Everything

I frowned, stepping closer.

XAVIER

The painting was huge, almost as tall as I was. It had been beautiful once. I could see that much. Now the canvas was

remained only partially. The better part of his body had been scratched away, his face actually ripped off.

destroyed. On one side, a beautiful golden-haired angel stood, untouched. Another figure, who had once kneeled at her feet, now

The longer I stared, the worse the sinking feeling in my stomach became.

The angel was the spitting image of Angela. This must be the portrait Dustin had done, which could mean only one

thing: I was the ripped-up knight. I'd have to be a moron to come to any other conclusion. The message was clear.

The painting was meant as a threat.

"Pick up your phone," I hissed. "Pick up your goddamn phone."

The line dropped. I hit the dial button again.

"We need to get around this," I barked to Marco.

a great idea until we were stuck in traffic four blocks away from the hotel.

Dustin wasn't answering. He was probably having too much fun at the wedding to hear his phone.

From the front seat, Marco murmured his usual reply. "It's New York." That wasn't good enough this time. I wasn't late for a polo match or a meeting at the yacht club. Angela was in danger.

The first time Dustin hadn't picked up, I'd decided to track him down and hopped back into my car. It had seemed like

"Forget it," I snapped and threw open the back door, pocketing my phone and stepping out into the street.

"Mr. Knight!" Marco called after me. It was too late, though. I was already halfway down the block. I jogged past a couple, knocking into the man's shoulder, and I was gone before he could flip me off.

Angela. I need to get to Angela.

If he's touched her ...

No. She was at a wedding. In a ballroom full of people. Untouchable.

Still ...

I ran faster.

"The police?"

you?"

paintings."

"By who?"

games.

speaking to lean in closer.

The social-ladder-climbing rat.

"Yes. One of an angel," I told him.

"Who did you sell it to?" I shot back.

"I don't remember his name."

"He was French?"

Jacques was behind this.

Jacques was loose in New York.

Jacques had taken the painting.

I needed to find her, now.

If she'd gone outside ...

gardens.

"So?" he asked.

"Ace?"

"The police looked into it," Dusty replied too quickly.

I skidded to a stop outside the front doors of the hotel, my dress shoes sliding on the cement of the sidewalk.

I wouldn't lose her, couldn't lose another person I loved.

Dad was already there, waiting for me.

"I've already called them. Dad, please," I begged.

hair or hear her familiar laugh.

The doorman pulled open the door, and I stepped into the lobby.

"Jacques," I panted. "He's here. He's after Angela. We have to find her."

"Go check the ballroom. I'll have the staff sweep the hotel. We'll find her, Xavier."

"Xavier!" he cried, and then he frowned as he took in my disheveled state. "What's happened, son?"

"Thank you." I sprinted for the stairs, not needing any further prompting. Inside the ballroom, the wedding was still in full swing. I swept the crowd frantically, hoping to catch a flash of golden

My gaze kept getting stuck on fuchsia. Every bridesmaid was impossible to distinguish from the next.

"No, no, no," I muttered, backing into a waiter and nearly sending his tray toppling over.

I pushed through the crowd and grabbed his arm. "Why aren't you answering your phone?"

Then I spotted a familiar head of coiffed hair among a circle of guests. Dusty.

He's been drinking, I realized. Fucking brilliant. I pinched the bridge of my nose, trying hard not to yell at Angela's friend. "I have a question about one of your

"Xavier!" Dustin said, throwing an arm over my shoulders. He was happy. Too happy. "How are you? What can I do for

"The one I made for you and Angela?" he asked. "Didn't she tell you?" He dropped his voice so only I could hear. "It was stolen."

"Xavier Knight is interested in one of my paintings?" Dustin asked, too loud. I noticed some of the people he'd been

With a sideways glance at his new friends, Dustin sighed. "Okay, look. I'll tell you the truth, but you have to promise not to tell Angela." "Fine."

"It wasn't stolen. I sold it. I didn't want to, but I was offered a *ridiculous* amount of money for it and—"

"Don't lie to me Dusty, or I'll end your painting career faster than you can say *moccachino*." I was in no mood for his

"What did he look like?" Dustin laughed, "Well, I can tell you one thing. I would definitely eat his baguette, if you know what I mean."

"Oh yes! You must know who I am talking about. He came into the café the other day with some girl on his arm. Angela seemed to know them. He—"

And I'd left Angela alone.

I'd left Angela with Em. Maybe she knew where she was. Maybe—

"No, I left her with you," I said, a little too harshly.

Em frowned. "She said she needed some air."

"Fuck," I hissed out, hands knotting in my hair.

My chest tightened. Dusty had revealed a clue unknowingly.

I stepped back, away from him, fears confirmed.

"Have you seen Angela?" she asked. "She owes me a dance."

Angela hadn't been out in front of the hotel, so there was only one other place she could have gone to get some air

I was running out of options, out of time. My only hope now was that they'd found her somewhere else in the hotel.

...the

"Is something wrong, Xavier?" Em asked. "I'm not sure. I just need to find her."

"Xavier!" a voice called from behind me. I turned to find Em heading in my direction.

French doors opened up onto an enclosed courtyard. If it had been a warmer night, wedding guests would have been sipping their champagne under the twinkling lights. Instead, the gardens were empty.

I knew already from his hopeful tone that the hotel staff hadn't found her.

I turned on my heel, heading for the other side of the room.

I headed for the lobby and located my dad.

My father cleared his throat. "Xavier."

"She's gone." I said, helpless. "The bastard got her—"

I turned to find Mr. Carson standing behind me, along with Em, Lucas, Danny, and Dustin. "Em said Angie is missing, Ace. That true?"

"We're doing everything we can to track her down," Dad said. He put a hand on my shoulder, like he knew that it

suddenly felt impossible for me to speak, that my chest ached too much to breathe. "We'll find her."

We were sitting in the bridal suite—all seven of us—waiting.

The police were here. I'd given them my statement.

They said there were no charges on his credit cards.

They said his hotel room was empty.

That wasn't fucking good enough.

"I can't just sit here," I said.

Penny.

I stopped.

The call dropped.

Then my phone vibrated.

I wished to God that I could have. Instead, I said, "She's right."

Em broke into tears, and then she was pulled into Lucas's chest.

Their eyes were on me, waiting for me to console them, to tell them it wasn't true.

They said they were on it. It wasn't enough.

This couldn't be it. There had to be something I was missing. Another clue. Another lead. Anything.

"You've done everything you can, son," Dad said, watching as I paced back and forth along the length of the bed. "I don't believe it. Someone must have seen something. Somebody knows where she is."

"Son," Dad said again, looking from me to Angela's friends and family.

I got the message. I was scaring them.

Good. They should be fucking scared. Angela was missing, and no one was doing a goddamned thing. No—

"Penny," I said, aloud this time, fumbling in my pocket for my phone.

Maybe Jacques had been in touch with her. Maybe she knew where he was. I pressed her number with my thumb.

I fell back onto the couch, defeated.