

Like Father, Like Son

Angela

I knocked on the front door of Dustin’s cafe. It was early, just past dawn. The streets were quiet compared to what they would be in a few hours.

Through the cafe windows, I saw the light over the counter flicker on, and then Dustin jogged through the cafe to the door and unlocked it.

“Morning!” I said as I stepped through the door.

“You’re chipper,” Dustin grumbled, re-locking the door.

The cafe wouldn’t open for an hour.

I’d woken up early to go for a jog and was pleased when I’d received a message from Dustin about halfway through, asking if I wanted to come meet him.

With the cafe so packed lately, and Dustin so busy managing the place and selling his art, early morning dates were the only time we’d been able to see each other.

And this morning was one where I needed my friend.

Dustin moved back behind the counter and began his setup routine. I pulled myself up onto one of the barstools, swinging my legs back and forth.

“So, how was your night?” Dustin said.

A huge smile spread across my lips. “Amazing.”

“See, I told you. You’re an event planner extraordinaire.”

I poured a little sugar out onto the counter and used my fingers to draw a little heart. It wasn’t the dinner that had made my night so amazing, but I wasn’t too sure how to broach the topic with Dustin. Instead, I said, “I got hired for the auction too.”

Dustin folded himself onto the floor, near the mini fridge, and began restocking the milk. “Of course you did. They would be stupid not to hire you. The publicity alone ...”

“Would you like to donate a piece, for the auction?”

Dustin looked up. “Really?”

“Sure, why not?” His work was known well enough now. It would be a suitable prize, and if someone important enough bid on it, it would increase Dustin’s popularity as an artist.

Dustin’s eyebrows knitted together, his gaze dropping to the polished concrete floor. “You’re always helping me and my career. I feel a bit bad that I can’t repay you in the same way.”

“You’re my friend,” I told him. “That’s what friends do. And you do help me. Your show was the first event I planned, wasn’t it? You’re the one who helps me navigate all the gritty details of my relationship with Xavier.”

“I guess you’re right,” he said, pushing himself up.

“I know I’m right.”

“Oh, yay! Thank you,” Dustin clapped and stepped over to the espresso machine. “This calls for a celebration.”

I looked down at the sugar again, feeling my cheeks heat. “There is something else to celebrate too.”

Busy in his cloud of steam, Dustin hummed in reply.

“Xavier said ‘I love you’ last night.”

“Wait, WHAT?” Dustin squealed—then swore as hot milk bubbled over.

I smiled again. The same lightheaded feeling I’d had last night was returning in full force. The whole morning I’d felt euphoric. I’d practically floated through my jog.

He’d said the three little words I’d been waiting for.

That I’d hoped for.

Sure, he’d only said them after being enticed by my naked body, but he’d still said them. He still loved me.

Dustin slapped two lattes down on the counter. “I knew there had to be a reason you were glowing! I thought it was that new moisturizer I got you. But love is a different kind of serum, isn’t it? TELL ME EVERYTHING.”

I leaned closer, resting my elbows on the counterop. “Well, I got home after the dinner last night and felt so good...I kind of just threw myself at him.”

“ANGELA!” Dustin mock-gasped, covering his hand with his mouth.

“I know. I know. Xavier stopped me though. Said he didn’t want—”

Dustin cut me off. “That BASTARD!”

I held up a finger. “No, no, it was sweet. He said he wanted to wait. That my first time should be special.”

“You guys are *too* much,” Dustin wrinkled his nose. “I can only hope I find someone who makes me go as goo-goo eyed as you and Xavier.”

I took a sip from my coffee. “That’s not all. I sort of let him...go... down there. With his mouth.”

Dustin choked on a mouth full of coffee.

“O-M-G,” he said between coughs. “Angela, you little whore. FINALLY.”

I blushed for what had to be the thousandth time. “It was...indescrribable. Electrifying. Like a shot of lightning down my spine.”

“So he is as good as one assumes,” Dustin pursed his lips.

I frowned. “Why?”

“He’d have to be, to make you come on your first go like that. Either you had way too much tension built up, or he’s *that fucking good*.”

“Dustin!” I said, covering my eyes.

“What? Not everyone is good with their tongue. I should know. I’ve met my fair share of terrible screws. There was this one guy who—”

“I don’t want to know,” I said. “Just promise me you’ll create that painting.”

Dustin nodded. “Absolutely! In fact, I’ve just found the perfect inspiration. I’ll start it now.”

I looked around the still dark cafe. “Don’t you need to finish setting up?”

Dustin rolled his eyes. “I’ll make Ben do it when he gets here. But before I get to the art, I want to hear more about your diva hoe behavior.”

I couldn’t help it. I burst into laughter.

Brad

Are you two free for dinner sometime next week?

Angela

Just name a day and I can make it work :)

Xavier

My only open night is Tuesday.

