## **No Reservations**

Angela

The hour of the dinner had arrived.

By eight the next night, I was out of time.

I paced back and forth in the bar of Tavern on the Green.

*Deep breaths*, I reminded myself.

"At the table?" I balked.

through the doorway along the far side of the bar.

The dinner was taking place in the Central Park Room. I could see the circular table popping in and out of view

A handful of guests had already arrived and were being served cocktails.

Along the opposite wall was the entrance, where the host was greeting new arrivals to the restaurant. I smiled as she

passed with an older gentleman in a crisp navy suit. I recognized his freckled face from the guest list.

main room. As soon as the last two arrive, we can start with the first course and—"

Margret, it is my great pleasure to introduce Mrs. Angela Knight."

Maybe I should have turned down Didi's invitation.

Was it normal for the event planner to join the party?

enough to get hired.

"I have no doubt. I—"

I blushed and gave a small nod to the guests who had fallen into silence. "Hello."

I'd done everything I could to take care of the list of last-minute changes Didi had sent me yesterday afternoon. There

was nothing else I could do now—except wait.

"There you are, darling!" I turned to find Didi trotting toward me in metallic gladiator heels. She looked magnificent in her knee-length leopard

print dress, with her auburn curls somehow bigger than the last time we'd met. "You're here." I smiled as she air-kissed both my cheeks. Instantly, I felt brighter, as if simply being closer to her gave

me an instant confidence boost. "All but two of the guests have arrived already. They are being served drinks in the

"Breathe, Angie," Didi said. She peered over my shoulder into the dining room. "You did great. Tell the servers to add another place setting at the table and come sit down."

"Why not?" Didi laughed. "Come enjoy the fruits of your labor."

I flashed her a big smile as a sense of pride filled me. "Thank you."

"Good. Now come, I'll introduce you to everyone." After a quick word with the host, I hurried after Didi into the dining room.

She was already in the middle of telling a story. The board members bust into laughter as she gestured wildly. I came up beside her, and Didi did a double-take, and then she threw her arm around my shoulder. "Gentlemen,

"Angela here is an event planner extraordinaire. She might be the one taking care of this year's auction," Didi continued.

I noticed a few pairs of eyes flicking between us. A few brows rose. I spun my wedding ring around my finger and looked toward the floor.

Or was it my last name that caused their speechlessness? Margret—the only other woman at the table—was the first to break the silence. "It's wonderful to have you on board."

There were a couple hear-hear's, and the men raised their glasses, clinking them together.

"Sit, sit," Didi urged, patting the back of the chair next to the one she stood before. We both took our seats, and the board members began to talk among themselves once again. I scanned their faces, trying to resist the urge to sink into my chair.

"Tough crowd, huh?" Didi whispered. I laughed, instantly feeling relieved that she'd pulled me into conversation. "I've faced worse."

I'd never been around so many fancy people all at once by myself, and definitely not while trying to impress them

The woman stepped around to the far side of the table and took the seat opposite mine.

"So sorry I'm late," a slightly accented female voice said, interrupting Didi. "The traffic was outrageous."

The hair raised on the back of my neck. I recognized that nasally tone.

One of the too-thin, sleek-haired girls that Xavier had gone to school with.

"Ah, the wife." Her winged eyes flicked to Didi. "Très intéressant."

It was one of the ladies I'd met at the Gala in Paris.

"Collecting items?" Darla said.

The man beside me snickered.

My cheeks flushed deeper.

auction."

Traitor.

"Nice of you to join us, Darla," Didi said, her voice icy. It seemed I wasn't the only one who'd had a non-pleasant encounter with the French model.

At least she was alone this time. Maybe she'd be less *mean* without her posse surrounding her, backing her up.

I signaled to a passing waiter. Within minutes, plates of salad were being delivered to the table.

"So, Angela," said a balding man to my left, "have you started collecting the items for the auction?"

As she perched her bony butt on the edge of her chair, her gaze caught mine, and a slick smile spread across her lips.

"N-No, not yet." I blushed as I struggled to get the words out.

"If you'd arrived on time," Didi said, "you'd know that Angela is the event planner who will be organizing this year's

One of Darla's perfectly shaped eyebrows lifted. "You're planning the event? Have you been cut off from the Knights' accounts?"

Luckily, Didi came to my rescue again. "Some of us like to do more with our lives than play dress-up, Darla."

As her plate was placed before her, Darla wrinkled her nose. "Risotto for the vegan. How original."

"I'm sure we can find you some more plain lettuce," Didi said. "I wouldn't want you to fall off your diet."

