Medical Mysteries

ANGELA

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I never played with dolls much as a kid. Maybe it was because I had brothers. Even when Dad bought me the Barbie I
was dying for one birthday, it didn't hold my interest.
I never had a baby doll. Never a Bitty Baby, or one of those ones that peed.
I wasn't a little girl who dreamt of being a mom.
Of course, none of that mattered. Not now, when I was about to be a mother of two.
For the past seven months, my life revolved around the babies growing in my belly.
Being a mother had become ingrained in my identity. And there was no going back.
But as the cab sped through the night, taking Xavier and I to the hospital, I wondered if all of it could go away.
As quickly as the twins came into my life, they could leave it.
Anxiety wrapped its tendrils around my heart. I closed my eyes, trying to focus on breathing regularly.
I squeezed Xavier's hand.
He was in the middle seat, but he squished even closer to me.
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"Exactly," Xavier agreed. He pulled me close to him, so my head rested on his chest. "It couldn't be because we ...had sex. Right?" he whispered.

"It's going to be alright, baby," he said. But his voice was strained. I knew he was freaking out, too.

His hand was shaking in mine. Suddenly it made sense to me. He was worried this was *his* fault.

"Blood doesn't mean anything. Necessarily," I said, trying to comfort us both.

"Should I get a wheelchair for you?" Xavier asked, panicked.

she not walk?

I was such a fucking idiot.

"No!" I replied, looking into his eyes. "No. Don't worry." I couldn't be certain, but it wasn't worth telling him that. My body was a mystery to me right now. But it was even more mysterious to my husband. The cab pulled up in front of the hospital.

"No, no, I think I'm fine," I insisted. I wasn't in any pain. I could at least walk inside. Xavier supported me as we headed toward the doors. Inside the building, everything was clean and bright. As if it was a place outside of time. **XAVIER**

The nurses immediately seated Angela in a wheelchair and carted her off. I felt like an idiot. Why didn't I insist that

She was bleeding during the third trimester! Carrying twins! The nurse who led Angela away explained that she needed to see a specialist alone before I could join her. "Dr. Carmichael is here!" Angela said, turning her face up to look at me. "Aren't we lucky?" She was even smiling. Meanwhile, I was about to pass out. But I knew I had to stay strong for her. A freak out wouldn't help. I watched Angela travel through the sliding doors, and I collapsed into a waiting room chair. I let my head fall into my hands. I was alone. My mind was going crazy, tunneling down dark, spiraling paths. This was my fault. I couldn't keep my desire in check. I just had to fuck the hell out of my wife during this pivotal point in the pregnancy!

Maybe the sex wasn't it. Maybe the bleeding was the result of the stress I put her through when I was gone. How could I have been so selfish? Why the hell did she take me back? I played through every awful explanation. In each one, it was my fault. I wanted a fucking drink. I wanted to forget these feelings. I wanted to forget I could feel this way. But the past few months had taught me that drinking would only make me feel worse.

My forehead was slick with sweat, and I tasted the sickening tang of blood in my mouth. I had been biting my cheek, hard enough to break the skin. I stared at the sliding door. I was a fucking mess.

I'd never felt so powerless. Never had I been more of a useless bystander to my own life. Screwing my eyes closed, I willed the minutes to pass. Every moment that kept me from my wife was driving me insane. But all I could do was wait.

"Angela," he greeted me, searching my face with his attentive eyes. "I'm sorry to be seeing you again under these

I lay on the gurney in the small hospital room. The nurse rushed around me, checking my vital signs.

I sighed, feeling the tension leave my shoulders. Maybe everything would be okay.

The door opened, and Leo burst into the room.

conditions, but we'll make sure everything is alright.

Tears began to flow, but now they were tears of relief.

"Thank God," I sighed.

I leaned back, shutting my eyes.

My babies were going to be okay.

"Why was I bleeding?!" I demanded.

"Have you been smoking cigarettes?"

I nodded.

"That's all I have. I'll send for Xavier."

that they made me dizzy.

