## Visit with the Doctor

"Xavier Knight," I said, extending my hand. He took it and shook. Hard.

I lowered my eyebrows at him. Who did this all-American blondie think he was?

## XAVIER

"Angela!" The doctor sang, clapping his hands around my wife's. He turned to me. "You must be Xavier."

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But his attention returned quickly to Angela. He asked her how she was feeling, and the two of them engaged in a
conversation a little too scientific for my understanding.
Not that I was a novice around doctors. Since my accident, I practically had an MD. I'd had my cast removed just the
day before. It felt like graduation day.
My doctors told me to take it easy, but I preferred to stretch my legs every chance I got.
Like then, when Dr. Carmichael was getting chatty with my wife. I stood up and rested my arm protectively on
Angela's reclining chair.
The doctor was taking notes on his clipboard, then tucked the pen behind his ear with an annoying laugh.
Who the fuck was this guy? It was obvious who he would have been in high school. Quarterback, homecoming king
that kind of hokey shit.
"How's the garden coming?" he asked Angela.
"Oh, I love it!" Angela gushed. "I planted lavender, strawberries, and some herbs. Xavier and I are shopping for more
plants after this!"
"I'm so glad to hear that. It makes you feel better, doesn't it?" I tried not to roll my eyes.
Clearly, he was happy to have my wife as a patient. Anyone would be. Angela was a ray of fucking sunshine.
But when I thought of how many doctor's visits Angela must have made here on her own, I got a squirmy feeling in my
gut.
And if my instincts were correct, someone else had weaseled in to pick up my slack.
Guilt rained down on me.
"You're so right, Leo. Thank you again for the suggestion."
I stewed in silence. So that was why Angela had taken up gardening.
Doctor's orders.
Thinking about the two of them talking alone in this room made me sick.
As Angela laughed at some stupid crack this Dr. Carmichael joker made, I realized I was jealous.
What an ugly feeling.
And unfortunately, one I knew too well. At another time in my life, this would be all the invitation I needed to start a
fight, but in this instance I gave pause.
Angela didn't need drama. She needed a husband.
I let go of my little dominance game and sat in the chair next to my wife.
I reached out and took her hand, giving it a little squeeze. She sent a radiant smile in my direction.
It felt like a little victory.
"You want to see the babies?" she asked excitedly.
"Of course."
I smiled back at her.
Angela lifted up her shirt so her round belly was exposed. The doctor slathered on some gel, and then he touched her
stomach with the ultrasound thing.
My eyes were glued to the little TV screen. It was filled with grainy black and white streaks. At first, there wasn't much
to see. But just knowing that I was looking in Angela's womb, where so many exciting things were happening, felt like
magic.
I brought her hand to my lips and kissed it.
Angela gazed at the screen expectantly, maybe a little tense.
"Here we go," Dr. Carmichael said, and then instantly, Angela began to smile.
I stared at the screen to see a sketchy outline of a little bean. But looking closer, I saw a head, and then an arm
It was a little baby.
I was beside myself with happiness. Angela turned to me with tears in her eyes.
"Our baby!" she whispered.
"This is your little boy," the doctor explained. "And here's the heartbeat
The sound filled the room, and Angela laughed through her tears. Her hand gripped mine with all her strength. I loved
I couldn't imagine any feeling that could compare to sharing this with her.
"Let's find the little girl now ..." Dr. Carmichael continued.
He navigated again through the TV static until he landed on another bean.
I was just as excited to see our second baby.
Angela and I grinned at each other like crazy people.
"They have fingers and everything," I gushed.
She laughed and tugged on my hand, pulling me closer. I leaned forward in my chair until our faces were nearly
touching.
"Aren't they adorable?" she whispered.
Closing the space between us, I kissed her. I kissed her softly, cradling her face. I kissed her like she the goddess she
was. I kissed her like we were totally alone.
When we pulled away, our goofy smiles were gone. We were overcome by the power of our love. We had created life!
Dr. Carmichael was across the small office, scribbling on his clipboard.
"The twins look healthy and happy," he announced.
Angela and I didn't even look at him. To me, she was the only person that existed in the universe.
The thought that I had felt threatened by this man only a few minutes before was suddenly absurd to me.
How did I think that anyone could come close to what I had with my wife?
We had a long history. Our crazy love story. Nobody could mess with that. I knew that now.
The doctor had every right to measure me up. I hadn't been here, and by not being here, I hadn't deserved to be here.
But I was back. The dark place I was trapped in would never claim me again.
I promised myself I wouldn't miss anything else. I would be the man who deserved to be Angela's husband.
I would be the man who deserved to be a father.
                                                             ANGELA
