

A Final Dance

ANGELA

Fingers shaking, I stood at the head table, waiting for the guests to quiet around me. As the maid of honor, I was obligated to make a speech.

It was an honor, really, to be able to give my blessing to my brother and best friend. That didn't mean I wasn't nervous though, especially since the only experience I'd had of love was anything but romantic.

Finally, I took a deep breath, ignoring the weight of hundreds of gazes on me, and began.

"Ummm ...Hi, my name is Angela, and I—I've known Lucas and Emily my whole life. Lucas, my brother, I had no say in having in my life. He's just been there, every day, without fail. Em ...Emily I met in school and have chosen every day since to keep her in my life."

A chorus of awws erupted through the room, giving me courage as I continued.

"It's this friendship I want to focus on, this choice, as I offer you my final words of ...umm, advice, as you take your first steps on this journey as man and wife.

"I've ...I've been married less than a year, but the lessons I learned from being friends with Em have helped me every step of the way."

My eyes found Xavier's in the crowd. He held my gaze, dark eyes smoldering, as I continued my speech.

"Friendships, like marriages, are not a smooth road. There are turns, potholes, and hills you have to navigate around. It isn't always easy. It—It isn't always smooth cruising.

"The most important thing I have learned is that you, um, have a chance to redo everything each morning. Each day, you can choose again. Choose a new path. Choose to be a good friend. A good partner. *Choose love.*

"My advice to you, Lucas and Em, is to keep making that choice. If you do, you will conquer every obstacle you encounter, no matter what path you take."

Teary-eyed, I raised my glass of wine. "To Em and Lucas. May you always choose love."

I slid my way through dancers, looking for a familiar pair of dark eyes. Tonight was the night. I was sure of it now. I would tell Xavier that I loved him. I would *choose love.*

I just had to find my lover first.

"Dance with me?"

I jumped as a strong pair of arms curved around my waist.

Found him.

"It would be my pleasure," I replied, already feeling more at ease.

Xavier led me to the center of the dance floor, and we began to sway among the other couples. I lay my head on his lapel, breathing in his scent of leather and bergamot as we twirled.

Dinner was finished, the speeches over, the cake cut. All that was left was dancing.

"How was your meal?" I asked, worried. "Sorry I couldn't sit with you."

Xavier hadn't been allowed to sit with me since I was seated at the head table. I knew Em had tried to find him someone compatible to sit with, though.

Xavier snorted. "I sat beside some middle-aged prick who owns an Airbnb. I'm sure you can imagine what he wanted to speak about."

I laughed as Xavier dipped me, earning a few glances from nearby dancers.

"Your speech was beautiful," Xavier said when we were eye to eye again.

The words bubbled up again. *I love you.*

"Thank you." I blushed.

He bent his head low, lips brushing against my ear, and whispered, "When do we get to go home? I've been thinking about peeling this dress off of you the whole goddamned night."

Xavier's hand slid down my back to my butt.

I gasped, swatting his hand away. "Behave!"

"Angie! Oh God, Angie!" cried Em, suddenly squeezing between Xavier and me.

She threw her arms around me. "Thank you so much!"

I gave Xavier an apologetic glance over my friend's shoulder. Clearly Em had had a few glasses of wine too many.

"I couldn't have done all this without you!" she continued to gush. "And your speech! It was so nice."

"It was my pleasure," I assured her, patting her back. "You deserved your perfect day, Em."

XAVIER

Ron

📞 911 at the office, Boss 📞

Xavier
My dad's on call tonight

Ron
I tried to call him. He's not answering.

Xavier
Probably because we're at a wedding

Xavier
Can it wait?

Ron
Afraid not!

Ron
Someone has tripped the security alarms

Ron
They need your okay to involve the police

Xavier
The police?

Xavier
What happened?

Ron
It's hard to explain ...

Ron
Would be best if you come check things out yourself, sir.

Xavier
On my way.

Fuck me.

This was the last thing I needed right now.

Emergencies were why I hired security. Now I had to go to the office to show those fuckwads how to do their jobs.

I looked up from my phone and caught Angela's eyes.

Em was still talking a thousand miles a minute at her while Angela nodded in reply, unable to get a word in.

I moved behind Angela, slid her hair from her shoulder, and whispered, "I need to go to the office for a minute."

"You promised me no work," Angela whispered back. Emily continued to rattle on, oblivious.

I ran my hand down Angela's side in silent apology. "It's an emergency. The office is just down the street. I'll be back before you can miss me."

Angela nodded. I placed a kiss on her bare shoulder and then slipped back into the crowd.

I'd made it clear I wasn't available for business tonight. Ron had better have a fucking good reason for this.

When I arrived at the building, a member of the security team met me at the door.

"What the hell happened?" I demanded.

The overweight, middle-aged man, wearing a vest with reflective tape on it, was quick to reply. "There's been a break-in on the top floor, Mr. Knight. The director is up there now waiting for you."

I headed for the elevator, not waiting for him to catch up.

The caretaker had probably tripped the alarm by accident. Or some overworked intern had been caught stealing office supplies. Something *not worth my time.*

The elevator pinged open. Ron stood in the hall, awaiting my arrival.

"Good to see you, sir." He fell in step beside me.

"This better not be a false alarm," I gritted out.

"No, sir. I'm afraid not, sir."

"Mr. Knight," called a tall man with dark skin and a mustache. He stood at the far end of the hall, in front of my office doors "My name is Mr. Taff. I'm the head of your security team."

"You pulled me out of a wonderful evening with my wife, Mr. Taff," I replied. "This better be good."

Mr. Taff pulled the door to my office open. "See for yourself, sir."

At first, I couldn't find anything wrong. My office was as I'd left it, as it always was. No shattered glass, no fire, no dead body.

I gritted my teeth together. As expected, everything was in its goddamned place.

Then I saw it. The photograph of the New York skyline that normally hung above my desk was gone.

Something else hung in its place.