

Overexposed

Xavier

Angela and I were surrounded by a thousand cameras, but this time, I was the one who'd called them.

Ever since the news got out that Angela and I had an arranged marriage, we'd been stalked by desperate paparazzi, pressing us for details.

Now it was time to come clean.

This time, we were going to leave everything on the table. No more secrets, no more lies. Angela and I had something real, and we had nothing to hide.

The press conference was set to begin in twenty minutes. But that didn't stop the persistent stalkers with cameras outside our dressing room.

I knew what they wanted.

They wanted to catch us frowning, to catch us fighting. Anything that proved we were as much of a sham as they thought we were.

"Are you sure about this?" Angela asked, her soft voice filling the space between us.

Even though she'd asked me that same question a million times, and even though I'd answered it confidently every single time she'd asked, she still had doubts.

Not that I could blame her.

The girl had been dragged through the dirt, all because she'd gotten mixed up in the mayhem that was my life.

Before I'd made the calls to secure this press conference last night, Angela had looked at me with her wide eyes, her mouth tugging up into a half-smile.

"We should go back to the island. The one we crashed on." She giggled. "There won't be any cameras there. No paparazzi. It'll just be me and you."

We laughed together, and I kissed her, marveling at how I'd gotten so lucky.

She was right, of course. If we could just get somewhere that we could be with each other, without the complications, it'd be so much easier.

But I was a Knight, and things like that didn't come easily to my family.

"We can't run away," I whispered to her in response.

"I know." She nodded, rubbing my cheek. "As long as we're here, together, I'll be happy."

"Promise?" I asked her, regretting it instantly. Because I couldn't ask that of her; it was too much. After everything I'd put her through, even asking her to stay by my side was too much.

"I promise," she murmured, kissing me again.

And I exhaled.

"Xavier? Are you sure?" Angela asked again, bringing me back to the dressing room. I stepped closer to her, pulling her into a tight embrace.

"I'm as sure about this as I am that I love you," I replied, kissing the top of her head.

Even with all the panic consuming her, she couldn't help but smile.

"Okay, then," she said, straightening my tie. I grinned, placing my hand over hers. "Go give 'em hell."

I brushed some hair out of her face, cupping her soft cheeks in my hands.

"For you," I responded, pressing her lips against mine. "anything."

Claudia

Nothing could make the chaos of after-school pickup better.

The new nanny had offered to pick up Sophie from school, but I just couldn't say yes. I couldn't bring myself to avoid fun like that.

And besides, just because I could afford help didn't mean I wanted all of it.

The whole point of this was to be able to pick Sophie up after school every day, to be able to take her to whichever extracurricular activity she chose. I wanted to give her the life she wanted. I wanted to make sure she had it all.

And in order to do that, I needed resources.

Resources and a little bit of fun. To keep me sane.

I got out of the car, grabbed Sophie from the teacher, and then helped her into the car. Once she was secure in her car seat, I got behind the wheel.

"Moosic! Moosic!" my little girl chanted.

"As you wish." I smiled back at her through the rearview. And then I put the *Frozen* soundtrack on, letting the beat wash through the car.

Ron
Hey babe

Ron
I've been thinking about you

Ron
Let's go to Cipriani Wall St tonight

Claudia
Can't

Ron
A night in then?

Claudia
Busy

Ron
How about tomorrow?

Claudia
That won't work either

Ron
Why not?

Ron
Everything okay?

Claudia
I didn't want to do this over txt but...

Claudia
I don't think we should see each other any more

Ron
What?

Ron
Why?

Claudia
I'm just not that into you

Ron
Are you kidding?

Ron
You used me

Ron
You just wanted the contract

Claudia
...

Claudia
I'm rly sry Ron

Ron
No you're not

Ron
You're no better than the Knights

Ron
You all deserve each other

Ron
Fuck all of you

Xavier

Standing at the podium, I was so terrified I couldn't even read my speech.

That was unlike me, which made my pulse race ever faster. I could feel sweat beading at my temples, and my tie felt way too damn tight.

If I couldn't fix our reputation, I would lose the company. Our stock had already dropped from all the chaos.

Poor Dad...Dad.

I couldn't believe how hard I'd been on him.

After this, I need to go and apologize for being such a dick.

All the reporters were shrieking questions at me. I cleared my throat as loudly as I could so I could at least answer a few.

