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Permanent Record(ing)
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**The Arrangement** 

S.S. Sahoo

Ron Broooo

Ron Yo

Ron Xavier

Ron I'm outsideee

Ron no

Ron come out Ron I have 😡 😡 😡

Ron come outside

Ron

yaaas

Should I see him out or send him up?" I turned the video monitor on. Ron was stumbling around the lobby behind the doorman. He was so wasted he could barely walk. the funeral, and I could not bear the thought of getting them started up again. "XAAAAVIEEEEEER!" Ron howled, like a dog crying out for attention.

If it wasn't so annoying it would've been impressive.

The doorman glanced over his shoulder. "Sir?"

woke Angela.

As soon as he saw me, he cheered. "I can't have him making this much noise in the lobby," the doorman said. I ground my teeth together, then grabbed Ron's upper arm. "Come on."

swaying by the entrance.

Fuck.

I rolled my eyes, resisting the urge to push the fucker to the ground. A public breakdown inside my goddamn building was *not* what I needed. As soon as I managed to get him into my elevator, I dropped him onto the cushioned bench. "What are you doing here?" I asked. To be honest, I was genuinely curious.

sleeve of my coat.

Although it did seem like a pretty on-point punishment for them both. "She broke my heart!!!!!" Ron screeched, just as the elevator doors opened. Angela darted into the foyer, eyes wide with surprise. "Ron? What are you doing? Are you okay?" she asked, helping him out of the elevator. She shot me a confused look.

"No...Claudia. She's—"

Oh God.

Angela and I exchanged glances. Ron ... He'd just confessed. Hadn't he? Was that a confession? Angela went into the kitchen to get him water while I carried the useless prick to the couch.

"Leaked what?"

"I'm sooooorry," Ron muttered.

"Sorry for what?" I hounded him.

I translated.

That fucking imbecile! piece of paper. It was a good thing I'd fired him. Not only was he incompetent and disloyal but he was dangerous. *How dare he have the nerve to come here to heal his conscience?* 

There was no way I was going to give him any peace of mind.

glossy drunk eyes. "Your life is ruined, you know that?"

"Are you here to apologize?" Angela asked, always trying to see the best, even in the worst people.

"I know...she ruined all of me. I don't expect you to forgive me. I don't forgive me," Ron admitted.

"It's not accepted, you asswipe," I growled, grabbing his shirt and pulling him toward me. I looked at him, deep into his

He nodded, too distressed to let panic penetrate through. He took a long sip of water, becoming increasingly sober.

"I put a recording device in your office. Hours and hours of your emotional abuse toward your employees was caught

But Ron patted his jeans pocket, like he was looking for something urgently. Then he pulled out his phone, clicked a

"Hey, Johnny, US Weekly ~needs~ to hear these recordings. It's the biggest scoop on the Knights I've had yet. You're

on tape. And Claudia, it was all her idea. She was the one who gave me the little thing that did the recording."

I could see Angela pitying him, her eyes softening like butter in the microwave, but I wasn't buying it. "Why are you really here, Ron?" He took a deep breath. Then he gulped.

"You didn't—"

It was Claudia's voice.

button, and something started playing.

going to want this exclusive," her voice rang from the phone.

This was extortion. "You know what this means?" I asked Angela.

"Claudia's in trouble," she whispered.

I wanted her to leave my family alone.

moving so fast he'd barely even discussed it with me.

But I didn't want that to come at the cost of her family.

"For who, Xavier? Not for Sophie. If we send Claudia to jail

plausible reason for why she would risk so much to destroy him.

"It's okay. I'll make it okay. I promise. What do you need?" he whispered.

I wanted Claudia to be punished for all the havoc she'd caused, sure.

The idea of Sophie being ripped from Claudia, and being left with no parents, no people who loved her, who could take care of her, was devastating. The feeling of guilt was overpowering.

mad with rage.

"I know." I nodded.

I couldn't do that, not to another human being. Not to a mother.

"I need you to fix this in another way," I told him.

Claudia's eyes were painted with terror.

But still, I didn't hate the woman.

where he is." "So you decided to blackmail the cash out of Angela and me?" I couldn't believe it. She didn't have access to the jackass she needed, so she'd tried to fuck us up. Claudia looked down.

Her embarrassment made it clear I was right.

Just a few feet away was the fountain.

I pulled an envelope out of my pocket. "There's two plane tickets and the deed to a house inside. I don't know where you'll be. My old assistant sorted out all the details," I explained, handing her the envelope. "Everything you need has been taken care of. You take Sophie, and

you get the hell out of my life. For good."