I wiped my sweating hands on my leggings. It didn't matter.

Leo was a gentleman. He would never try anything with me, and I knew that.

"I know, baby," I responded, gripping him as tightly as I could. "Everything's okay."

From my seat, I gazed up at my husband's jawline. A sense of relief relaxed my muscles.

I zoned back in for the doctor's question.

serious. "I know things were a little bit rocky with your husband

I was alone and stuck with myself, the person I hated most.

"Everything looks normal to me," she said finally, touching my shoulder. "And that's a good thing."

ANGELA

He settled into the chair next to me and asked the nurse a few questions while I closed my eyes. I was exhausted. I didn't even know how late it was. "Let's do a quick sonogram, alright?" Leo asked. "Of course," I agreed, raising my shirt with shaking hands. Leo got to work, and soon I felt the cool gel on my belly. Each time I had a sonogram, I felt nervous. But never like this. Tears stung behind my eyes. "Angela, take a deep breath," Leo instructed. The authority in his voice did help a little bit. "It's a good sign that you're not in any pain." I nodded, biting my lip. I wanted to hold onto the good signs, but all I could think about were the bad ones. "And ...there we are," Dr. Carmichael said. "Both children have steady heartbeats." I exhaled, giving my weight to the bed beneath me. My babies were okay.

When I opened my eyes again, Leo was gazing at me with an unreadable expression on his face. The nurse had left. We were alone. "I have to tell Xavier," I suddenly exclaimed. "We have to tell him!" I pushed up on my arms. "Woah, woah! Not so fast," Leo warned with a little smile. "We'll tell him in a minute. I have to ask you a few questions." After the initial relief wore off, my mind started racing all over again.

"Everything looks alright on the sonogram..." the doctor explained. "Which is why I have to ask. There are a few possibilities." I held my breath. "None of them are serious!" Leo added, noticing my distress. I gave the doctor a little smile. Now that I knew my babies would be okay, all I wanted was to see Xavier.

I imagined him sitting alone in the waiting room, waiting for news. Imagining the worst

"No," I responded. "Okay," he gave me a little smile. "Have you been using cocaine?" "No!" I said, immediately blushing. "I've *never* done that." He nodded, a little smile playing on his mouth. I fidgeted. How many questions were left?

"Alright, then. Have you been under any stress lately?" Doctor Carmichael leaned toward me, his expression growing

I raised my eyebrows. I was a little surprised he was being so straightforward. "Things are better," I asserted. And I meant it. "I haven't been under much stress." "Have you had sexual intercourse recently?" Leo asked, looking at his clipboard. "Yes. Last night. Could that have anything to do with it?" I felt my cheeks flush. Was I blushing because I was talking about sex? Or was it because I sensed something unsaid in the doctor's question?

"That would probably be it," Dr. Carmichael said quietly. "From the nurse's report, it sounds like it was a lot of blood,

"To be safe, I would recommend bed rest until your term is complete in another month. To prevent early labor." "Okay," I replied. A month of bed rest. Leo marked something else on his clipboard before he looked back at me. His earnest gaze made me look away.

As the doctor stood and left the room, I felt a strange sensation settle in my stomach. Had Leo been more than a doctor to me when Xavier was gone? Sure, was a friend to me. But had he felt something ...more intense?

My thoughts were interrupted as Xavier rushed into the room. He immediately pulled me into a hug. "Everything's okay," he whispered. He kissed my cheek, holding me against him.

If he had ever held onto the hope that something could happen between us, he would have certainly let it go by now.

Xavier pulled away from me, full of life. Energized by the good news. I hardly listened as Leo explained the bedrest situation to him, and a nurse procured a wheelchair for me. Seated comfortably in my new ride, Xavier pushed me out of the hospital room. In the hall, it was just us.

For a few moments, my husband held me, and I let my mind go blank. I only felt. I felt love and relief, both so strong

The night had been long and stressful, and I would be bound to my bed for the next *thirty days*. But I knew I was in