Brad

Tuesday would be splendid.

Brad

8pm at the Waldorf?

Xavier

Sure

Brad

Well, I think I’ve met the one.

Brad

I want you both to meet her.

Xavier

WHAT?!

Xavier

What do u mean, the one?

Xavier

A woman?

Xavier

How?

Xavier

Who is she?

Xavier

How much money does she want?

Angela

Xavier ...

Brad

Please, son, this is very important to me.

Brad

You asked to be included in conversations.

Brad

Don’t make me regret the decision

Xavier

☹️ ☹️ ☹️

Angela

We’ll be there with bells on

👉

Brad

✔️ ✔️ ✔️

Xavier

This was ridiculous. Never in a thousand years would I have ever thought I’d be meeting my own father’s girlfriend.

He was supposed to be meeting my girlfriends, not the other way around.

Instead, I was the responsible one. I was married. Settled down. Meanwhile, he’d apparently been off gallivanting around the town, picking up women right, left, and center.

It all felt like some big cosmic role reversal.

Like a punishment for all the years I’d spent doing the same thing to him.

The only difference was I’d done it in my twenties.

Not my sixties.

Not after thirty-plus years of a happy marriage.

“Do we have to go?” I asked Angela from inside my closet.

“Of course we do,” she replied from the other room, no nonsense. “You should be happy for your father.”

I grabbed two ties off the shelf and then followed her voice into the bathroom. She was sitting at the vanity, applying a light layer of shimmery gold powder to her eyelids.

“What’s there to be happy about? He’s already been in love. This is just some ridiculous fling to get attention,” I said and held the ties out for her inspection. “Why couldn’t he get a dog like a normal old person?”

“The purple,” Angela said calmly, and then she returned to the topic at hand. “Is that what this is about? Are you worried the woman is going to replace your mother?”

I ground my teeth together, a pain tightening in my chest. “That’s ridiculous. No one could replace my mother.”

Angela raised an eyebrow at me in the mirror but didn’t say anything more.

I tossed the rejected tie onto the bathroom counterop and laced the other around the back of my neck. “Who do you think she is, anyway?”

“Maybe someone he met at the speed-dating event,” Angela replied softly.

The what?!

“Excuse me?”

Angela spun around on the vanity bench. “A few weeks ago your father told me he was feeling lonely. I found a speed-dating event for him to attend so that he could meet some people his own age.”

I pulled the knot in my tie taut. “So this is all your fault.”

“Xavier, you asked to be included in the conversations between Brad and me. If you want to stay included, you’re going to have to behave. It’s just one dinner.”

I sat back on the edge of the bathtub. “If it was just some sweet, bingo-playing, goldie-oldie, I would happily sit back. He called her ‘The One,’ though, Angela. And they’ve known each other, what, a month? She’s planning something. I know it.”

Angela shook her head. “Do you think all women are evil?”

I shrugged. “Well, I don’t think they’re all angels, if that’s what you’re asking.”

She rolled her eyes and stood, smoothing out the lines of her tight black dress. “Ready to go?”

For a moment, I couldn’t respond. I was too distracted, thinking about the other night. Of peeling the dress from her body and feasting on her skin all over again.

Instead, I shook my head and pushed myself off the tub. “Yup.”

We grabbed our coats and then headed outside, where Marco was waiting in the Audi.

“The Waldorf,” I told him as Angela and I climbed into the back seat. Then, as we merged into traffic, I said, “You don’t think they are getting married, do you?”

“No, it sounded like he just wants us to meet her,” Angela said. She grabbed my hand, taking it in both of hers. “Please, don’t worry so much. It’s just dinner. You should be happy he’s happy.”

I knew that, I did, but I couldn’t help but feel like something was going to go terribly wrong.

Things had been on the up with Angela and me.

I wasn’t a lucky enough bastard to have everything in life go right. Something was going to give. It always did.

“I’ll behave,” I promised as we pulled to a stop outside the famous hotel.

I took a deep breath to steady myself. I’d negotiated with top businessmen. I’d had lunch with Zuckerberg and Jobs. I could handle dinner with a sweet old woman.

Hand in hand, we walked inside.

“Table for Knight,” I said to the hostess of the hotel’s Peacock Alley restaurant.

“Right this way,” she chirped, leading us into the maze of tables.

Stomach tightening into a knot, I scanned the faces of the diners. Finally, I found my dad’s familiar smile. He was laughing, his arm wrapped around the shoulders of—

I stopped dead in my tracks, pulling Angela to a stop along with me.

“We need to leave. Now,” I said.

“What? Why?” Angela asked.

I nodded.

Angela craned her neck, following my gesture. “Oh.”

Oh was fucking right.

It wasn’t some sweet, old cookie-baking granny my dad had his arm around.

It was caramel-skinned, fat-assed, luscious-lipped Penny.

The girl I used to screw.