

The Arrangement
S.S. Sahoo

The Perfect Assistant

XAVIER

Ring! Ring!

The sound continued as I buttoned up my slacks.

“One fuckin’ minute!” I shouted, trying to rearrange the bulge in my pants to be less noticeable.

“Xavier,” Angela hissed. “What if it’s ... something important?”

I tied a sweatshirt around my waist to conceal my hard-on.

“I couldn’t give *less* of a fuck.”

Finally, Angela’s dress was in order, and I was decent, too. She shook her head, just as frustrated about the cock block as I was. I placed my hand on the small of her back, and together we walked to the door.

I swung the door open and made no attempt to conceal my distaste for the person standing before us.

“Henry,” I spat. “What the hell are you doing here?”

The buffoon was dressed in all his preppy glory, as if he had sailed to our penthouse from the Hamptons.

He was wheeling a magnum bottle of vintage Dom Perignon champagne in a silver trolley.

“And what the hell are we gonna do with *that*?” I asked, before he could respond.

My cousin frowned at my bluntness. Next to me, Angela crossed her arms.

“Hello to you too, dear cousin,” he said sarcastically. “I brought you a gift. It’s for both of you. I would have brought it to the wedding, but I wasn’t invited.”

“It was an intimate ceremony,” I said with a shrug. “But if I remembered that you were such a party animal, maybe I would have made an exception.”

“Look, man. Think of it as a peace offering. I’m sorry for egging you on in the Hamptons, and I’m happy for you and your wife. I really am.”

Henry sighed. It clearly made him uncomfortable to apologize, and I could tell that Angela appreciated the gesture.

But I wasn’t so easily convinced.

I remembered what he said about Angela in the Hamptons that made me bust in his face. That she was some mail-order bride. Some *prostitute*. No, a man like Henry didn’t change his tune out of the goodness of his heart.

He was here because he wanted something.

“I don’t know, Hen,” I began, using the childhood nickname that always made him squirm. “I feel like this has less to do with the wedding and more to do with my father’s will.”

I raised an eyebrow at the cocky little bastard.

“I’ll admit,” Henry revealed, “my family’s feelings were hurt when we heard we were left out of Brad’s will. Aunt Heather, especially.”

“We thought it would be a good idea if I came to talk to you, just to make sure there aren’t any ... hard feelings or anything, between Knight Enterprises and us.”

I felt my blood begin to boil. Henry was just the same when my father was alive. He was always a scavenging motherfucker, trying to leech off us. Just as I suspected, he didn’t give a rat’s ass about my father’s death.

He just wanted his money and power, and now he saw a way to get it.

“That’s enough of your pity party, Henry. If your family *needed* the help, my father would have put you in his will. But he was thinking about the company ...”

My hands balled into fists as my voice rang out into the corridor.

“And there’s *enough* goddamn commotion at Knight Enterprises these days without you poking your head in things. So ~get out!”~

I pointed to the elevator, my chest heaving.

But Henry stayed rooted right in the doorway, a smile tugging up the corners of his smug little mouth.

“Commotion at Knight, huh?” he sneered. “I heard ol’ Brad left Penny the lion’s share of the company. But I didn’t realize just how much it was stirring your pot.”

I seethed. If my cousin mixed one more metaphor in my house, I would have to call an ambulance to escort him out.

“Leave, Henry.”

“Guess you wanna do this the hard way, cousin. I want a say in my family’s business. And now that Brad’s gone, there’s no one protecting you.”

He turned on the heel of his loafer and sauntered down the hall. Angela took my hand, and I could feel her worried eyes on me.

Just before I slammed the door, Henry called:

“You’re not Daddy’s golden boy anymore, X!”

ANGELA

Xavier and I both woke early. He went off to the gym, and I went for a long jog in Central Park. Henry’s interruption the night before had left me feeling frustrated—and not just because he killed the sexy vibe.

I hated to see my husband struggling at work. But I tried to take my own advice and be thankful for what we had: each other.

And luckily, I had my own work to distract me.

I was delighted to find that I received many applications from my online job post. I started to schedule interviews for later that very day.

