

## The Arrangement – Free Novelette by S. S. Sahoo

### Chapter 3

#### Angela

It all started a month ago. ...

It was late in the evening when I sat beside Em on the couch, watching my favorite TV show, when the phone rang. I looked at the caller ID and saw that it was my brother, Lucas.

“Hello, Lucas?”

“Angie, th-...there’s a problem,” Lucas replied.

“Problem? What is it? Is everything alright?”

“Calm down, Angie. It’s Dad. ”

“Dad! What’s wrong with Dad? Is he alright?”

“Angie, stay calm and listen to me. Dad, he fainted. We weren’t with him when it happened. He was walking out of the house when our neighbor saw him and called 911. I was informed and immediately rushed to his side. The doctors are checking him out as he still hasn’t gained consciousness. Danny was also out of town but is on his way—he will be reaching the hospital soon. Angie, can you come here?”

“Oh, my god!,” I panicked. “Lucas, don’t worry, I’m taking the first flight out of here. I’ll be there soon. You, please stay with Dad and keep updating me about his condition. I’ll call you as soon as I land. ”

He sighed and replied, “Okay, come soon. I will be taking care of Dad. Bye.” And with that, he hung up.

“Bye,” I muttered, more to myself than him.

I looked at Em. She was busy typing on her laptop.

“Em, what are you doing?,” I peeked at the laptop screen.

“Booking tickets, duh! I heard your conversation. ”

“Thanks, Em,” I replied gratefully.

“You’re welcome. Now go and quickly pack your bags. You only have two hours to catch your flight and I have already called a cab,” she replied, smiling.

“Oh, Em, Thank you, Thank you so very much! You are the best!”

I ran towards her, giving her a hug.

The cab arrived an hour later. . I was late because of the traffic and I was running to catch my flight when I crashed into someone.

“Oh, God, I’m so sorry!” I apologized quickly and dashed towards my plane, without bothering to look at the person.. . Thankfully, I made it to my plane on time. I inhaled deeply and took my seat, waiting for the landing. Two hours later, I rushed through the checkout and hired a taxi to get to the hospital..

Entering Dad’s room, I was devastated. He laid unconscious on the hospital bed, with IV tubes attached to his hands and chest. He was breathing through an oxygen mask. He looked so vulnerable and weak. Tears rolled down my face.

Lucas was sitting beside him, leaning on a chair and looking worried and exhausted. I slowly walked to him and placed my hand on his shoulder. He looked up at me, smiled, and pulled me into a hug.

“Oh, Angie, you’re here!” he cried.

I patted his back, reassuring him, and myself, that everything would be okay.

“Lucas, what happened? What did the Doctor say?”

“Angie, let’s get out of here. I don’t want Dad to hear this. ”

I nodded and went to Dad, giving him a kiss on his forehead before walking out of his room with Lucas.

“Listen to me, Angie, just don’t panic after hearing this, alright? It’s not good news. .”

I nodded.

“Dad. . .” He inhaled deeply and continued. “His heart is failing him. ”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

“What! What the hell are you saying?” My voice came out in a whisper and soon I was crying, sobbing, unable to withstand the pain this news held.

Lucas hugged me and soon I could feel my right shoulder was damp because of his tears. I controlled myself and asked. . ., “How? ... . He was perfectly fine! I mean, I don’t understand...”

“Neither do I, Angie. The doctors said that he needs a ventricular assist device or artificial heart to support circulation and this surgery should be done as soon as possible if we want his condition to get better. ”

Hope arose within me. Helping Dad getting better was my first priority now.

“So what are we waiting for, Lucas?”

“I’ll tell you what we’re waiting for, Angie,” someone said from behind me.

I turned to find Danny, who looked sorrowful but was trying to appear strong with his determined face.

“Danny!,” I cried and ran into his open arms to hug him. He wrapped his hands around me and patted my back. I pulled back and dragged him to the bench where we were previously sitting and asked him, “What is it, Danny?”

“Sis, we’re bankrupt,” Danny replied in a single breath.

“What? I mean, how? We were stable, right?”

“Our restaurant hasn’t been doing great lately. So... Dad loaned some money from the bank in the hope that we’d be able to repay it. But fate worked against us, and now we are bankrupt. Dad didn’t want you to worry you so we kept it from you. ”

Danny averted his gaze. I put my head on his shoulder and unshed tears began rolled down my cheeks again. I felt so hopeless. Lucas was patting my thigh when we heard some loud beeping noises from Dad’s room. We rushed inside and were terrified. Soon doctors and nurses rushed into the room and we were pushed outside. I couldn’t stop crying. Lucas comforted me while Danny was crying his eyes out.

After a while, a doctor approached us. “Don’t worry, that was a minor attack. But we were successful in saving him. We need to perform his heart transplant as soon as possible. ” .

