Another Girl

Angela

I couldn't help but sulk on the ride back home from The Plaza.

Why did it feel like all anyone wanted to talk about lately was my and Xavier's sex life?

Dustin jumped at the chance to hear the smallest detail about Xavier's manhood.

Em gave me sympathetic looks every time the topic of physical relationships came up.

Was it really so unbelievable that Xavier and I hadn't slept together yet?

And now Brad was asking about grandchildren?

Really so shocking that I wasn't throwing myself at him every five minutes?

We'd known each other for less than a year.

Liked each other for less than a handful of months.

Would anyone else behave so differently in our predicament?

The answer came quickly: *yes*.

He was used to attention...a lot of it.

of lovers.

And was clearly missing it based on what I interrupted the other night.

Hundreds of women threw themselves at Xavier without knowing a thing about him, other than his last name.

I had been right when I told him that there was an imbalance in our relationship, but I'd misidentified the cause.

It had nothing to do with me having a job—and everything to do with S-E-X.

When we pulled up outside the building, I thanked Marco and headed into the lobby. Xavier wouldn't be home for a while, yet. I still had time to collect my thoughts, to think about what to do.

It wasn't that I was afraid to have sex or that I was immune to my husband's Casanova charm. It was something less

tangible that kept me from giving myself fully to Xavier.

Xavier's past actions had made it clear that he didn't hold the same beliefs, that making love didn't mean the same thing to him as it did to me.

For me, sex was the most intimate way you could know a person. Something shared between soul mates and the truest

I didn't know where that left us. I loved him. I told him as much, as often as I could. And I thought he loved me too. But unlike me, Xavier had yet to utter those three little words.

How could I let him love my body when I didn't know if he loved my soul? When I didn't know that I wasn't just sex?

That I wasn't just another girl?

I was passing the kitchen when I heard it. A rhythmic thumping.

The elevator doors slid open, and I stepped into the penthouse, my wedges *thunking* on the hardwood floor.

A woman moaning.

Xavier was in there with another woman.

The surety of it rang through me, cut into me.

Deep masculine grunting.

Following the sounds into the kitchen, I stopped before the pantry. Its sliding door shook in time with the thumping.

apartment.

Tears suddenly filled my eyes, and my hand flew up to cover my mouth, to silence my sobs.

I stopped dead in my tracks, my stomach turning for a whole new reason.

This would be far from the first time I'd caught him having an affair, not the first time he flaunted his conquests in our

It seemed like he was through with trying, like he'd grown bored of me, just as I somehow always expected him to.

This was the first time he'd done it since we'd agreed to try this though. To try us.

I'd been right to wait.

I was fuming, my mind racing and my heart breaking, when the elevator doors pinged open again suddenly, making

The asshole just loved sex.

Furious, I wiped the tears from my cheeks.

me turn.

My mouth fell open as Xavier stepped out and into the penthouse.

the *thump-thump-thump* that rang through the living space. "Is that

Xavier didn't care about me. He didn't love me. Not really.

happened?" He dropped his bag by the door and crossed the living room toward me, his eyebrows raising as he became aware of

"Hello, angel," he greeted, and then his face fell as he took in my tear-stained cheeks. "What's wrong? What

Xavier brushed past me, reaching for the pantry door. As the frosted glass panel slid open, I gasped.

Lucille stood in the pantry, her arms—and legs—wrapped around a balding man with a salt-and-pepper mustache.

"Mr. Knight!"

straighten their clothes.

seen him flustered.

Mrs. Knight."

I nodded.

"Holy fuck!"

sides. "Yes, this is Tony. He is visiting from Italy. He—"

"No, no, Mr. Knight. I will cook," Lucille said, tuning back into the pantry.

Tony stuck out his hand toward Xavier.

taking Angela out for dinner, anyway."

heartbreak I'd felt only minutes ago.

Xavier shook his head. "How about dim sum?"

had been Xavier in the pantry.

That wouldn't be fair.

"You were serious?"

register.

letting her go early lately."

through, I *still wasn't* enough for him.

I took a deep breath, but I didn't want to lie. "I did," I admitted.

"Look at me, Angela." He hooked a finger under my chin, lifting my head up.

