

Team Crimson

Angela
Hey Leo! I'm looking for a Lamaze class.

Angela
Do you have any recommendations?

Leo
Of course! I'll send you an email.

Leo
The one I always recommend is great for couples.

Angela
Oh ... actually, my husband is still away.

Angela
Do you have one that I can attend on my own?

I looked out the window to a snowy New York City. The city was still as busy as ever, cars and yellow taxicabs clogging the roads, bundled-up pedestrians maneuvering around slush-covered sidewalks.

I buried myself deeper in the blanket I'd dragged out from my bed to the living room, enjoying the warmth of the electric fireplace.

The wind howled at the penthouse windows, searching for a way in.

The past couple of weeks were a strange blur to me. My days mostly consisted of staying at home, ordering food, and watching Netflix.

I was so bored.

I'd helped Zoe a little bit with planning Bernard Loreley's fiftieth anniversary party, but she insisted I rest up and focus on the pregnancy.

I thought back to Marlena Marlboro's gala in Japan where we'd met the kindly couple.

It felt like ages ago.

Another lifetime, even.

I remembered my last fight with Xavier. The wounded look in his eyes, the sight of his back disappearing out the door ...

I always imagined Xavier and I going to Lamaze classes together. Now I was alone.

I put a hand over my stomach, taking strength from my children.

This was for them.

My phone buzzed.

Leo
I could find one, but it won't be as good as the one for couples.

Leo
If you'd like I can accompany you in your husband's place.

Leo
That way when he gets back, you can teach him everything you know!

Leo
I always recommend this one over a solo class so couples better know what to expect.

I read the texts over, surprised that he would suggest something like that.

I mulled it over.

What he was saying made sense. Xavier would have a lot of catching up to do when he came back, and it would be helpful if I already knew what I was doing.

If he came back ...

What were my other options?

Em?

No, she was busy moving into her new home with Lucas and Bella. I didn't want to bother her during such an important time in her life.

Dustin was no doubt spending all of his time with Jake. I could imagine the two lovebirds roaming the city, their own personal winter wonderland.

I shrugged to myself.

Why not?

Angela
Okay, if it isn't too much trouble.

Leo
Not at all! I'll send over the details now.

Angela
See you soon! 😊

The email came a few moments later, and I read the information.

It was a clinic right next to the hospital in New Jersey, and he'd already booked an appointment for the next afternoon.

What was appropriate to wear to a Lamaze class? I guess pajamas or yoga pants would be fine, right? Something comfortable.

I smirked, realizing I was a little excited to see Leo outside of his office.

He's always been kind and caring, and the crazy cocktail of emotions swirling around in my mind seemed to settle when I was around him.

A small laugh escaped me.

I actually had something to look forward to.

Feeling lighter than I had in months, I bounced over to my closet, sifting through my clothes.

Maybe this could be fun.

"Angela!" Leo called, waving me down in the waiting area. I waved back, hanging my winter coat on the rack. I realized that this was the first time I'd seen him out of his doctor's coat.

He wore a cashmere sweater that hugged his athletic body snugly, the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. His blond hair was styled more casually, his eyes as piercing green as ever.

I caught myself eyeing the sculpt of his muscles; I had to blink hard a few times to snap myself out of it.

I felt really underdressed in my yoga pants and baggy Harvard hoodie.

I settled into the seat next to him, feeling self-conscious.

"You went to Harvard?" he asked.

"What gave it away?"

"Wild guess," he laughed. "I'm a Dartmouth man myself."

"Oh, you're a Big Green?" I asked, referring to the school's football team. "Sorry, but I bleed Crimson."

"Yeah, that's unfortunate," he sighed dramatically. "Maybe this isn't going to work, then. You might need to find a new Lamaze partner."

"Hey! Don't be mad because we kicked your guys' butts too many times," I teased.

We shared a laugh, and I felt my unease fade away. Leo was good company.

"It feels a little weird, being pregnant," I said.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, it just doesn't really feel like I'm *doing* anything. I can see my stomach getting bigger ...but I feel like I can be doing something more, you know?" I shook my head. "Maybe I'm being pessimistic."

"Not at all," Leo said. "Why don't you try a little gardening?"

"Gardening?" The only experience I had with plants was when I worked in Em's flower shop. And even then, I'd just moved pots around. Being responsible for the life of a plant was intimidating me.

"Yeah. Gardening can satisfy that need you have to nurture something. It'll also relax you. It's a proven stress reliever."