Danny and Lucas went inside the room to check on Dad. I stood there for a while, not knowing what to do, and soon found myself walking out of the hospital. My legs were working on their own and I didn’t know where I was headed. Soon I stopped in my track and looked around finding myself in a park where children were playing happily. I sat on a bench and looked at the happy and careless children. Children who were carefree of the world and its problems. I remember how Dad used to bring Danny, Lucas, and me to the park on weekends. Reminiscing about the past brought a smile to my lips, but soon Dad’s condition flashed before my eyes and I began crying and sobbing, feeling helpless again. I sensed a presence beside me on the bench and turned to find the familiar face of an old man. I instantly remembered where I saw him. He looked at me kindly and smiled. I smiled back with my still teary eyes.

“I was passing by when I decided to take walk in the park where I found a beautiful woman crying,” he said to me in a fatherly tone.

He asked me whether he was disturbing me, to which I shook my head.

He smiled and asked, “May I know the reason why a kind woman like you is sitting alone in this park and crying?”

I just stared at him, not knowing what to say. He sensed my discomfort and tried to lighten my mood by asking, “Oh, I see, boyfriend problem?”

I shook my head and smiled. I don’t know why I had this sudden urge to tell him everything and cry out loud, but I did what I felt like anyways. I told him everything that happened with my family, from my Dad’s health to our financial condition. By the time I finished I was sobbing and weeping.

“Oh, I see the problem, young lady,.” He replied with sympathetic eyes.

We sat quietly for some minutes, just looking at the children playing in the sand.

“If you want, then I can help you, young lady.” He spoke suddenly from beside me.

I turned to look at him and saw that he was already staring at me with a stoic expression. I gave him a questioning look.

“I can help you in everything, from your family’s financial condition to your father’s heart transplant,.” he said in an authoritative tone. His playful and kind demeanor was replaced with cold and business one as if he was discussing a business deal.

“If you know who Brad Knights is, he is sitting right beside you at this very moment,.” he said, gazing at the sky. My eyes widened. Of course, I knew who Brad Knights was. He was the richest and most powerful man in New York, probably of our country but he kept a low profile so most of the people couldn’t recognize him. I was having a hard time believing that he was sitting right beside me and was offering me his help.

“Oh, no! No, Mr. Knights, your help’s not needed.”

“I am sure, child, that after listening to your story I know that you surely need my help”, he replied, kindness flowing from his eyes again.

I think God heard my prayers and sent Mr. Knights to help me. Happy tears fell down my cheeks.

“Thank you, Thank you so much, I will do anything to see my dad get better, and I will repay you as soon as possible,,” I replied truthfully.

“Repay me? Oh no, child, I don’t want you to return my money.”He looked at me.

I gave him a questioning look. He smiled and stood up. .

“You don’t have to return my money, dear, but you will have to do something in return. ”

I nodded. “What will I have to do?”

He smiled and simply said, “Marry my son. ‘

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For the third time, I gazed at myself in the mirror. .

Still, can’t believe I said Yes to Mr. Knights.

I didn’t say yes immediately, though.

That day he gave me his card and personal number and went away.

I went back to the hospital and after two days of thinking, again and again, I told everything about it to my brothers.

They didn’t like the idea of me getting married in exchange for money to a stranger neither was I ready to marry a stranger for money. I was keen on waiting for any kind of other source of receiving money. I was hoping that the job interview I gave few days ago select me and but then time was running and again when Dad again had a minor attack my brothers grew vulnerable to the proposal of Mr. Brad and finally changed their mind.

I waited few days more but then I received no phone call from the company for which I had previously interviewed. Dad’s condition was getting worse than I had expected and finally like my brothers I nodded at the proposal. Reluctantly...

Mr. Knights was overwhelmed when he heard my decision and immediately gave me a cheque and told me that I am to be married to his son in a month, after my father's surgery. He even set up a press conference where I was introduced to the media as his soon going to be daughter-in-law but then something was off. His son didn't show up in the conference and a reason was kept before the media that he was away from the country because of business but he would give an interview to the media as soon as he returns back. At this time of my life I was actually relieved that I didn't meet his son but then I believed blindly that it was all happening because of his consent. He must've agreed to go with his father's decision because like me he was also going to marry a complete stranger. Still, it was nagging me why his father wanted his son to marry a woman like me when he could've any woman he wished for.

Em came to know about all this through the media and I had to tell her everything. She wasn't happy with what she heard but eventually gave up and wished me a bright future.

In one week Dad's surgery was held, which was a success. Our loan was paid and our restaurant was saved.

When Dad first opened his eyes the happiness I felt was unexplainable. Dad was weak at first, but with time he grew better and eventually he wanted to know how we saved him. After finding out exactly what I did for him, he cried and forbid me to marry.

I made him understand that a promise was a promise.

Mr. Knights kept his promise to help in our misery, so now it was my turn to keep my promise. In the end, Dad had to agree.