I glanced down, unable to hold his intense gaze.

didn't you?"

jaw, his full lips.

I shouldn't have doubted him.

I'm obviously not making you happy."

that. Believe me when I say this is so much better. You're better."

I had no reason to.

as everyone else.

"I am so sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Knight!" Lucille said, running her hands through her tumbled hair. She had flour handprints on the front of her blouse.

"I, ah," Xavier faltered, rubbing the back of his neck. His cheeks were flushed. It was the first time I think I had ever

Xavier jumped to the side, pulling me with him, as Lucille and the man stumbled out of the pantry, fumbling to

"Is this your husband?" I said, breaking the awkward silence. Lucille nodded and moved to take the man's arm. Then she seemed to think better of it and let her arms drop to her

Xavier glanced at Tony's hand then crossed his arms over his chest. "Why don't you and Tony head home for the night, Lucille," Xavier said, finally finding his voice. "I was thinking of

"Please," Xavier called after her. "I insist." "Yes, okay. Thank you, Mr. Knight," Lucille said, shooing her husband toward the elevator. "Good night, Mr. Knight.

"Good night," I awkwardly called out. The second the doors slid shut behind them, Xavier burst into laughter.

"What?" I asked, finding myself laughing as well, his joy contagious. The laughter felt good, cathartic, after the

He'd been good lately, but it was hard to forget that things hadn't always been good. That didn't mean that I should always expect the worst from him though.

I smoothed the lines of my dress out, trying to regain composure, trying to ignore how guilty I felt for assuming that it

Forty minutes later, we were uptown at a hole-in-the-wall dumpling place Xavier knew I loved. We were sitting at a small bar seat at the window.

"I was too focused on *not* looking at other areas." Xavier laughed, biting into some pak choi. "No wonder you've been

Everything about the moment was perfectly imperfect, a healing balm after the pain of this afternoon. After the fear

Xavier frowned, his dark eyes flicking between the food in front of him and me. "You thought it was me in the pantry,

that Xavier had fallen into his old habits. The fear that I hadn't been enough for him. That, after all we had been

The only other people in the restaurant were a pair of elderly gentlemen playing mahjong at a table near the cash

He nodded. "There is no way I can eat in this kitchen after seeing where Lucille's hands were."

"Did you see Lucille's face?" I laughed, pinching a piece of broccoli between my chopsticks.

I smiled and popped another dumpling into my mouth. "I told her she didn't have to work while her husband was visiting. She insisted!" Xavier grimaced. "I hope they haven't done that anywhere else in the house."

A jaw in his muscled jumped. Then he turned in his stool and pulled mine closer to him so that I sat between his legs.

"I know I'm far from a saint," Xavier began. "But I would swear on whatever God you asked me to, in order to make you believe me, that I haven't fucked a single woman since before the Silver Jubilee."

"Xavier." I blushed at his words, flushed as the guilt from questioning his fidelity bubbled up again.

I took a deep breath in, letting my eyes run over him—took in how ridiculous his Prada suit looked as he perched on

the ripped vinyl barstool, how half his face lit up red by the glare of a neon sign outside, and then, the sharp line of his

"No, listen. I don't want anyone else. Only you, Angela. And goddamn, do I want you. I don't know what else I can do to make you believe me." "B-but if you're"—I snuck a look at our mahjong-playing friends to make sure they weren't listening—"masturbating,

Xavier laughed. "I would rather have five more years of jerking off than a new girl in my bed every night. I've done

"What if I'm terrible in bed?" I blurted out, as worry after worry shot to the surface now that the cap had been

Xavier laughed. "I promise, you won't be. And if you are, it would be my pleasure to teach you a few lessons."

I gulped. "I would like that. Is there something I can do? You know. To make it easier until I am ready?"

"No sweatpants, got it." I smiled, already feeling lighter.

Our relationship might not be perfect, but I had to believe that we would find our way, even if it wasn't the same way

Xavier smiled. "Good, now, you ready to head back? I think the house has had enough time to air out."

Xavier groaned, picking up his chopsticks again, and began to pluck at the remnants of his food. "Unfortunately, even the thought of you in sweatpants and a holey T-shirt sounds appealing right now."