I thought it over.

"All right, I'll look into it. Thanks, Leo."

"Angela?"

I looked up to find a kindly older woman peek her head out from the next room.

"Yup," I said, standing up.

She smiled at me.

"Come on over, we're ready for you two."

After we took our shoes off, we were led into a comfortable-looking room with soft carpets and comfy chairs.

The next half hour was spent learning and practicing various breathing techniques. There was the classic and well-known *hee-hee-hoo* method, although apparently, it was outdated. I discovered that I much preferred a slow and steady deliberate breathing, in and out through the nose.

Wanda, our instructor, told me about diaphragmatic breathing, and all the other complex and scientific benefits it came with.

Leo nodded along, but most of the info was lost on me.

Breathe in and out, and you'll feel more relaxed was about the extent of my retention.

After that, we moved on to various poses and positions that could help with my contractions and relaxation.

It almost felt like a mini yoga class. There were "poses" for walking, standing, leaning, squatting ...though the ones I had the most trouble with were the ones for kneeling.

Not that they were difficult, but they were very ...intimate.

One position had Leo sitting in a chair, and I was on my knees in front of him, my head in his lap. It was supposed to help with back pain, and easing the baby into rotating to a more favorable position.

I sighed, wondering what Xavier would think if he knew I had my head on another man's lap.

Another position had me bent over a yoga ball, with Leo behind me. Wanda told me that this position also helped with back pain, and had the added benefit of your partner being able to give you a relaxing massage.

I felt Leo's hands around my waist, and I gasped, a jolt of electricity shooting up my spine. His pulled his hands away.

"Are you okay?" he asked, concerned. "Did I hurt you?"

"No," I murmured, hiding my face underneath my hair. I could feel myself burning up. "You just surprised me a little."

What the heck?

I closed my eyes, willing my heart to stop beating so fast.

He's your doctor, Angela! Relax!

Wanda guided Leo's hands as she demonstrated the proper technique to massage me. She emphasized not to put too much pressure, which would push the baby into the yoga ball.

I closed my eyes. Leo's hands felt good. He had a strong, gentle touch that moved in circles on my back, slowly unravelling the knots in my muscles.

The remainder of the session was about policies and hospital procedures. Leo assured me that he'd send me a copy over email so I didn't need to memorize everything Wanda said.

"Let me know if you have any other questions, okay?" Wanda said as we made our way out the door.

"I will. Thank you so much, Wanda."

She leaned in for a hug.

"You two make a very attractive couple," Wanda said. "A lot of husbands aren't so *attentive* during class." She winked at me. "You're very lucky."

Leo laughed, and I felt myself flush red.

"Oh, um, he actually isn't my husband," I stammered. "He's my doctor, actually."

"Oh!" Wanda's mouth formed a perfect little O. "My mistake!"

"No problem at all."

I walked away, staring at my feet.

"Are you alright?" Leo asked.

"Yup, totally. Why?"

"You're red as a tomato right now."

I glowered at him.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

He blinked and made a show of rubbing his eyes. He shrugged.

"Still red."

"Well, thank you very much for coming to the class with me, *Dr. Carmichael*. I'll be in touch about our next appointment."

I stomped away from him, my heart pounding wildly in my chest.

What's going on with me?

Leo easily kept up with me with his long strides.

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry." He laughed as I put on my coat in a huff. "This was nice," he said earnestly. His tone made me pause.

He wasn't teasing anymore. He sounded very genuine.

"Maybe we could do this again sometime?" he asked. "Well, not *this* again." He gestured to the Lamaze class. "Like a coffee or something. Or—I mean if you wanted to do another Lamaze class, I'd be okay with it, but ...uh ..."

I laughed as I watched him trip over his words. Was there a little pink in his cheeks?

"You're red as a tomato," I said.

"No idea what you're talking about," he repeated to me.

I couldn't help but be charmed. He was a small ray of sunshine after months of darkness.

"Sure, Leo. A coffee would be nice."

He broke into a wide grin.

"I'll see you soon," he said.

I waved goodbye as I stepped outside. Marco was already waiting for me in the beamer. It wasn't until we were well on our way back to New York City when it dawned on me.

Had I just agreed to go on a date?

Blood rushed to my face, my heart pounding in my throat.

No. It was just a little get-together.

As friends.

Leo's handsome features flashed into my mind, as did the comforting feeling of his touch.

I shook my head.

We were just going for coffee, nothing more.

Right?