The Arrangement
B.B. Hafren

Making Amends

XAVIER

I stood before the mirror, grumbling as I buttoned up my shirt.

For once, I wasn't grumpy before a meeting because I was hungover. I'd gone nearly a week without a drink now.

Hell, I had gone to a wedding and stayed sober. I was a new fucking man.

No, I was dreading the meeting because I was about to see Penny.

Angela came over, looking like a goddess in her stretchy outfit. Her belly ballooned in front of her as she helped me with my tie.

"I know it's hard," Angela said, "but you're going to feel really good when it's over."

"This isn't yoga class, Angie," I said, deadpan, but then I bit my tongue.

No, it wasn't yoga. It was a suicide mission with my goddamned stepmother.

It was all Dr. Elmore's idea. Since alcohol had played such a big role in my crash and burn, she thought we should incorporate some AA issues into our therapy sessions.

One of them was "making amends."

I had repaired the most important relationship in my life: the one with Angela.

I was happy to stop there, but Dr. Elmore wouldn't have it. Who else had I lashed out at because of my relationship with alcohol?

The second she asked, I knew. It was Penny.

Angela had encouraged me to reach out to her.

I got the feeling that Penny wasn't the type to expect a long-winded formal apology. As long as I just stopped treating her like shit, we could live out the rest of our lives perfectly fine.

But after everything Penny had done, after all of the bullshit I had put her through ..., I supposed she deserved better than this.

Didn't mean I had to like it, though.

"Thanks for ...encouraging me." I managed to tell my wife. The compliment felt like pulling off a wax strip, but this was something else I wanted to get used to. Expressing gratitude.

She gave me her radiant smile.

"See you later, Angela," I said, leaning down to kiss her. "I'll be home for dinner."

PENNY

I checked my watch for the hundredth time.

Yep, still two minutes to four.

I sighed, staring out the window of the café. I'd chosen a spot right next to the door, just in case I needed to make a swift getaway.

"What can I get you today?" the waiter asked. A harmless enough question, but it still made me jump.

"Just water for now," I said. "I'm meeting someone here."

When Xavier had asked me to meet up with him privately, I'd had no idea what to expect. It obviously wasn't for business, and so way in hell was it for pleasure.

I fidgeted in my seat.

Seeing Xavier privately made me nervous.

He seemed to be making honest strides toward coming to terms with his demons. But that didn't erase his short fuse and his history of sudden outbursts.

He'd never hesitated to tear into me with whatever poison popped into his head before. I told myself that he was just looking out because of circumstance and not specifically at me ...but still.

I couldn't deny that it hurt me every time.

Why did I put up with it all?

Even with Jacquie, I'd eventually reached my breaking point. I'd mustered my courage and broken up with him. Cut him out of my life completely.

Why couldn't I do that with Xavier?

Was it because of our relationship at Knight Enterprises?

Or the fact that he used to be my lover an eternity ago?

No.

It was because Xavier was the last link I had to Brad.

Cutting Xavier out of my life would have been like losing my husband all over again.

I sighed, thinking of our strange, toxic relationship.

I guess I'm in it for the long haul.

Even my happy memories came wrapped in barbed wire ...

There I saw him. I immediately recognized his tall, athletic build, his casual gait. Xavier burst into the café and headed straight for my table.

I gripped my hands in my lap.

Xavier leaned over the back of his chair, standing before he took his seat.

There was a light sheen of sweat on his face. And he gulped.

"I'm really fuckin' sorry, Penny," he burst as if the anticipation of saying those words had literally made him sick.

He swallowed, examining my face. Waiting to see what I would do.

I blinked up at him, my mind going blank.

"Huh?"

Xavier groaned and sat down across from me. He looked like he would rather jump off of the top of the Knight Enterprises building than be sitting there across from me.

"You're going to make me say it again?" He muttered darkly under his breath for a moment before starting again. "I'm sorry, Penny. For everything."

I heard the words coming out of his mouth, but for some reason I couldn't make sense of them.

"Um. For what? Did something happen?"

"You're being real fuckin' sadistic right now, you know that?" Xavier leaned forward. "I'm sorry for *everything* Penny. All the shit I put you through. The accusations, the names, the hate. All of it."

He took a deep breath, and when he spoke again, his voice was softer.

"I don't actually think it's your fault Brad's gone. I said that at my lowest point, and I'm not sure I can ever make up for it. But I can start with this. I'm so, so sorry."

I felt something inside of me unwind.

A knot in my soul that I didn't even know existed.

I felt a drop of water fall into my lap, and only then did I realize I was crying.

Xavier looked away, and I barely wiped away my tears.

I was so used to just rolling with the punches. To sweeping things under the rug and moving on.

Xavier's unexpected apology pierced through the defenses I'd built around the most wounded part of my heart, then dragged it right out of the darkness and into the sun.

"What brought this on?" I tried to keep my voice light. "Did your therapist put you up to this?"

"She suggested it," Xavier admitted. "But Angela was the one who really convinced me to really commit."

"Well, thank goodness for Angela."

"You can say that again."

Xavier gave me that easy smile that I couldn't help but return.

He pretended to wipe his brow and wick away the sweat. And then we both began to laugh.

I thought back to the months of hardship and uncertainty. How I'd questioned my every move, contemplated running away to start a new life.

Sitting there with Xavier though, the tension between us finally cleared away ...

I could say with certainty that it had all been worth it.

I had made the right choice before, when I'd followed through and let him go from the company.

