?"

"Yes!"

we will have more."

I hiccuped. "A kiss?"

"Angela, are you a virgin?"

"I understand."

you mad at me for forgetting our first real kiss?"

I pulled the sheets up higher, covering my face. "You're the one who said it was 'our first time."

I hesitated, not sure if I was ready to share something so private with him, and then slowly nodded once.

you. Understand? Not unless you want me to. Not unless you *ask* me to."

"Okay," I breathed against his neck.

Xavier scooped me into his strong arms, holding me close to his chest. "Don't ever think that I would take that from

"Hey," Xavier said, pulling the sheets back down. He searched my face carefully, like he was trying to find something.

He pulled back a little, taking in my teary eyes and water-stained cheeks. "Okay?"

I could have melted. Right there. Just disappeared into my sheet. There was one more important question though. "Are

"Good." Xavier smirked. "And, darling, the first time we have sex, you can be fucking sure you'll never forget it."

In answer, Xavier leaned closer and kissed the corner of my mouth and then the center.

"No," he replied, voice thick, while my head spun. "Because I can remind you of it as often as you like."

That afternoon, back in the city, I ducked into the warmth of the café and shook out my umbrella. I left it hanging on the rack by the door along with my damp coat.

She glanced up from the bridal magazine she was flipping through as I slid onto the bench beside her.

"You look happy."

Em had already taken over the largest table and strewn coffee cups and miscellaneous wedding supplies across its top.

"I don't believe it," Dustin scoffed from the other side of the table. He had a sprig of baby's breath in his ear and was fanning himself with a handful of fabric swatches. "I think our little Dancing Queen has a secret."

I scanned the café, careful to make sure it was empty before dishing out any details. I knew all too well how quickly rumors spread and turned into news when overhead by the wrong ears.

I picked up a magazine. "Just excited for you."

It may not be my naked body this time, but I was sure that if someone heard that my and Xavier's relationship was on the rocks, I would see it on the six o'clock news.

My cheeks warmed, and I felt myself shrugging. "He's been so ...different lately."

"Yeah, since you saw his—"
"Em?" I cut in before Dustin could finish his sentence.

where he still worked part-time.

"Hater," Dustin shot back.

and marry me instead," Dustin gushed.

the *whoosh* and bubble of the steaming milk.

"So soon!" I gasped, honestly surprised.

"It's a wedding." Em rolled her eyes. "There has to be white."

growing up. Do you know his name? Oh, and your aunt

much."

foam.

help?"

reason.

"Xavier and I are dating,"

My friend's face had dropped at my announcement, and a little of my confidence with it.

Em shut her magazine. "I'm happy for you. Really, I am. I just

divorce the man a week ago. I just don't want to see you hurt."

She offered a small smile and nodded. "I'm here, no matter what. Always."

"Oh. Em. Gee!" Dustin said, clapping his hands. "I knew you'd give in eventually!"

I took her hand, squeezing her fingers. "I know. He's different now though. I can feel it."

"Well, I, for one, am tickled pink." Dustin let his forearms drop to the tabletop, his palms slapping against the wood as if to accentuate his point. "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the two of you. You and your sometimes-husband are the reasons my career has taken off. Who knows where I'd be if you hadn't helped me host my first show?"

He waved his hand through the air. It might have been as dramatic as intended if we hadn't been sitting in the café

...he's been so awful to you, Angie. You were ready to

Emily snickered, earning a glare.

"You *must* let me repay you somehow."

something from my friend for such a simple favor. "I couldn't possibly."

"Hey!" It was Em's turn to defend me. "Stop harassing us and go make some lattes."

His eyes grew wide. "I know exactly what you need—a Dustin Sterling original. Oh, please, let me paint for you."

A small smile crept across my lips. If it made him so happy, I wasn't sure how I could refuse. "I would like that very

"Fabulous! Just wait. I'm gonna paint you something so good you'll divorce your terrible husband for real this time

I shook my head. Xavier had more than enough stuff for the both of us. Besides, it would feel wrong to accept

"Fine, but you're paying for them this time, Miss *Sass*afras." Dustin pushed himself up from the table.

I couldn't hold back my laughter as Em called back: "That's *MISSUS* Sassafras to you!"

"So, here's what I'm thinking." Em slid a pile of magazine clippings and scribbled notes toward me. "A spring wedding."

I shouldn't have been so judgmental; Xavier and I had been married within only a handful of weeks, without having

ever met. Em and Lucas had been dating for almost a year and had known each other their whole lives.

"Well, I want the centerpieces to be peonies, and you know they are the best in May," Em explained.

Dustin flipped her off while ducking behind the counter. In no time at all, I could smell the grinding coffee and hear

She flipped through the papers, pulling out another. "I want fuschia and white for the colors."

"Oh, no. Please not white. That's *so* basic," Dustin called while he sprinkled cinnamon on the freshly formed peaks of

"Oh no, hun," Dustin called. "It's all about *ivory* next year. Besides, ~ivory~ will look so much better with your pale-ass skin than just white."

"That was almost a compliment," I said, praising him. Then, with a determined huff, I turned to Em. "So, how can I

"Well, we need an officiate, and I think Lucas would like to be married by the priest from the little chapel you went to

I couldn't help but throw myself into the wedding planning. It wasn't just the excitement of seeing my best friend and

...she's vegan, right?"

Brad had organized everything. And while it had been grand and beautiful, it hadn't been *mine*. There had been nothing of me or Xavier in it.

brother so happy together. It was that I had never had the opportunity to plan my own wedding.

Em wanted a slideshow of images of her and Lucas to run throughout the reception.

Their favorite song would play for their first dance as husband and wife.

They would write their own vows.

It sounded magical. Having so much of them both in the details would make it a day to remember forever.

I'd never had the opportunity to have *my* perfect day and would remember my wedding for a completely different

My husband and I hadn't danced to our favorite song.

We didn't *have* a favorite song.

In fact, my husband had slept with another woman.

With a sigh, I flipped to another image of bridal gowns.

like that, what did silly things like dancing to Ed Sheeran matter?

"What would you like, mon coeur?"

We hadn't slept in the same bed on our wedding night.

and flower arrangements off the table. I scrambled to grab them before they could land on the damp floor.

"Hello!" Dustin singsonged to the newcomer. "What can I get for you?"

The bell over the door chimed, shaking me from my thoughts. A gust of cool air rushed in, lifting pictures of dresses

There was no point in letting the past get me down. Last night had been spectacular. If my and Xavier's lives continued

A jolt of fear shot down my spine. I *knew* that voice.

It had haunted my dreams for months.