Marco stopped the BMW in front of the garden center. Xavier's eyes were glued to the sonogram photos the whole
I leaned over and kissed his cheek. His excitement meant more to me than any apology.
With each passing day, I felt the wall around my heart lower. I'd built it to protect myself, to make sure Xavier couldn't
hurt me again.
What I'd known the whole time was still true: he hurt me because he was hurting. He was so absorbed in his own pain
that he couldn't think of anything else.
He hadn't left me alone because he wanted to be away from me. He had stayed in Tokyo because he thought he wasn't
worthy of my forgiveness.
While that didn't change the fact that he had betrayed my trust, that he had left me alone, it did change my
perspective.
My husband was depressed. He was sick. And he had to get better before he could make things better between us.
It eased my mind that his physical health was improving. His cast had been removed, and he was walking again.
And Xavier's enthusiasm at Leo's office gave me hope.
He needed to get out of his head. He needed to focus on something bigger than himself and his shortcomings.
At Leo's office, I realized that being a father was exactly what my husband needed.
Xavier's depression had caused him to spiral into the darkest place in his mind. To get better, he would need to reach
out.
That was how my husband would get his confidence back. And I was ready to help him.
"Thanks, Marco," I called, holding the car door. "We'll be back in an hour or so."
I took Xavier's hand as we headed toward the flower farm.
My good mood improved as we passed under the giant arch. Spring sunshine warmed my back, and the scent of soil
and flowers saturated the air.
It also felt good to be in the country, away from the loudness of the city. Being pregnant made me sensitive to blaring
car horns, pushy walkers—the city nuisances I'd grown used to over the years.
Here, the lush gardens expanded almost as far as my eyes could see.
"What are we looking for today?" Xavier asked.
"Em gave me a list," I said, unfolding the piece of paper. "Cucumbers, lettuce, carrots
                                                                                               ...and dill. So I can make my own
pickles."
Xavier smiled, kissing my cheek. My pregnancy cravings made total sense to me, but they confounded my husband.
"Is there anything you'd like to grow in the garden?" I asked.
"I haven't really thought about it," he answered.
Rows and rows of green surrounded us. Plants of all kinds, flowers of all colors bloomed.
"It's kind of like paradise here," I said to myself.
"You're right," he agreed, kissing my temple. "Want to just walk around for a little while before we shop?"
I nodded. Xavier had read my mind.
As we walked through the greenery, I held onto my husband's arm. I leaned over to smell the blossoms on an orange
tree, to touch the waxy leaves of a Yucca plant.
I was so happy to be here with him, surrounded by growing things. The day was warm and full of possibility.
"I never knew you had such a green thumb, Angie," Xavier said.
"Neither did I," I admitted, "but now I see why Em loves it so much. You get to watch something grow."
We were quiet for a moment, walking through the little rainforest.
"Wow," Xavier whispered, moving toward a white orchid like a magnet. It was a delicate plant, with a row of perfect
blossoms. "Can we grow this in the garden?"
His earnestness made me laugh. "Yes!" I responded. "Well, not in the garden. That needs to grow inside. Orchids are
hard to take care of, but I'm sure you can do it. It will be your responsibility, okay?"
He nodded with the enthusiasm of a little boy promising to take care of a puppy.
I smiled as we continued to walk.
"Does it make you feel crazy, not going to work?" I asked. Maybe it seemed like the question came out of nowhere, but
it was something I'd wondered for a while.
My husband took a moment before responding. "At first, yeah. I didn't know what to do with myself when I didn't
have to be at the office every day. That's why I was drinking so much."
He looked at the ground. "That's part of why I stayed in Tokyo, too. It was easier to be far away from the office, from
New York. But now I wonder if I wanted to be at Knight Enterprise because I always have. Because it was familiar."
I met his gaze, and he gave me a sad smile. "I miss work, but I don't know if I miss the office."
I nodded.
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"This is actually a huge opportunity," I said. "You can choose what you want to do. For you."

"I think it would be good for you," I went on, my voice soft. "It would give you a sense of purpose to work again."

"It could be something unexpected," I encouraged. "I never thought I would be an event planner, but I ended up loving

"I don't know exactly what it will be yet," he went on. "But I'm going to get a job soon. No, a *career*. Something I really

Xavier smiled at me. There was mischief in his eyes. It was the smile that always made my heart flip.

He stopped walking and pulled me in close to him. "Don't worry," he whispered, kissing my head.

But with our newfound trust so fragile, it was hard to stop imagining it breaking all over again.

Xavier didn't say anything.

it."

He nodded. "I know you're right."

I closed my eyes. I didn't want to worry.

I didn't want to push him, but I knew this was my chance.