. . . . . At the third week, Em came to Chicago and showed me the picture of my would-be husband, whom I still haven't met or even talked to.

He looked very handsome. Words couldn't explain his personality, and the headlines about him didn't convince me that he would be a good husband.

I had never loved anyone romantically, but I knew someday I had to get married to someone. Even though I was more into studies and career but the couples I saw

in the corner of the library, in the park, in the restaurant made me feel kind empty and lonely. Like every woman, I also had this wish to find a perfect man who would love and support me for which I kept on believing that one day I would eventually find the right guy and then I would marry him.

Talking about my unseen would-be ...I still don't know about him nor do I hear from him...It's strange, but I know one thing: his father, Mr. Knight, helped me in my bad times, so now I had to repay him back by being a good wife to his son and a good daughter-in-law.

My future husband's name is Xavier Knights, and I am soon going to be a Knights too.

I will have to do my part of serving in this marriage with full sincerity and patience, and I will do it.

Mr. Knights informed me that I'll be meeting Mr. Xavier directly on the wedding day. As I had asked about him earlier, he told me that he is still out of the country and he agreed to the marriage which makes me wonder why did he even agree to marry me? Does he know me?

Impossible...

How am I going to react to him when I see him?

Calm down, calm down.

I heard the sound of door opening and looked behind to find Em standing and looking at me in awe.

"Angie, you look so beautiful. I can't believe that you are going to get married," she whispered through teary eyes.

Em knows everything about the marriage, and I know she is not showing she is really in pain.

I ran towards her and hugged her tight.

We just stood there hugging each other for some minutes and pulled away.



“Angie, remember one thing—wherever you go I’ll always be there for you, just give me a call whenever you want, okay?”

I nodded and smiled at her. She is more like an older sister to me than a friend.

“And I wish happiness for you, Angie.” she whispered, and a tear slipped down her rosy cheek.

I hugged her and cried. “I will miss you,.”

“I will too, Angie, I will too.” she whispered and hugged back.

“Come on now, I don’t want people to think that I made the bride cry.” she tried to joke.

I smiled and together we came out of the room only to be hugged tightly by my brothers and Dad.

Dad is looking better now and he is able to walk, but he still needs rest.

“We will miss you, Angie, look,” they all said in unison.

“I will too. ,” I smiled and hugged each of them.

Soon they all left, leaving me and Dad alone. He took hold of my hand and gave a squeeze. .

I looked up to him and smiled. He replied with a smile and led me towards the aisle.

Soon I could hear people cheering and music playing.

“Everything is going to be fine, love. Don’t be nervous. You look just like your mother,.” Dad whispered, feeling my nervousness.

I nodded and looked forward at my soon-to-be husband.

He was looking towards, wearing a black suit, and his hair was pulled up neatly.

My God, he is so beautiful.

And I could only see him from behind.

Soon I was standing before him. Dad kissed my cheek and left. Xavier's gaze was focused on the priest.

What's wrong? Why isn't he looking towards me?

“Do you, Xavier Knights, take Angela Carson to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, until death does us apart?”

He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. And then, again without looking my direction, said with a voice filled with venom, . “I do. .”

Then he was given the marriage license by the officiant to sign. He looked reluctant at first, but then he took and signed it.

“Do you, Angela Carson, take Xavier Knights to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, until death does us apart?”

I took a deep breath and turned my head to stare at the huge crowd. I could see my brothers, Em, Dad and even Mr. Knights smiling at me.

I turned my head towards my husband who still wasn't looking at me.

“I do,” I whispered, and now it was my turn to sign the papers, which I did, and everyone began to clap and cheer loudly.

“You may now kiss the bride. ”

My husband just closed his eyes and gave me a short peck on my cheek.

After the ceremony, I noticed during the reception my husband never looked towards me and didn't bother to even talk to me. When we were forced to dance with each other, he just took my hand and led me to the dance floor, twirled me a few times and left me standing alone.

My classmates teased me for my wedding night which made me tense up but thanks to Em who knew on what situation I agreed to marry off she handled the situation and finally shooed them off and supported me.

When it was time to go to my new home I hugged everyone and bid them goodbye and joined my husband in the limo..

Typing furiously on his laptop he had this void expression on his face and it was starting to nag me because he wasn't even looking my way nor did he try to talk.

I thought he had given his consent to his father for the wedding. So what's wrong?

The Limo came to a halt and the Chauffeur Opened the door for us.. My unhappy looking husband quickly scrambled out of the car and began to walk towards the door of a beautiful mansion.

I thought maybe he was tired or something.

Not knowing what to do, I also got out of the car and thanked the chauffeur who only smiled towards me.

I followed my husband towards the house and into the living room when he suddenly stopped, his back facing me.

“We need to talk.” he said in a cold manner, sending shivers down my body.