Who Rescued Who?

XAVIER

I'm dead.

I wasn't sure where I was, but I knew that for sure.

I was floating in some endless, dark void. I couldn't feel my body. I wasn't even sure if I still had one.

It was just me, alone with my fading thoughts.

Flashes of memory drifted through my mind like strokes of light.

The face of the woman I loved. The woman that had broken my heart.

The anguish of betrayal.

The sting of heartbreak.

The all-consuming heat of fury.

The anger came back to me now, here in my final moments. I could feel it burning me up.

So this is *how it ends* …..

I remembered seeing Angela on the beach before my body gave out.

Her hair had burned golden in the sun, her eyes reflecting the sparkling ocean around us.

A pang of regret hit me.

I'd treated her like shit. Worse than shit, really. And honestly, she deserved none of it.

Funny how death finally put everything into perspective when it was already too late.

I surrendered to the dark, letting myself go …..

But then I felt something.

A soft pressure on my lips. The sensation was like a refreshing breeze, breathing life into my lungs, filling my heart.

My eyes opened. I took a deep, rattling breath.

And I was looking into the eyes of an angel.

ANGELA

"Oh thank God, thank God," I said. I cradled Xavier's head in my lap, brushing away the hair from his eyes.

"Ang—" He started coughing violently.

"Shh," I urged. "Don't try to speak. Get some rest."

But Xavier seemed determined to speak. I frowned with worry. What was so important that he had to say?

"Thank you …" he said, barely a whisper.

He closed his eyes, and for a second I feared the worst. But the steady rise and fall of his chest pushed those thoughts away.

He was pretty beat-up.

He had a nasty cut on his forehead, and it looked like his shoulder was dislocated. I grimaced as I popped his shoulder back into its socket. I tore off a piece of my shirt to make a sling for him.

I looked around at the deserted island again, new determination filling me.

I wasn't just surviving for me anymore. I had to pick up the slack for both me and Xavier, at least until he woke up.

I'd never seen him so helpless, and part of me kind of liked seeing this human side to him.

When he was in pain, when he was injured, he was just like the rest of us.

I left Xavier in the sand to try and find us food. I knew the sun was going to set soon, and I was worried about how pale he was looking.

So I looked around, surveying my options. The forest seemed like it could house a bunch of different types of animals, but I knew with my luck, I wouldn't be able to run or fight if they didn't take well to the idea of being eaten. By two human mistakes, no less.

So I headed for the ocean.

I waded into the water, liking the way the cool liquid splashed up my calves. All of the sand that had stuck itself to my ankles came off the second I waded into the waves, and I felt instantly clean.

I realized if I was going to catch any fish, I was going to need to go deeper. And I was going to need a weapon of sorts.

So I went back to the shore and found the closest tree. I picked off a small branch that was pretty near to my head and scraped to end against the tree until it was passably sharp.

Then I ended my jeans and ripped them off, not wanting to soak them through. If it got cold at night, I'd be happy to have a dry pair of pants to put on.

Armed with my makeshift spear, I headed back for the water. The saltwater stung my gash at first. It hurt so bad that I cried out, screaming at the sky as tears fell freely.

But it was a different kind of pain. The kind of pain that made me feel free, like I didn't have to hide what I was going through.

Maybe it was the situation or the environment I was in, but I felt like I deserved to cry and scream here as much as I wanted to. After the pain subsided and my eyes dried a little, I ducked my whole face under the water.

I came back up to the surface, rubbed my eyes, and then started swimming out to sea.

As soon as I was deeper, I decided to dive down and see what I was working with. I kept my eyes open, and after a few moments, they adjusted to the burn of the salt.

I saw a fish the size of a grown man's palm.

I stabbed at it once, my spear going through its little body.

When I resurfaced, I brought the spear up to my face in shock.

There it was, my little fish. I'd found us food all by myself.

Dad will love this story, I thought, and then *realized* this story had begun when my plane crashed. So maybe he wouldn't love all of it.

Holding my spear up like a trophy, I headed back for the shore.

XAVIER

My whole body was pulsating with a distinct kind of pain, like when you wake up after a night of heavy partying and you feel every organ inside you complaining. That was what was happening to me now.

My whole body felt the weight of the crash.

The sun was coming down on me strong, so I rolled onto my good shoulder to angle myself better against the breeze. The cool wind hit my face, and it almost relaxed me. I was looking out at the ocean when I saw a figure emerging from the water.

Not just any figure, but Angela's figure. My wife's figure, almost entirely exposed.

I squinted, trying to make out what, if anything, she was wearing. I saw the top of her top—she had ripped the bottom of it to make my arm a sling—and some panties.

But that was it.

Even though I knew it was wrong for me to be looking at her like this, without her knowing, I couldn't tear my eyes away.

And the dream I had kept coming back—of her in various stages of undress, of her pleading with me for more.

