

## (In)Visible

### Angela

As I was growing up, people would ask me what I would choose as my superpower.

I'd always say that I would choose invisibility.

The power to conceal yourself but still be privy to the world going on. To see, to hear, but without the pressure of interaction.

I would dream about being invisible.

Honestly, in many ways, I already was. In school, I knew the answer but wouldn't raise my hand. At home, I wanted things, but I wanted everyone else to get their wish list fulfilled first.

To me, if I could turn invisible, I would be complete. I could move through this world like an echo, rippling through in quiet grace. I could do the right thing and not have the pressure of being the face of it.

By being small, there would just simply be more room for everyone else, right?

But when I heard that they'd lost the heartbeat for Em's baby—my niece—I didn't want to be invisible, not anymore.

I'd choose a different superpower.

The ability to fly. To get there as fast as I could, unbridled by traffic or parking or road routes.

But as soon as I got to the hospital, I was back to my half-transparent self. I found my dad, who looked at me like he had seen a ghost.

I couldn't believe that after fighting to live, after doing everything he could to be alive to meet his grandchildren, he was right back in a sterile dungeon. Only this time, he wasn't fighting for himself. He was watching his grandchild fight.

In the hospital room, the air was thick with outrage. Lucas sat beside Emily, who was in bed, gripping his hand tight. Dad paced back and forth as the doctor threw jargon at us.

"I'm going to check your fetal measurements. We only need to be concerned if there's no fetal heartbeat in an embryo that has a crown-rump length greater than five millimeters," she said, tracing her fingers over Em's belly.

"What does that mean?" Lucas replied, his voice heavy with panic.

"The ultrasound technician will be coming in soon to see if you need a transvaginal ultrasound or a 2D or 3D abdominal ultrasound," the doctor explained.

Looks of confusion shot around the room like shrapnel.

"Please, we're scared. Tell us what's going on!" Em burst out.

"I just told you, miss," the doctor replied.

"She means tell us what's going on *in English*," my dad clarified.

"She's saying there's thunder but not necessarily a storm," a voice announced from the doorway. We all whipped our heads around, and there he was. The man I loved.

The man of my dreams.

The man I was so goddamn mad at.

The man who'd betrayed me.

The man I felt safe with.

"Right?" Xavier asked, his question directed at the doctor. She nodded, clearly as taken by him as I was.

"Right. There's no need to freak out just yet," she assured Em. "Let us run these tests, and then we'll have answers. We'll get to the bottom of this."

I knew the doctor's words were intended for the medical emergency at hand, but I couldn't help but skew them toward my relationship with the man standing in the doorway.

*We'll get to the bottom of this.*

*Because, if we don't, I don't think my heart will ever be the same.*

### Xavier

I wasn't sure if Angela wanted me here. But regardless of everything that had happened, I knew she needed me here. She needed someone steady that she could rely on.

And even with the shitstorm I'd brought upon us, that guy was still me.

The only thing was, nobody else in the room thought so.

Em narrowed her eyes at me. "Get him out of here," she said to Lucas, a hand resting on her stomach.

Lucas looked at me, unsure.

Then Angela was stepping over to me, and my breath caught in my throat. "It's okay. I got it," she told her brother and then guided me out of the room.

I held out the tray of macaroni and cheese that I'd brought to the hospital, feeling like a fool with it in my hands, but I offered it up anyway.

"Lucille says Em always asks for this when she comes over," I said as I handed her the macaroni. "I figured she'd need some comfort food."

"Thank you," Angela replied, clearly unsure how to act. The uncomfortable glance she gave me stung like a goddamn bee.

"I know you probably want me to leave," I said, unsure if telling her that Claudia kissed me would just make me look like I had ambushed this moment. I had to do everything I could to avoid stepping into even more shit.

"Just go, Xavier. I have to be here for Em, for my family..." She trailed off.

"Our family. I become an uncle when you become an aunt, Angela. And I want to be here for you."

"Today. But tomorrow, you might want to be there for Claudia," she responded. "You have a family, a daughter."

*Wait, what?*

"How ... how do you know about that?" I asked before I could stop myself, and then I winced. Now it'd look like I was trying to hide that part from her, that I was mad she already knew.

"Claudia told me," she said softly. "And I ... I met her."

"You met who?"

"The girl, Xavier. Her name is Sophie." As Angela's wide eyes met mine, my stomach sank further. Not only was this child real but my wife had met her.

"Sophie might not be mine," I responded, trying to keep hold of a way out. Trying to bring some semblance of hope into the predicament.

"But what if she is?" Angela probed, eyes searching me as I tried to answer and failed. She wasn't asking it in a biting way. She was saying it in a genuine, actual-possibility way. And that stung way more.

"I don't know. I ... There's so much I want to discuss with you. You're my love, don't you see that? I just ... it's not the time to unravel the mess, not right now."

"You don't have to explain. I get it," she replied.

"You do?"

"I was a placeholder in your life, the wife you needed until you could figure out things with the one you wanted, right?"