Darla crossed her arms over her chest and leaned back in her chair. "Will Xavier be attending the auction this year?"

I swallowed thickly, the bite of fingerling potatoes I'd just taken getting stuck in my throat. Darla was up to something.

I pursed my lips, not altogether upset at Didi for making such a comment yet, somehow, feeling guilt for the harsh words being thrown around. Maybe it hadn't been such a good idea to join the dinner.

"I hope he does," she continued. "It's always good to see old friends. Don't you think, Didi?" "I prefer to make new ones," Didi bit back.

table, looking pointedly between Darla and Didi.

As I finished the last bite of my chocolate torte, Didi leaned closer.

"Absolutely. I'll send you the details for the auction in the morning."

I could have flown. Just jumped into the air and floated into the clouds.

My first instinct about her had been right. She was a good friend. My friend.

"Did you have a good evening, Ms. Knight?" he asked from the front.

Didi liked me, and for more than my event planning skills.

goodbye, I slid into the back seat.

I'd actually done it.

I did a little happy dance in the leather seat.

And she liked me, shy, awkward, stuttering me.

Only, around her, I didn't feel like my old self.

I felt magic. Powerful. Like I could do anything.

There was something else I wanted.

*Tonight is the night.* 

I turned down the hallway. "Xavier?"

I pushed through the door into his bedroom. Our bedroom.

"I'm ready," I said simply, and then I crushed my lips to his.

I'm ready.

I want this.

his hips.

I couldn't remember a time I'd felt so successful, so confident.

Not even getting into Harvard or passing my final exams had felt this good.

Excitement bubbled up inside me. "So I really get the job?"

didn't know you'd had the pleasure of meeting before."

Margret's interruption, I couldn't be sure.

"You really outdid yourself, Angie."

I blushed. "You think so?"

Darla laughed. "I think we all know how good you are at making friends."

I knew it. "I haven't asked him yet."

The salad plates were cleared away and replaced with our main course.

The man beside me choked on his sirloin. "If I wasn't, Animas wouldn't receive any time in the press," Didi shot back.

"How about we talk about what we could do to get the auction in the press?" Margret cut in from the other side of the

The man beside me made a little noise of disapproval. Whether it was for the women's snappy conversation or for

Darla pursed her glossy lips. "I could think of a few things you might do to get on the front page."

argument. By the time dessert rolled around, and a few more drinks had been served, the party was back on track.

I stabbed another potato, unable to help the feeling that I had somehow gotten myself in the middle of a long-standing

I leaned closer to her. "Thank you for defending me." Didi waved one of her manicured hands. "It was my pleasure, believe me. It's a battlefield out there, Angie. Compared to the other women I've encountered, you're a fresh breeze. I'm happy to take a couple of bullets for you."

When I finally made it outside a few hours later, Marco was waiting for me in the Lamborghini. After hugging Didi

"You've always had it." Didi smiled. Then her expression became more serious. "Sorry about Pepé Le Pew over there. I

"Amazing," I replied, smiling. I wasn't sure if it was the champagne or the fact that the night had gone well, but I could have sworn that I was glowing. The dinner was a success. I'd secured the upcoming auction. I'd done it.

Maybe it was because I'd finally taken a risk and gotten out of my comfort zone. Tried something that I might not be good at. Put myself out there. I thought of Didi, of her charisma and determination.

I bet she felt like this all the time. Like a sky full of stars. Like stepping off your favorite rollercoaster.

Someone else. I'd conquered so many of my fears at the event tonight, but there was still one obstacle left I needed to overcome.

"Shall I walk you in?" Marco said as we pulled up in front of my building.

I was already halfway out of the car door. "No, thanks! Have a good night."

As the car pulled up to a red light, the glow I felt turned into a fire, deep in my belly.

The trip through the lobby and up the elevator was a blur. All I could feel was the hammer of my heart in my chest, the tingling in my fingertips, and that deep pulsing heat in my core.

It would be a shame not to take advantage of the liquid courage that raced through my veins to conquer it, too.

"Xavier," I called as I stepped into the dark penthouse. The living room lights were off, the twinkle of the city lights bright out the windows.

Xavier was in bed, the duvet pulled up to his hips, laptop balanced on his legs. The pulsing heat in me darkened, deepened, into a molten throb as I took in the bare planes of his chest.

He raised an eyebrow, eyes sweeping from my heaving chest to my toes. "You're home."

He quickly moved his laptop out of the way. "Whoa, Angela." I gave him a look, one that showed him my passion, my cards. I was putting it all on the table.

I dropped my clutch to the floor and took one step toward the edge of the bed, throwing my leg over him, straddling