In Your Arms

XAVIER

"Angela?" I called as the elevator doors slid open. It was silly, because it was still early and she could have been sleeping.

Angela was normally a morning person, though, and I needed to hear her voice, needed to see her to believe she was okay.

"She's not here," a voice replied. I froze mid-step and turned toward its source.

"Em," I said in greeting. She was sitting cross-legged on the sofa, a computer in her lap. "Where is she?"

Em ran a hand through her hair. "She disappeared down the hall. Ran into one of the rooms. I tried to talk to her, but she won't have it."

My stomach twisted. "Did something happen?"

"I don't know. She just burst into tears. I—" Em frowned. "I think she needs you right now."

My and Em's relationship was rocky, to say the least. I knew she didn't like me. Why would she? Girls always told their best friends everything.

I was sure she knew every terrible thing I'd done to Angela. To hear her admit that Angela needed me was a big step, an indication I must have done something right.

She stood and started collecting her things from around the room.

I pulled my phone from my pocket and typed out a quick message. "Marco will drive you home."

"That's okay," Em dismissed.

"Please, it's the least I can do. Thank you for being here for her."

As soon as Em had disappeared down the elevator, I headed toward the bedrooms.

At the end of the hall, Angela's door stood open. I peeked into the room, only to find it empty. With a frown, I turned to face my own shut bedroom door and gently pushed it open.

Angela lay in the center of the bed, the blankets pulled up around her, her head buried in the pillows.

In any other situation, I would have been thrilled to see her there. Dreams of Angela on my bed with her legs spread wide, screaming in ecstasy, had plagued me for weeks.

Just the memory of them was enough to make my cock twitch.

I shook my head. Now was definitely not the time.

Careful not to disrupt her, I perched on the edge of the mattress. "What's wrong, my angel?"

I heard her quick intake of breath.

"Xavier," she breathed. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing," I teased as she pushed herself upright.

Angela's cheeks turned pink. "It's the only place I felt safe."

I almost groaned. She wasn't making this any easier. Repositioning myself, I asked, "Safe from what?"

"Dustin's studio was broken into. The only thing that was taken was a painting of us," she said. "It was Jacques. It had to be."

Her words were like a punch in the stomach. She didn't feel safe, didn't feel protected. I'd failed her.

I reached out and wrapped her in my arms, running a hand up and down her back. "He's gone, Angela. The authorities are searching for him now. Marco is in the lobby downstairs. I'm here with you. You're safe."

Angela took in a shaky inhale. On the exhale, I felt her relax into me. "What are you doing home?"

"Did you really think I would leave you alone after what you told me?" I asked. "I had to go to the office to check in on things. I terminated the contract with Jacques. Once the Paris team was filled in, I came back."

"You terminated Jacques's contract?"

"Of course, Angela. How could I ever work with a man who did such terrible things to you?"

Angela sniffed. "You did all that for me?"

The answer came quickly, without doubt. "I would do anything for you."

ANGELA

I would do anything for you.

"I don't know what to say," I told him honestly.

"You don't need to say anything," Xavier replied. "Just rest."

"But Em—" I remembered suddenly that I had abandoned my friend in the living room.

"Lie down."

"But—" I moved to stand, but Xavier stopped me with a hand on my shoulder.

"Angela," he growled out. "Em's gone. Now, please, you need rest."

He was right. I had hardly slept last night. I knew from the purple circles under his eyes that Xavier hadn't slept much either. "Fine, but only if you stay with me."

Xavier's eyebrows raised. He was probably shocked at how forward I was. To be honest, I was a little surprised myself.

I knew that I would feel safer with him here though. That was nothing to be ashamed of, was it? Besides, it wouldn't be the first time we had shared a bed.

"Okay," he said simply and kicked off his loafers.

I threw back the comforter that smelled of him, like leather and bergamot. Xavier slid in beside me, still in his dress shirt and slacks.

We lay, side by side on our backs, just as we had in the Hamptons. Only, unlike the Hamptons, there was no blanket barrier between us.

"Xavier? Would you mind if I turned onto my side?" I asked.

Xavier stiffened beside me.

"Okay," he said again.

I turned to face him, and then, heart racing, reached out to lay a hand on Xavier's muscular chest.

"Thank you," I whispered, knowing he'd understand I meant the words for more than just the repositioning. It was hardly enough, but I didn't know how else to express my gratitude.