I rubbed my eyes. *Get it together,* I ordered myself. She was taking care of me. The least I could do was treat her with respect. Especially after the way I'd treated her for so long before.

I watched her grab her jeans from beside a tree a few yards away and pull them on, and then she started walking over to me. I closed my eyes, pretending to be resting.

"I'm back, and look what I got," she exclaimed. I opened my eyes and saw a tree branch with a sharp end.

She must've sharpened it herself, I thought, stunned. *On the sharpened edge was a fish.*

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"How did you …"

"It wasn't too hard," she said, modest. "I'm good with my hands. My dad taught me how to fix cars when I was young, and after that, fixing just about anything *that* became easy."

Huh. I thought back to when the Bentley broke down in Midtown, how Marco told me a random woman had stopped to help him fix it. Could it be …..

But before I could make sense of anything, Angela was tearing a piece of the fish off and handing it to me.

"I know it's not exactly filet mignon, but you need to eat something. Please."

So I let her feed me the first piece of the fish and then another. And before I knew it, she'd fed me the whole thing, not taking any herself.

"What about you?" I asked.

"Don't worry about me," she said, and in that moment, I became certain that I didn't know this woman at all.

What kind of person would treat someone like me, someone who went out of their way to make her life harder, with such kindness? If she was just after my money, wouldn't it be in her favor to have let me die?

If I were her, that was probably what I would've done.

But instead here she was, tending to my injuries and feeding me fish she'd caught by herself. It felt surreal, like she was an angel put there for a reason.

I tried to sit up by myself, but she saw me struggling and helped me. When I was up, I reached the back of my hand to my forehead and felt moisture.

"It's sweat, not blood," she said, reading my mind. "Are you hot? You want to take that off?" she asked, motioning to the sweater that had on place on an island.

I nodded, and she helped pull it off of me from behind. She stood behind me for a moment after it was off, and I thought I felt her gaze on my back.

On my scar.

"What happened?" she asked quietly.

I didn't want to talk about it, not now. I didn't need another reminder of pain; I had plenty already. But I wanted to answer her, to give her something after all she'd given me.

"I was in a car accident," I said.

"Recently?"

"About a year ago."

I was looking at the ground, picking sand up and watching it fall. She came back around and sat beside me, watching me play with the sand too.

We sat there in silence for what felt like hours, getting to know each other through the words we didn't say.

ANGELA

This was a different Xavier. A Xavier that thanked me, that smiled at me, that answered me in full sentences without a hint of sarcasm. It was like he had become a completely different person.

That, or he'd started to see me as a completely different person.

We were sitting in the same spot on the sand, letting the easy silence take over, as the sun set. The temperature had dropped, but not by much.

I felt comfortable, like I didn't have anything to worry about.

I knew that, in the morning, I'd really start to worry. But for now, I was at peace. Kind of. I was on my back now, counting the stars in the sky.

That was when I heard it.

It was getting closer and closer, but I recognized the sound immediately.

A helicopter.

It was too dark for me to make anything in the sky out, but I was certain it was there, coming for us, I woke up Xavier.

"Xavier, hey, wake up." I said. "They're here. They're here for us."

Xavier sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, and looked around. A few minutes later, a helicopter was landing near the destroyed jet.

I helped Xavier up, and together we limped toward it.

A man in a military-looking outfit was inspecting the outside of the jet when he heard us call to him.

"HEY!" I yelled. "We're here!"

He turned to us. "Mrs. Knight? Mr. Knight?" he called back.

"YES!" I shouted, overcome with relief. When we got to him, he called to another man on board the helicopter, who helped us up.

We were seat-belted into the leather seats and given massive headphones to minimize the sound. A huge blanket was thrown across me and another over Xavier.

I looked at him, my husband, and he looked back at me. I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know if I should say anything.

"Alright, folks, we're ready. We'll get you home safe."

"What about the others? Are they …" I trailed off.

"They were found on a different island, a few miles away. Most've been thrown from the plane. They're on their way to a hospital as we speak."

I let out a sigh of relief—at least everyone was okay. And then the helicopter was taking off, flying us back into the sky that had let us go a few hours ago.

I watched the tiny island drift away into the distance, the darkness swallowing it whole.

"I hate flying," I said.

"Me too," he answered. I turned to look out the window beside me, seeing nothing but darkness. I didn't know what life was going to be like when Xavier and *I returned* to New York.

I didn't know if he'd go back to being the monster that chastised me at every turn or whether we'd keep this tentative peace.

And I knew was that I liked being there for him. I liked getting to take care of him and helping him feel okay.

And I liked thinking that maybe Brad had been right, that there was more to Xavier Knight than met the eye.

I felt Xavier's hand brush against mine. A soft, almost hesitant touch. I reached out and slowly, our fingers intertwined.

We didn't say anything else. We didn't have to. We both took comfort just from having each other there.

I closed my eyes and smiled, appreciating his warmth.

Maybe this plane crash was the best thing that could have happened to us …..