

On The Job

Brad
Good news!

Brad
I found you the perfect job.

Angela
Really?

Brad
Absolutely!

Angela
Thank you so much 

Brad
Don't you want to know what it is?

Angela
Of course I do!

Brad
Event Planning.

Angela
Event Planning?

Brad
The idea came to me out of the blue.

Brad
You did such an amazing job with my retirement party.

Angela
I don't know....

Brad
You'll be splendid my dear!

Brad
I truly believe that you have a talent.

Angela
I guess I can give it a try.

Brad
Wonderful. You'll meet your first client today.

Angela
As in, TODAY today??

Brad
Yes.

Brad
Is that a problem?

Angela
No, no.

Angela
Send the details over.

Angela
Thank you so much for your help!

Angela

Two hours later I was seated in The Boathouse, nervously fiddling with my napkin.

Brad had told me that I was meeting with someone from the board of Animas, a nonprofit focused on the preservation of endangered animals.

I didn't know anything about running a nonprofit or endangered animal activism, or even event planning for that matter.

This whole thing was beginning to feel like a mistake.

"Are you sure I can't offer you something to drink?" the waiter asked from beside me, sounding a little irate.

"Um..." I'd been sitting in the restaurant for almost forty-five minutes now. I'd been so nervous I'd arrived half an hour early, and now the client was nearly fifteen minutes late.

I flipped open the drink menu and rattled off the first thing I read. "A mimosa, please."

"Make that two," called a husky voice from behind me.

I turned in my chair to see a woman gliding through the tables toward me.

Everything about how she presented herself was big, from her thick auburn curls and wide mouth, to her six-inch heels and Chanel sunglasses.

The waiter hurried away, clearly intimidated, as the woman pulled out the chair across from me and perched on its edge.

"So sorry I'm late, Angie!" Then, taking in the surprise that must have been clear on my face, she added, "Or do you prefer Angela?"

"Angie is fine," I squeaked, taking in her bright orange lipstick and the nearly matching fur scarf around her neck. "Is that fox?"

"Yes, isn't it glamorous? I got it at Barney's." She held one end out toward me, as if to encourage me to feel the fur.

I frowned. "Pardon me, but don't you work in animal activism?"

The woman laughed. "It was already dead when I bought it."

I wasn't sure that was the point, but it didn't seem like my place to point that out.

The waiter returned with our drinks then, saving me from my big mouth. "Would you like to order now?"

"The eggs Benedict, please," the woman said, without opening the menu. "But please be sure not to undercook the ham this time."

"Of course, madame. And for you?" The waiter turned to me.

Somehow, in the forty minutes I had to prepare for this moment, I hadn't thought to open the menu once. I'd been here before, with Xavier, but he'd always ordered the food. I grasped for a wisp of memory.

What did I eat last time I was here?

"Quiche?"

Luckily, the waiter nodded and disappeared again.

I cleared my throat and pulled a notebook out of my bag, trying to look like I knew what I was doing. Like I'd done this before.

"So, Mrs..." I froze. Brad hadn't told me whom I was meeting.

"Call me Didi," the woman said, smiling big.

She stuck her hand out across the table. "Don't worry, Brad didn't know I was coming. Normally, my assistant handles these sorts of things, but when I heard that *the* Angela Knight was going to be organizing the fundraiser, I knew I had to meet you myself."

I took her waiting hand. "I'm honored."

"Oh really, darling, the honor is mine."

Didi leaned back in her chair and took a long sip of her mimosa.

"So, um...tell me about the event you're holding," I said.

"We do a yearly event, an auction for New York's finest, to raise money for Animas," Didi began. "Everything will need to be organized, from the pieces to be auctioned off, to the catering, to the centerpieces."

"Oh wow," I said, scribbling down her words in my notebook.

"You don't need to worry about that quite yet though," Didi smiled.

I stopped writing. "No?"

"No. First, I want you to organize the board of directors' dinner. It's next week. Think of it like a kind of test."

"A test?"

"I need to see what you're made of before I hand the auction over." Didi grinned. "Don't worry, Angie. I can already tell you'll be great."

The waiter arrived with our plates then, and I quickly moved my notebook out of the way. "Eggs Benedict and the quiche Lorraine."