Sauntering down Fifth Avenue, I felt like a boss. I knew I looked the part in my gray pencil skirt and pointed-toe pumps. The summer air was fragrant and alive and I breathed it all in, excited for the task ahead of me.

I scheduled my interviews at Dustin’s coffee shop, of course, and I arrived to find he had placed the same makeshift “RESERVED” sign on my favorite table.

As I took a seat, Dustin appeared from behind the counter and took the chair across from me.

“Hello, Miss Boss Lady,” he greeted me, sliding over an iced mochaccino.

“Thank you, Mr. Boss Man,” I responded coyly.

“When does our first victim arrive?” he asked.

“My first ~potential assistant~ arrives in ...” I checked the Rolex on my wrist. “Five minutes.”

I shoed Dustin away so I could review my notes, and when I looked up again, I saw a timid boy by the counter who seemed totally lost.

I waved him over.

“You must be Tom!”

The boy blushed red as a tomato over his Windsor knot.

“H-h-hi, Mrs. Knight.”

“Call me Angela,” I smiled, and he took the seat across from me. “So I read on your application that you coordinate all the travel for your college’s debate team. How interesting! Tell me what you like about planning.”

He cleared his throat, loosening his tie. I tried to put on my nicest face, but I was clearly intimidating the hell out of this poor kid.

“I, uh ... I like ... when we stop at McDonald’s on the way back to campus?”

Dustin appeared behind Tom and lowered a cappuccino in front of him. My friend stuck out his tongue and drew his finger across his throat.

The next few interviews were as tragic as the first, and Dustin gave his seal of disapproval each time.

Finally, I had only one more meeting, and I prayed that this girl might be *the one*.

“Angela Knight?” a voice called as I flipped through my notes, most of them just big fat “No’s” written over and over.

“Oh! Calla Lily?” The girl before me was smiling and sweet, and her handshake was strong.

She had blonde curly hair and stacks of beaded bracelets on both of her wrists. Her look was funky but still professional. I was all about it.

“Take a seat,” I practically sang. “Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?”

“I’d love to!” she began. “Well, I’m an extrovert, so I’m energized by being around others ... and nothing makes me happier than creating a space where people can come together and express themselves.”

This girl was speaking my *language*. I was thrilled.

“I feel the same way!” I gushed. “Tell me about an event you planned recently. Maybe something with the environmentalist group you mentioned?”

Dustin placed a flat white on the table before her and lingered to hear her response.

“Well, in my coven, we host a huge feast every full moon and invite all the local pagan and Satanist groups ...”

I practically spat out my coffee, and Dustin choked back a laugh. His eyes were wide with exasperation, and he shook his head slowly.

I sighed, looking at the sweet, smiling girl before me, knowing that I still hadn’t found my perfect assistant ...

Half an hour later, I left the cafe and decided to *go* for a long walk through the park. I knew it would be a challenge to find an assistant, but I didn’t think it would be *this hard!*

Central Park was busy with cyclists and families and businessmen on their lunch breaks. Everyone was enjoying the sun.

Just then, I heard the beautiful sound of a violin. On a whim, I followed the music, which came to an end as I happened upon a group of applauding young people sitting on picnic blankets.

Beside them, a table was filled with trays of charcuterie, cheeses, and crudité’s.

I wandered closer to their gathering and watched as a young woman in a long yellow dress thanked everyone for coming and invited the others to enjoy the food. Her friends clapped and whistled, thanking her for her hard work.

As the guests formed a line by the refreshment table, the girl in the yellow dress stood off to the side and smiled, admiring her efforts.

I knew I needed to talk to her.

“Excuse me,” I called from behind her. She turned, and her expression was warm and open. “I don’t mean to bother you ... but I couldn’t help but admire this beautiful event!”

I stuck out my hand and we shook.

“I’m Angela Knight.”

“I’m Zoe,” she said, clearly unfazed by my name. Maybe she hadn’t heard of the Knights ... which made her an even more attractive candidate.

I cleared my throat, suddenly nervous. I knew this girl was perfect.

“I came over here because I’m an event planner, too,” I said, I hoped not too anxiously. “And actually... I’m looking for an assistant ...”