It had been a long, winding, painful path, but I could finally see some light at the end.

You were right, Brad. Maybe this can work after all.

ANGELA

I was out in the garden checking to make sure all my seedlings had enough water.

"Are you throwy, little baby?" I asked a broccoli seedling.

Oh, my God. Was I going crazy?

I was talking to broccoli!

Yes, maybe it was crazy, but it was also fun. I touched the tiny little leaves and felt a rush of love and warmth. My emotions were really running away with me.

It must have been those third-trimester hormones.

I looked out over my tiny kingdom once more before heading into the penthouse. As soon as I was inside, I heard the elevator doors chime, and I hurried to meet Xavier.

"Baby!" he cried when he saw me. He pulled me into his arms and breathed in the scent of my hair.

"How was it?" I asked. But I could already tell by his demeanor. Xavier's get-together with Penny went well.

"It was good," he replied, pulling back and blinding me with a winning smile. "She accepted my apology."

I stood on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "I knew she would!"

"I didn't," he laughed. He pulled me into a hug once more.

Our bodies relaxed, sinking into one another. His hands traveled down my back, holding my ass.

Even with my huge tummy, we were so close. It was like there was nothing between us. My hands were traveling up, under his shirt ...

"Let's go to bed," he whispered.

I took his hand and led the way, steering my husband's eyes for just a moment. How long had it been since we'd had sex?

I hadn't exactly been in the mood lately. My body felt so full that the idea of putting anything else inside it didn't thrill me.

But whatever was happening now felt right.

We collapsed on the bed.

"We don't have to do anything," Xavier whispered. "I just want to kiss you."

And just like that, he was.

We were careful at first, our touches light as I scratched Xavier's back, as he held my belly.

But slowly, I became more desperate. I wanted him closer to me. I wanted to feel his hands on my breasts, on my hips, and in between them.

I wanted our clothes off.

Xavier, attentive to my every assend and inclination, fulfilled my desires. Our clothes seemed to disappear into thin air.

I lay on my back while my husband worked my body. He kissed my neck, licking me, working his way down until his lips were teasing my sensitive breasts. I arched my back up to his touch.

Running my fingers over the pronounced ridges of his abdomen, and then further south, I relished in how his body stiffened under me, anticipating my hand on his manhood.

And then I felt it. His member, thick and tender, straining for me. He was rock solid, and a moan escaped his throat when my hand wrapped around him. I squeezed him, feeling his girth.

I stroked him slowly. When I reached his tip, I found it already wet, his desire dribbling over.

My legs fell open, and Xavier didn't waste a moment. He reached between them and stroked my clitoris lightly. The way he knew I liked. I shivered and moaned in a way I hadn't in ages.

My body was open to him. As he reached a finger lower, dipping it inside of me, my walls pulsed around him in expectation.

We were both so ready.

Though it had been months since we made love, our bodies remembered everything.

I wondered how many times my husband played this very scene over in his mind while he slept alone. I knew it crossed my mind more than once.

"I need you," I whimpered. As soon as the words left my lips, Xavier's mouth covered mine in a deep kiss. Our tongues hugged each other.

Between my legs, Xavier's finger drove deeper, pushing my G spot. I cried out.

"Come close," Xavier ordered, though his tone was gentle. He held my hips and guided me to the side of the bed, so my butt reached the edge.

He stood on the ground beside the bed, and I lifted my legs so that my sex was open to him, at the perfect height for him to enter me.

He'd definitely been planning for this.

I reached out and stroked him, pulling him closer as I guided him inside me.

He pushed into me, inch by delicious inch. I writhed beneath him, and he stared down at me, devouring my naked body with his eyes.

"This feels alright?" he asked.

"Fuck yes!" I yelled. It felt so fucking good that I forgot I was pregnant. I forgot my body was capable of anything other than feeling him. "Fuck me. Please." I begged.

And then he did. He glided in and out of me, lifting my legs on my knees were on his shoulders. He fucked me quick but gentle, and then slow but hard. I grabbed my flopping, oversized breasts, moaning under him.

"Baby...I'm getting close," I warned. I was at the cliff's edge, about to plummet.

"Me, too," he moaned, accelerating his pace. With every jolt of Xavier's hips, he brought me closer.

"Oh... fuck," Xavier cried. I felt his cock stab deep within me, releasing his seed.

It was all I needed. I came hard, lost in the culmination of my desire. My body throbbed as my muscles clenched in time with the currents of pleasure.

When it was over, I sank into the soft mattress. I was so relaxed that I was practically asleep.

Xavier collapsed beside me, and I cuddled into his arms. We were both so tired, so content, that we fell asleep like that, lying down sideways on the bed.

XAVIER

I woke in the middle of the night to Angela's face, illuminated by moonlight.

She was so beautiful. How long had it been since I had this intimate view of my wife? How long had it been since I deserved it?

Her head rested on my arm, and I leaned down to kiss her temple. Her eyes flickered open and met mine in the darkness. She smiled sleepily.

"I didn't mean to wake you up," I whispered.

She shook her head. "I have to go to the bathroom, anyway."

She got up slowly, holding her belly, and I let my hand collapse onto the space where she was. It was wet.

My sleepy mind snapped to attention. Did I cum that much?

I opened my eyes to see a dark stain on the bed.

Oh, God.

I reached for the bedside light. When it flicked on, my worst fears came true.

"Angie?" I shouted. "It's blood?"