## The Perfect Arrangement

## Angela

It was my wedding day.

Again.

Isolated in my dressing room, I stood in my underwear. The last time I'd slipped on a wedding dress, I'd been surrounded by people.

When I walked down an aisle, there was a crowd around me. I'd looked at Xavier at the altar and pledged to be with

him in sickness and health, and I'd been completely alone. Today I wasn't getting married *to* Xavier.

I was getting married with him.

I wasn't a trade, but a promise. Honestly, what I was promising Xavier wasn't different than the things we had already

to last us a lifetime.

done. To be there through trials and tragedies? We'd done that. Between my dad and his dad, plane crashes and aggressive business associates, we'd had enough trials and tragedies

It dawned on me that when Brad had passed away, the arrangement had passed away with him.

There was no longer anyone to disappoint and no doctor bills left to be paid.

The web he'd sewn, tying Xavier and me together, had unraveled, so it was time for us to tie the knot.

It was time to shed our insecurities like a second skin. It was time to say I do, and really do whatever it took for our love to survive.

I put on my wedding dress. It was a magnificent textured organza gown, with a draped bodice embellished with delicate lace.

I looked at my reflection.

I looked...breathtaking.

But unlike last time, I still looked like me.

I was in a wedding gown, not a costume.

I walked up the stairs from below deck onto the enormous main section of the sailboat.

Summer had arrived, and its breeze propelled us through New York Harbor. My father was waiting, the sunset

I realized that this wasn't just the first real wedding for me, but for him too.

Dad wrapped his arm around my waist and escorted me down the aisle.

As I looked at the faces I passed by, I smiled the biggest smile. Everyone around me knew what toppings I liked on my pizza, what I'd looked like before I knew how to do my

Dustin grinned and pointed to Danny, mouthing to me, "He's so hot!"

Em smiled at me, her pregnant belly bulging in her satin sundress.

My thoughts were fluttering like a migration of monarch butterflies soaring through the Rocky Mountains, thousands

That was the word I was looking for. It was the only one that could adequately describe the mass of emotions cartwheeling through my stomach.

Just as the sailboat cruised beside the Statue of Liberty, I reached the altar.

I faced Xavier. His suit was perfectly tailored, allowing his broad shoulders to sit in perfect harmony with his athletic arms. I looked over every inch of him, every angle and vein, knowing that tonight, and forever after, they belonged to

As the sails rippled through the tangerine sky, the minister asked me if I would take this woman as my wife. I had already taken her to abandoned islands, to press conferences, emergency rooms, and funerals.

I had taken her to my house and watched her make me a home that felt like heaven. I had taken her virginity.

But at that altar, I wanted to take the pain away.

And I had taken her as my wife long ago.

I had taken her to hell, and I had brought her back.

Did I want to do that until the end of time?

I do.

The way that let her know that if she went blind, I'd write her love poems in fucking Braille.

I do.

I was promising to love her the way I do everything else—recklessly, passionately, knowing that I might not get it right every time. And she knew that. She accepted it.

Before I knew it, our vows were renewed and we were kissing the way we should have on our first wedding day.

But that meant there was a physical reminder that he was gone.

The boat erupted in celebration as soon as we were re-married.

My eyes locked on the empty chair, and I felt empty myself.

Angela took it from my hands and fed me. She swung her arm around me, fiddling with my hair.

Her words were like clear air in a sandstorm. This was our time to ignore all of the shit and rejoice that we'd survived

Angela looked at me hard, and long. "All Brad ever wanted was for us to make it, Xavier. For you to not be alone," she said. "I promise you will never be alone. If anything, we're celebrating today for him. In his honor."

the fuckery together. So I pulled my head out of my own ass and let myself feel happy.

me as his equal, his just-as-experienced partner. I wanted him to make me scream.

managed to grab my wrists, spin me around, and unzip my gown.

The weight of Dad's death was so heavy I could barely pick up my fork.

Angela Xavier was carrying me into our hotel room, in old-fashioned bridal style, but I wriggled myself out of his embrace.

"You're feisty tonight, wife." "Just for you, husband," I retorted with a smile.

I didn't want any more sweetness. I didn't want chivalry. I wanted to be pinned against the bed. I wanted him to treat

I broke from him and slammed him against the wall, kissing him with all my might. Through his surprise, Xavier

nipples, dug into my tight hips. Then he lowered me to the ground, gently, and my knees made contact with the marble, my body still wrapped in layers of organza.

And more than happy ... *loved*.

My eyes on him, I circled my tongue around him, and his breathing got heavy.

He was throbbing and stiff as I twisted my hands around him. I rushed them up and down as I wrapped my lips

I watched him unzip his pants, looking down at me with a dirty grin. He released himself from the fabric.

My whole body shuddered, my shoulders crunching together, my neck extending back.

I started to shake, losing control. He reached for the skin between my thighs with his tongue and licked it.

It was like being in a cold shower then being doused in splashes of blistering heat. Every cell of me was soaking wet.

Every cell of me belonged to him.

It really was the perfect arrangement.

Em

angie!

"I love you more, Mr. Knight," I replied, so close to the edge, to losing myself, that I couldn't wait a second longer. The chaos, the excitement, the spontaneity, and the passion.

Em i'm sorry to text you on your wedding night...

and my water just broke!

highlighting his glowing face.

makeup, and that I loved Xavier more than breathing.

of wings flashing through the air. Gratitude.

We were surrounded by lavender, white roses, maroon mini calla lilies, variegated pittosporum, and crisp silver

ribbons. The scent was enticing, but I couldn't breathe because I was so overwhelmed. With joy, of course.

Xavier

I had taken her for a gold-digger, for an obligation, for a mistake. I had taken her for granted.

Fuck yes, I do.

I do.

The way that told her if she went deaf, I'd still show her all the best fucking parts of me. The way that promised if we couldn't touch, she would still feel my presence.

But when we sat down to eat the feast, I couldn't look at Angela. My eyes were glued at the empty seat across from me. Where my father should've been sitting. We had decided that

the best way to honor him was to leave an empty seat for him. For his spirit. For his memory.

Although it had been months since Dad had slipped away, this was the first milestone he'd been absent from. It was the first time I couldn't glance over to him and know if I was fucking up, or manning up, gloriously.

"I guess...I can't be celebrating anything knowing he's gone," I admitted. "All he wanted was to see me as a father, and I couldn't even do that for him."

"What's wrong, Xavier?" she asked, innocent as ever.

Thousands of dollars' worth of lace was discarded on the floor, and then he ripped my panties off.

He took both my wrists in one muscular hand and traced down my torso with the other. His fingers lingered on my

Still, Xavier kept his eyes on me, wondering who I'd become. I took more and more of him, surprising both of us. His legs were quivering, his voice box vibrating with

overwhelming moans until it was too much. He had to have me, all of me, immediately.

Xavier pulled my legs up in the air, kissing my ankles with tender enthusiasm.

His tongue was everywhere, his breath electrifying against my flesh.

As I was squealing, he drove inside me, over and over again.

Each thrust was deeper, faster, more mind-numbingly delightful.

He grabbed my neck, pinning me down onto my back.

I was still pulsing, and Xavier crossed my ankles around his neck then pulled his fingers through the roots of my hair. He wasn't done.

He pinched my nipples in rhythm with the rest of his body, rotating between pleasure and sharpness.

I wouldn't have it any other way. "I love you, Mrs. Knight," Xavier said between breaths.

Em but I'm still on this boat

Em