"There's a rumor that my wife signed a contract before she married me, in exchange for cash," I announced. The crowd of journalists grew silent. "I'm not here to contest it. I'm here to tell you that it is the truth."

There was a roar surrounding me. Everyone began spitting headlines into their cameras.

Xavier Knight confirms ...

...Angela Knight was a ...

...fake love but real employee ...

They didn't wait for me to get to the good part.

"That is the truth, but it is not the whole truth," I proclaimed. "Before I was married, I was miserable. I saw all sorts of women, yet was completely alone. My father met Angela and knew instantly that she was everything I needed. She was no gold digger. In fact, she had so much more to offer than I did."

I took a breath, and then I continued. "But I was stubborn. I was emotionally sealed off. I wouldn't even entertain the thought of love, yet was completely alone. My father refused to let me take on his company, the only thing I could connect to, unless I took Angela's hand. So I did."

I looked at Angela. Her face was puffy from crying. Her cheeks were flared up, uncomfortable with the secrets I was revealing. But I needed to tell more.

I needed to tell it all.

"That was the best choice I ever made," I explained to the crowd. "At first, I was like all of you. I misjudged Angela. I thought she was money hungry, willing to do anything for high-class living, but she wasn't."

Again, I risked a glance at Angela. Her eyes were closed, like she couldn't bear to watch.

"Angela's father needed major heart surgery, and her family didn't have the resources to help him. So she married me to pay off his medical bills. Angela would do anything for her family, including marrying some trash-bag she'd never met."

I heard a gasp from the group of reporters in front of me.

Good.

"Now, Angela and I are family. We'll do anything for each other. And that includes coming clean. About the history of us."

A stylish *Cosmopolitan* reporter burst to the front of the crowd, calling out to me.

"Do you even like her?" she remarked.

And finally my pulse slowed down, my pores stopped sweating, and my heart opened up. I smiled.

"No. I don't like her. I am over the top, cheesy, little-kid-crush in love with her. Angela Knight makes me want to listen to Taylor Swift songs. She gets me to look forward to holidays and lets me enjoy the things in life that come free. I love her so much that I'm remarrying her—this time for real."

A meek loyal news reporter raised her hand. Out of breath and overwhelmed with how I'd just peeled off my skin for a crowd to assess my heart, I called on her.

"Mr. Knight, are you angry at your father for forcing you into an arranged marriage?" she questioned.

"No...I'm so grateful he did. Everything I have in this world ... is because of him," I answered. And then I turned away from the podium and walked off the stage, proud of the truth I'd left behind.

Brad

As I sat alone in my favorite leather armchair, eyes peeled out the floor-to-ceiling glass window in my home office, my mind reeled with the events of the past six hours.

I couldn't believe Xavier hated me so much.

I couldn't believe I had let things get so out of hand.

I couldn't believe the whole world knew our family secrets.

I tried to reassure myself, to tell myself that I could think of something to fix it. There was always a way to fix things.

As soon as things are back to normal, Xavier will forgive me.

That was what I told myself.

Just figure out a way to get them back to normal.

My son was right, of course.

I had made the arrangement for me.

I wanted him to get married because I couldn't bear to see the light of my life fizzle out, all because there was no one to tend to his flames. I didn't want my beautiful, smart, headstrong boy to be alone.

Life wasn't meant to be lived alone.

And now he wasn't. He had Angela by his side, to help him meet the chaos of the world head-on.

Even if he despised me, the end was worth the means. He had her, and that was all I'd ever wanted.

So maybe I was some sort of control freak.

Maybe I liked being able to move the puzzle pieces around, to orchestrate happiness for those I loved.

So *what?* I thought with a smile.

Then it hit me, the deepest, most all-consuming pain I've ever felt. Like an ax through my skull. I froze.

Then, I vomited.

Then, the shaking began. My entire body seized, my head vibrating without control. With each shudder, excruciating agony drove through me.

I searched for something—anything—I could focus on, a distraction that I could grasp onto in this moment of unflinching pain.

But my vision was scrambled. Light felt like fishhooks piercing through my eyes.

Then it felt like I had no eyes at all.

Each body part felt like it was evaporating into nothing.

I felt the life in each limb gasp and disappear.

I couldn't go.

Not like this.

Not now.

I had to fight, for my life, for my son. I wasn't ready for Amelia yet.

I inhaled with everything I could, but it was no use.

I took a breath and knew it was my final one.