

Close to Home

XAVIER

A few hours later, the door to my hospital room burst open and my father ran inside. I’d never seen him appear so unkempt.

His usually coiffed hair was sticking out in different directions. His tailored Brioni suit looked like he’d thrown it into a blender. His eyes were puffy and red and not at all like those clear, hard eyes of the CEO I’d always respected and feared growing up.

“Dad?” I asked, surprised. “You look like shit. Are you okay?”

“Am I...?”

Dad shook his head, grabbing my shoulder, smiling, but the smile looked so full of pain.

“I thought I lost you, Xavier. I thought       ...”

“Hey, it’s all right, old man,” I said, feeling slightly uncomfortable.

I didn’t like seeing someone so powerful brought to his knees. The only other time in my life I’d seen my father act like this was when Mom died.

“This is all my fault,” he whispered through clenched teeth. “If I hadn’t forced you to go on that honeymoon       ...”

“Xavier.” He took a seat beside my bed, eyes watery. “When the news came out, they said there were casualties and       ...”

“Who?” I asked, suddenly tense. “Who died on the plane?”

My father looked aside, saddened. “The pilot, Jim.”

*Shit.* I’d known Jim almost my whole life. He’d flown my father and me around the world more times than I could count.

“Wow,” I said, surprised by how gutted I felt. “Has anyone spoken with his family?”

My father nodded solemnly. “We already reached out and offered generous compensation, not that it could ever replace him.”

“That’s good,” I said, but it didn’t feel good. It didn’t feel right at all.

“I’m just so grateful, son,” my father said again. “After your mother, the idea of losing you too       ...I couldn’t bear it.”

The enormity of what he’d experienced, the sleepless nights, the terror and heartbreak, finally hit me. As bad as it had been for Angela and me on the island, at least we’d been together.

There was no gray area. We’d either survive or die, but for my father, every second that passed without knowing what had happened to us must have been goddamn agony.

I took his hand, finally, though it was strange for me to be so emotive.

“I’m okay, Dad. Everything’s all right.”

He nodded, wiping away a tear. Then he looked around, frowning. “Where is Angela?”

ANGELA

“You have a rare case of retrograde amnesia,” the doctor had explained. “It’s essentially a delayed mental reaction to events of extreme psychological or physical distress. Surviving a plane crash is a very stressful.”

He’d turned to the man next to my bed. “We expect a full recovery for your wife, Mr. Knight.”

His *wife*? This man was my husband?

“It might be a few days, or even a few hours,” the doctor went on. “The best thing you can do is to be here for her.”

The doctor had left the room, leaving me alone with this man, Mr. Knight, my husband. I didn’t even know his first name.

He gazed pensively out the window, refusing to make any eye contact with me.

“So...,” I tried. “We’re married?”

A very handsome stranger, I’ll admit.

I couldn’t exactly place why, but it was like there was a steel wall between us. It wasn’t how I would have expected to be treated by my husband.

“Were we happy?” I asked.

He laughed, a short, bitter sound.

“Not really,” he admitted. “Sorry.”

“Oh.”

The silence between us stretched on. I picked up a sandwich the nurse had left on the tray by my bed, more just for something to do rather than hunger.

“Maybe it would be better if your memories of me never came back,” he said suddenly. “You don’t have to be married to a stranger.”

I blinked up at him, taken by surprise.

“Why’s that?”

“I haven’t exactly been       ...good to you       ...” His voice cracked, and I could sense the immense pain his words carried.

“No...I think that would be too sad. I want my memories back.”

“Even if they aren’t good?” he asked.

“I trust the past me,” I said, “I must have married you for a good reason, right?” I smiled, trying to comfort him. He looked so tortured.

He sighed and shook his head, holding my gaze for the first time.

My heart almost stopped. I could lose myself in those eyes       ...

“What did I do to deserve you?” he wondered.

“I don’t know, you tell me,” I said. “Amnesia, remember?”

He laughed again, but this time it sounded genuine. The sound sent butterflies fluttering around my stomach.

He was so worried about our past, but he seemed fine to me.

How bad could it have been? I wondered.

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In the small, quiet hours of the next morning, I woke with a start. I remembered everything, remembered Xavier and our marriage.

*How bad could it be?* I had wondered earlier.

Now I remembered just how bad it had been.