"So, Angie," Didi said, cutting into her eggs Benedict and making yolk ooze out onto her plate, "tell me about yourself."

"There's not much to know," I said reaching for the salt shaker.

Didi pointed at me with her knife. "I can't believe that's true. You're Angela Knight! You stole the most desirable bachelor in New York. That's no easy task."

There was something in her tone that made my stomach tight.

Jealousy maybe.

Was it possible that Didi was one of Xavier's many women? If the nonprofit she worked for was a regular charity Knight Enterprises donated to, there were countless Christmas parties and luncheons that would have provided the perfect cover for a romance.

Surely Brad wouldn't set me up with one of Xavier's bed-warmer. Not unless he didn't know...

Suddenly, I found myself asking, "Do you know Xavier?"

"Our families run in the same circles," Didi said, dismissing the question. "We went to the same private school. Took lessons at the yacht club together. Summers in the Hamptons. You know, normal stuff."

I nodded. Maybe that was where Didi's sense of style and loud mouth came from. I had always thought that they were just Xavier's own quirks.

Now I realized that they might be symptoms of being raised in the elite upper class.

"So you know each other well?" I asked.

Didi shrugged. "I supposed we did once. But you know how it is."

I didn't. Em and I had been friends since we were kids. There was no one else. And there definitely hadn't been any yacht clubs or weekends in the Hamptons.

I nodded anyway and took a bite of my quiche to avoid elaborating.

I wasn't sure what was going on here. Was this a business meeting? An interview? Brunch with a friend?

"How did you and Xavier meet?" Didi asked. "I mean I've read the articles, but it's always so much better to hear the story from the source."

"It really was as simple as all that," I told her after I swallowed. "We met one afternoon in a dumpling shop, and the rest is history."

"True love," Didi smiled. "And how about the event planning? How did you get into that?"

"It's actually only recently I discovered I had a calling for it," I found myself saying.

It sounded like something you'd read in a girly magazine or hear on HGTV. Hopefully, something exactly up Didi's alley.

"I wish I had thought of that," she said.

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

Didi laughed. "You don't get into nonprofits for the money, darling. You know how the game works. It's all about image."

I found myself smiling. It was rare to find someone so frank and outright among the Knights' friend and acquaintances. "I do."

Brunch turned to lunch, and lunch into cocktails. By the time I was walking home through Central Park, the sun had begun to set.

I liked Didi. A lot. She was full of passion and drive and more fun than I had been a part of in a while.

The two of us couldn't possibly be more different, but somehow her loud mouth and big hair mixed well with my shy smiles and flushed cheeks.

In fact, she reminded me a bit of Xavier. They were forces to be reckoned with.

Maybe that was why she and I hit it off so well.

Just as with my fiery husband, I was the water to cool her flames.

Whatever it was, I loved being around her. She made me feel empowered, like I could do whatever I wanted, be whatever I wanted.

As I stepped out of the park and onto the street, my phone buzzed in my pocket.

Xavier
Where r u?

Xavier
Got home and ur not here

Angela
Sorry!

Angela
I'm just down the street

Angela
My meeting ran long

Xavier
Meeting???

Xavier
nvm

Xavier
Just hurry

Xavier
I have some exciting news

Angela
Me too!

Angela
See you in a minute

Filled with fresh excitement, I quickened my pace.

Xavier would be proud of me, happy for me. I was sure of it. Not only had I found an acceptable job but I would be working for one of his old friends.

When I stepped into the penthouse, Xavier was standing over the dining table, lighting the candles.

Steaming plates of Kobe beef and julienne vegetables waited at our places, though Lucille was nowhere to be seen.

Xavier looked as though he'd had time to settle in.

He was still in his suit, but his jacket and tie had come off. The sleeves of his button-down were rolled up to his elbows, and the top two buttons of his shirt were open.

"Good evening, wife." He smiled as I walked toward him.

"Good evening, Xavier."

He kissed my cheek then pulled back to admire my wrap dress. "You look beautiful."

"What's all this *for*?" I asked as he pulled out my chair.

We normally ate dinner together, just not normally by candlelight, with orchestra music playing in the background, and not normally on the good china.

Xavier pulled out his own chair. "I told you I had a surprise, didn't I?"

Butterflies began to flutter in my stomach as he took my hands in his.

"Angela, I got you a job."