"Deal," she agreed, reaching to shake my hand. I pulled away. I couldn't bear to let her touch me. "Please, Xavier, I hope you can forgive me." But I didn't owe her an accepted apology. I didn't owe her anything.

Ron ur house!!sdf!?

Xavier

The doorbell rang, making me grind my teeth. Quickly, I jumped out of bed and ran to answer it before the sound

"Mr. Knight," the doorman's voice crackled through the intercom. "There is a very intoxicated man here to see you.

"I'm coming down," I sighed. The poor bastard deserved that much. He hadn't gotten this upset over nothing.

I tossed on my jacket and darted into the elevator. Then I was out in the lobby, striding over to the drunken idiot

"You spend MORE on goose down than you spend on EMPLOYEES. I was paid shit. You're *shit*," he grumbled.

Ron looked up at me, and then he started to cry like a goddamn teenage girl who'd found out her sick dog didn't really

"This was a bad idea. He's leaving," I said, trying to drag Ron back toward the elevator. But Angela kept her hold on

get sent to a farm. "You're the oooonly one who knoooows what I'm feeling," he whined.

"Incompetent and drunk?" I asked. "Can't relate. Not right now, anyway."

"Claudia dumped meeee. Sucked me dryyyyy, that mosquito!" Ron wailed.

"I think he and Claudia were involved, and he came here for solidarity?"

"Romantically?" Angela said, her eyes popping. "They were

**Xavier** leave

**Xavier** r u drunk?

Xavier

wtf

Xavier

outside where

I wanted to call the police, but Angela and I could not take another scandal. The paparazzi had backed off ever since

Xavier

gtfo

The doorman crossed his arms over his chest as I dragged Ron back toward the elevator. Ron was walking like he'd just learned how. Stumbling and falling every other step, he kept his eyes locked on the

*Please* don't tell me that this fool has been sleeping with Claudia. Really.

"SCREWING! And I helped her screw you two, but then...she screwed me in a baaaaaad way," Ron admitted.

"It was me. I leaked it," he sobbed. Angela returned to the room, glass in hand. His eyes dashed from hers to mine in panic. Angela handed Ron the water, sullen. "He leaked the arrangement. That's how it went public," she put together. Of course. I was ready to take his empty skull in between my hands and crush it. I wanted to crumple his head like a

"You were a terrible boss. And assistants, we talk. Every single assistant you've ever had has hated you, Xavier." "Get to the point," I demanded, seething.

My eyes whipped to Ron's then to Angela's. This was more than blackmail. "I have a lot more than that," Ron said, leaning forward on the couch. For a second he looked like he was going to topple over, but he steadied himself.

Xavier wanted Claudia in jail. He had already downloaded all of Ron's recordings and called his lawyers. He was

Angela

Her eyes were wider than I'd ever seen them. But she, very slowly, very cautiously, nodded.

I curled up on the bed, and I couldn't help but sob. Overhearing my cries, Xavier finished up his phone call with the fourth lawyer of the day. "It's all going to be over soon, my angel," he promised, coming to lie down next to me. He wrapped his arms around my waist, trying to soothe me. But he didn't get it.

"That was Claudia's job. She chose to harass us instead of looking out for her daughter," Xavier responded, his eyes

I knew Claudia was disturbed. She was heartbroken. She was probably still in love with Xavier, and that was the only

"It's not our problem. Sophie isn't my kid, Angela. She's the product of the worst memory in my life."

"But she's someone's kid! She's *a* kid, and we need to protect her," I said softly.

..." I gasped, trying to catch my breath.

And I certainly didn't want to butcher her with legal fees and jail time. I started to hyperventilate. Xavier squeezed me tighter.

Xavier

I had just played her the recordings. I enjoyed watching her squirm in panic, knowing that she couldn't run away from the mess she'd caused. All she could do was sit and beg. "Please, Xavier. Please," she groveled. "I needed the money. I can't get Daniel to pay child support. I don't even know

that we'd been covered in mist. Now, it was just fog. "Because I needed a reminder that I didn't always hate you," I said. "Do whatever you need to, Xavier, really. But you don't need to separate me from Sophie. Please, she's already had one parent abandon her," Claudia begged.

Claudia stared at the envelope in disbelief. She looked up at me with grateful, confused eyes.

"I'm sorry. Really. But, Xavier, why did you take me here?" Claudia asked, looking around at Bryant Park.

Three years ago, I had asked her to marry me right by this spot. It was summer, and the fountain shot its water so high

I owed myself the right to move the fuck on. "I can't forgive you. But I can forget you," I said. Then I walked away, leaving her in my memories.