

Monkey Business

XAVIER

Of all the things I wanted to show Angela in Bali, this was what I was most excited for. Homestead on the Beach was nothing short of magic.

And basking in the afterglow of our lovemaking, the restaurant was even more beautiful than I remembered.

We sat on the deck that looked out at the ocean and the blazing red and orange sunset. Nothing could beat this.

But then I looked back across the table, at my wife in profile as she took in the view, her blonde hair falling around her face, her skin tan under the beautiful white dress I bought for her ...

This is even better.

I felt like my heart could burst right out of my chest, onto the table beside the first plates of the tasting menu and our glasses of French chardonnay.

"It means so much to be here with you," I began. "Thank you for coming, I know it's not exactly your scene."

"No." Angela smiled, shaking her head. "I love it. It almost feels like Brad is here; this place reminds me so much of him."

Hot tears rose behind my eyes for a moment. She had read my mind.

The restaurant was five-star, but there was something easygoing about it. It was a sand-between-your-toes kind of place. It was right over the beach, after all.

That was why my dad loved it. And I thought Angela would love it, too.

"This was my parents' favorite restaurant in the world. And *this* was their favorite table."

I knew she wouldn't like it if I rented out the whole place, so I just made sure we had the best table in the joint. My parents' table. Tucked into the corner of the deck, but closest to the water.

I took a bite of ceviche, savoring the lime before washing it down with wine. I smiled at the angel who was my wife, settling into our perfect evening together.

"I know you've been thinking about them a lot since we've been here," Angela said, her eyes soft as a doe's. She placed her fingers on my arm, and once again, my heart swelled in my chest.

"I have," I admitted, looking at my hands.

"I thought being in Bali would make me miss Dad more. I do, of course, but it's more like I'm just ... remembering him."

"That's what he would have wanted," she said, tipping up her head to the blazing sky. The red sunlight danced across her dress. "For you to celebrate his life."

With one hand I held hers, and with the other, I finished my glass of wine. As a waiter materialized to fill it, I thought of Angela's words.

According to my father's lawyers, he wanted six months to pass before the reading of his will. He wanted us to celebrate his life without thinking about the things he left behind.

"I like thinking about when my parents were here on their honeymoon," I said, smiling. "When they were young, and my dad was still running the oil company before he started with hotels ... and they talked about having a kid ..."

Angela smiled knowingly at me, which urged me on.

"It makes me think about it, too. Makes me realize how much I want to have a family with you. And not just because Dad wanted a grandchild so much ... I want to raise a kid with you."

I leaned in towards her. "I want to do everything with you."

Her smile widened. When I looked at her, it felt like we were the only people at the restaurant. Hell, in the *world*.

Just me and this woman who turned my life upside down, who gazed at me like I was the good man I never thought I could be.

From her perfect lips came the voice of an angel: "I want it all, too."

ANGELA

I woke early as the sun broke over the ocean, the sky striped pink and orange. Not for the first time on the trip, I felt like I woke up in a dream.

The window was open. The crash of waves that lulled me to sleep each night pulled me from my dreams in the morning.

It meant I woke early, but I didn't mind. I loved watching the sun come up, drifting in and out of sleep. I loved watching Xavier while he slept.

In the pale light, I let my eyes run over his perfect features without the shyness I sometimes felt in his waking hours. Here, asleep beside me, my husband was as shockingly handsome as he always was.

But asleep, he looked as carefree and innocent as a child.

Unable to contain my love, I kissed his cheek.

I didn't mean to disturb him, but his eyes flickered open. He smiled at me lazily.

"Up early again, I see," he whispered, lifting his fingers to my cheek.

I nodded.

We only had two more days left in Bali. Though I didn't want to leave, I was excited for what was next. I knew wherever I went, Xavier would be at my side.

After Bali, we were flying to LA for the hotel opening.

I had a feeling this one would feel different than other parties before. The jazz quartet I booked was playing a sold-out show at the Hollywood Bowl the night before the opening. The night would be as elegant as the property itself.

I wouldn't let myself get pushed around by mean girls anymore. Or mean men, for that matter.

I would stand my ground on the red carpet, posing for the paparazzi with my husband. Xavier had told me I was beautiful so many times that I was finally starting to believe it was true.

I decided I would wear my new white dress to the event.

Was it weird for a new bride to wear white so much? After her second wedding?

I didn't care. My husband's love gave me the confidence to do whatever I wanted. Say what I wanted, dress how I wanted, make love how I wanted...

Xavier wrapped his arm around my waist, pulling me close to him. His skin was so warm with sleep that my muscles relaxed entirely. Before I knew it, I was asleep again, too.

When I woke again, the sun was all the way up.

Xavier was dressed in a fluffy white robe, wheeling a cart towards the deck.

"Room service?" I asked, wondering how long I had been asleep.

"Breakfast is served!" he announced. "Waffles for the princess."

I smiled, jumping from the bed and into my own robe.

I followed him onto the deck, where he was arranging our meal on the table that sat there.

"I told the delivery boy I'd set up the table myself," he said, winking. "He didn't want me to go to the trouble, but I convinced him eventually."