In reply, Xavier turned to face me. His free arm wrapped around me, holding me to him until every inch of our bodies was pressed together.

I'd never been so close to a man before, had never felt so much of one all at once. Somehow, it didn't feel like enough. I wanted more. Suddenly, I knew what I needed to do, how I could thank him.

Xavier understood actions more than words. He smashed vases, threw punches, and had rough sex.

If I wanted to thank him properly, I would need to speak his language.

"Xavier?" I looked up to find his dark, hooded eyes already on me, searching. Asking.

"It's okay," I whispered.

That was all the encouragement Xavier needed. He closed the gap between us and pressed his lips to mine.

The kiss was soft at first, simple, undemanding. I could feel the question in it though. In his lingering lips. In the way his hand pressed into my lower back.

Greedily, I replied.

The first kiss turned into a second and then a third.

I moaned as he sucked on my bottom lip, took it between his teeth, and then slid his tongue into my mouth.

Xavier flipped us, pinning my hands over my head. We were chest to chest, hips grinding into hips.

"Xavier." I panted, head swimming with his scent. Then I gasped as I felt something hard brush against my inner thigh. "Xavier!"

"Yes?" he groaned, moving his lips down to suck on my neck.

I squealed as the bulge brushed against me again and pushed myself upright.

Xavier kneeled over me, chest heaving, his erect manhood between us, hardly contained in his pants.

I couldn't stop staring at it. Could hardly swallow down the sudden need to touch it, to feel it sliding ...I quickly covered my eyes with my hands.

"I can't," I told him. "I'm not ready, Xavier. I'm sorry."

"Look at me, Angela," Xavier replied. Then, when I didn't remove my hands, he said again, "Look at me."

I peeked out from between my fingers. Xavier stared down at me, eyebrow raised.

"What did I tell you?"

"That we wouldn't have sex until I was ready."

"Then why are you hiding from me?"

I let my hands drop into my lap. "I'm sorry. I just ...panicked."

"I can't help it, Angela," Xavier said, lying back down beside me. He held out his arm in a silent offer, and I settled against his chest, careful to avoid getting too close to his situation.

"I want you," Xavier continued, unabashed. "I'm not saying that to force you into anything. It's just the truth. I can't help myself."

I had never understood how he could talk about such intimate things so plainly. I supposed, maybe, it came with practice.

As I lay on his chest, our legs intertwined, I found that, for once, I wasn't afraid of how forward Xavier was. If I was being honest with myself, I liked it. He made me feel desired in a way no one else ever had.

Finally safe, I slowly drifted to sleep in Xavier's arms, one truth ringing through my mind. I had never been this close to any man, but I couldn't imagine it being anyone other than Xavier.

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That night, and every night after, I fell asleep wrapped up in Xavier. Slowly, I was becoming more and more unable to deny that something felt right between us. Like we were meant to find each other. Like we were a fated pair.

I had found a home in the most unlikely spot I could have imagined.

Every morning, when I woke up in his arms, three words jumped to the front of my mind. Each morning, I swallowed them down.

It was too soon. There was no way they could be true. No way this could be real. That was too much to hope for.

I'd never understood why they were so difficult to say until this moment. Every time they were on the tip of the tongue, my stomach would turn, and I would have to swallow them back down.

Don't be greedy, I would scold myself. You've already gotten more than you could hope for. Jacques is gone. You're safe. That's enough for now.

It was getting harder and harder to keep it to myself.

"Good morning," Xavier whispered, pulling me against his chiseled, bare chest.

I love you.

"Good morning," I replied with a kiss on his shoulder.

He threw his arm over his eyes. "What time do we have to be there?"

"In an hour. You should hop in the shower."

Xavier smiled. "Join me?"

"In your dreams," I shot back.

And then he kissed me, and the three words bubbled up again.

I love you.

Today was the day of Em and Lucas's wedding. A day to celebrate love. Maybe, tonight, I would finally be brave enough to say the words aloud. Maybe I would tell Xavier that I loved him.

As he pushed himself up from the bed and headed for the bathroom, a sinking feeling began to grow in my stomach.

There's nothing to worry about, I chided myself as I heard the shower turn on. As always, he'd left the bathroom door open in invitation.

For some reason, though, I couldn't shake the feeling that all of this was too good to be true.

That I wouldn't get the chance to tell Xavier how I felt.

That all of my good luck was about to turn very, very bad ...