Her words were cutting right into me, sharper than any blade I'd known.

"No." I shook my head, trying my best to find a way to convince her of what I knew to be true. "I love you—"

"But I'm not her," she said, stopping my sentence.

That was when I saw the tears welling in her eyes.

"And thank God you're not," I replied without missing a beat.

"Angela, I loved her once. Years ago. And then I found out who she really is. Daughter or no daughter, you're my everything. Don't you see that? It's only you. So you can hate me. You can beg me to leave. But I won't. I'm going to stay here until Em's okay. Until you're okay. Whether you like it or not," I told her.

"I don't like it," Angela said, her eyes on the floor.

I could've sworn she'd slapped me in the face.

"You don't?"

"No. And I'd really like it if ... Xavier, if I mean anything to you at all ... It's best if you just go home."

### Angela

In the days Em was in the hospital, we each took turns staying in her room. It didn't matter if she was awake or asleep. We wanted to let her know she was never alone.

At this particular moment, she was sleeping deeply. Dad and I sat beside her.

"I'm so sick of being here," Dad admitted. "Just when I thought I'd be out of the hospital for good, here we are."

I nodded. "I just don't get why this keeps happening. We're good people, aren't we?"

"Of course, Angela," he responded, gripping my hand. "We're not being punished."

"It doesn't feel that way."

"Sweetheart, yes, these horrible things keep happening. I would much rather be at a baby shower than in a hospital room. But guess what. We keep surviving them, every time," he said, squeezing me. I rested my head on his shoulder.

"Em is strong, and I'm sure my grandchild is even stronger," he said.

"You're right, Dad." I exhaled. "I'm sorry I'm being so weak."

He turned toward me, putting a hand on each of my shoulders.

"What are you talking about? You're the strongest of all of us. The sacrifices you've made? No one in this family has had the courage you've had, Angie."

"Marrying a stranger wasn't brave, Dad," I reminded him.

*Especially a cheating one.*

"Honey, marrying anyone is brave."

"We don't have a real marriage. You saw the photo. Everyone did."

"So?" my dad asked.

Was he serious?

How could he not be outraged?

I was humiliated, publicly exposed, *again*.

"It looked like she was kissing ~him~, not that he was participating. Plus, how did they get that photo at that exact moment?" Dad asked, like he was arguing to a jury. "You know the woman, right?"

"Yes."

"Is she honest?"

Claudia...she was perfect.

A good mother just trying to make things right for her daughter.

*Wasn't she?*

But I'd met her when she was Didi.

When she was lying about being Xavier's ex-flancée.

I grabbed my phone, pulling up the horrible photo... and realized it wasn't actually horrible at all.

It was perfect—taken at just the right distance, in the right light, with the right lens and frame. Impossible to get if it hadn't been staged.

Hell, it would've been almost impossible to snap if it was.

I turned to Dad. He looked beyond concerned.

"Do you think I should stay with Xavier?" I asked.

Dad got up and peeked his head out, toward the waiting room.

"Take a look," he said, nodding to where he was looking. I got up from my chair and slowly walked toward my dad, my eyes following his line of vision.

And, sure enough, there he was.

My husband.

Xavier.

Fast asleep in a crummy waiting room chair. In an empty waiting room.

Dad put an arm around my shoulders and whispered into my ear, "It looks like he's staying with you."

### Xavier

Love will mess you up. It will make you want someone so much that, when you don't have them next to you, you'd rather not be awake at all.

Bent over the shitty waiting room seat, I wondered how long I would be here. How long it would take for Emily's baby to be okay. For Angela and I to be okay, to wake up to something that didn't feel like a nightmare.

Opening my eyes felt like opening a can of dread. Until I could make sense of what I was seeing.

Because there Angela was, looking at me.

"Xavier ..." she said softly.

"How's Em?" I inquired, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

"I felt the heartbeat," she answered, pressing my hands against her chest. I could feel her heart pumping away, and I felt so close to her that I didn't want her to put my hand down. Not now, not ever.

"So did I," I told her, whispering. "You've fucked me up real good, you know that?"

"What?"

"The thought of losing you, Angela, is worse than the thought of losing anything else. I went to Claudia to protect you. She ... I didn't want ..."

"It was a setup, wasn't it?"

Golden strands had wandered from her bun, leaving her looking like a frazzled goddess.

"I'll show you what a real kiss is," I declared, gently pulling Angela toward me, merging our lips together. I gripped her hair, pulling her onto the seat.

She straddled me, my legs between her legs, and she ran her hungry hands up my chest.

Our tongues interlaced, fingers intertwined, eyes closed.

*I needed this.*

*I missed this.*

*This is home.*

I picked her up, carrying her out of the empty waiting room and into an abandoned room down the hall. I pressed her up against the wall, getting lost in her scent, in her hair, in her moans.

All I wanted right now was to be with her.

"Lock the door," she murmured into my ear, and I was more than happy to do as she said.