He walked towards me, looking at me from under his dark lashes.

"Nobody gets to see my wife in bed," he said, pulling me in for a kiss. "Except me."

I giggled.

"Thanks for breakfast."

The bright sun made my head hurt. Thinking of all the wine that accompanied last night's tasting menu, I realized I had a tiny hangover.

"I'm gonna get my sunglasses," I said, ducking inside.

"I'm hungover, too," Xavier called. "But nothing cures a hangover like room service."

I dropped into my chair across from him, the world pleasantly shaded.

After a big bite of waffle, I asked, "What's on the agenda for today?"

He grinned at me like he knew a joke and I was the punch line. "You'll see."

"What does *that* mean?" I asked.

"We're going on a field trip. Off property. To meet some friends of mine. And I recommend you wear sensible shoes."

An hour later, we parked our Jeep at the entrance to a forest. A rock wall, centuries old, was covered in bright green moss. The forest was lush and deep.

Xavier had never mentioned that he had friends in Bali before, and I was praying they wouldn't be anything like the snooty models I met in Paris ...

"You have friends *here*?" I asked as Xavier helped me down from the vehicle.

"Sure," he said with a smile, gesturing to the sign:

SACRED MONKEY FOREST SANCTUARY

"The monkeys are my friends!" he yelled, tackling me in a hug.

I laughed, shaking my head. "You got me," I admitted.

As soon as we began walking, I noticed monkeys *everywhere*.

There were mama monkeys cradling baby monkeys, monkeys jumping at tourists' ankles, onto their backs and heads ...

"This is *wild*."

"Crazy, huh?" Xavier asked. He squeezed my hand. "Don't worry, I won't let any monkeys get you."

He pinched my side, teasing me. I giggled, but then his smile disappeared. "But seriously, don't look them in the eyes."

I laughed uncertainly as a monkey pounced on a little girl, making her scream.

"Let's keep walking." He directed us around the girl's extended family, who had managed to detach the monkey from the little girl, but not from her father.

I loved how determined my husband looked, directing me through the tourists in the forest. "We came here so I can show you this temple ... I just can't remember *exactly* how to get there."

As I kept pace beside him, I admired my husband's face ... his jawline, so sharp it could cut stone, the scruff he'd been growing since we got here.

He smiled down at me, and I met his eyes through the dark lenses of our sunglasses.

Around us, the deep green forest resounded with chattering and squawking birds. Xavier advised me to wear his work shorts and a button-down shirt, plus the new hat he bought me. I felt like I was on a safari.

Maybe at another point in my life, I would be scared. But I wasn't. My husband's hand was firm and certain around mine. And I, too, had proven I was strong.

We approached a break in the canopy of trees. When we entered the clearing, Xavier said, "Here we go!"

Then came into view a huge temple, with statues outside it, keeping guard.

"Oh my God."

It was made entirely of stone. And the stone was covered completely by electrifying green moss. It looked both ancient and futuristic at once.

Xavier and I wound our way around the temple, admiring the statues of Hindu gods.

This area was, to my surprise, relatively absent of visitors. Human visitors, that is, as there were many monkeys. But it seemed like even the monkeys there were keeping quiet. It made the whole place feel sacred. Caught between time.

We walked around silently. I thought of taking out my camera for pictures, but something told me that my memory would be enough. Photos couldn't do it justice.

Only when we were back under the cover of the forest canopy did we begin to talk again.

I practically skipped down the path, I was so excited by the eerily beautiful temple and the promise of the deep forest ahead of us.

"It's so amazing, right? Seeing it makes time stop or something."

"I know!" I gushed, reaching up to kiss his cheek.

He smiled, and again I felt like he was a little boy, like we were two kids on an adventure.

Right then, a monkey landed on Xavier's head. It must have jumped from a tree branch because it struck like a bolt of lightning.

"Whoa!" Xavier said, reaching above his head to grab the monkey. I tried to help, but the creature was determined. It reached with its agile little hand and grabbed Xavier's sunglasses.

The monkey effectively ripped them off and leapt away again before I could even react.

"HEY!" Xavier yelled, charging towards the monkey, who climbed up the branch higher into the tree. The unhappy billionaire shook the branch, sending leaves flying, but failed to disturb the monkey.

"Are you fucking *kidding* me?!" he shouted at the little thief.

Fellow tourists gathered around to watch my husband's tantrum. I laughed so hard that tears streamed down my cheeks.

When he turned around, his mouth hung open in disbelief.

"Those were *Gucci!*" he cried.

Back at the hotel, Xavier and I changed into our bathing suits for an evening dip in the ocean.

"I'm going to need to buy new sunglasses," Xavier complained. "I hope there's something decent in the gift shop."

"I'm sure we'll find something," I assured him, kissing his sun-freckled nose. "Now, let's go!"

As I was pulling open the sliding glass door, I heard an iPhone *ping!*

"I thought we put our phones on silent," I said, frowning.

"My battery must be about to die," my husband responded, gazing at the safe. "I'm sure it's nothing ..."

I followed Xavier out into the tropical air, glancing back at the safe. Even though we both wanted to deny it, we couldn't stay in paradise forever.