

*Off the Page with...Garrett Graham*

Team Effort

Wellsy is a warrior. A very sweaty, very angry warrior. Dark hair wild and matted to her forehead. Green eyes downright feral.

I never thought watching someone give birth would be this...terrifying.

Meanwhile, my legs feel like jelly and I'm pretty sure my hands haven't stopped shaking since the second she jolted me awake at three in the morning and whispered, "I promise you I didn't pee the bed."

It took a second for me to notice the wet spot on our sheets and realize her water broke.

"Garrett," she whimpers, and I lunge out of my chair.

I was banished to said chair after she told me I was holding her hand "too tenderly." I asked if she preferred I smack her ass and pull her hair while calling her my dirty girl, at which point I was ordered to sit in the chair and not speak until spoken to.

I hurry toward my soon-to-be wife, soon-to-be baby mama's bedside. At the monitor, the nurse gives me a warning glance, probably sensing I'm about to say something stupid.

"How you feeling, baby?"

Hannah shoots me a look that could melt steel. "How do you think I'm feeling? I'm giving birth to two human beings! It's like passing two watermelons through a garden hose!"

"Technically, you're passing one watermelon through the garden hose, followed by a second watermelon. They're not coming out at the same time—"

"WHY!" Hannah wails. "Why are you like this!" Her face is red from exertion. "Just hold my hand before I punch you with it, okay?"

I bite my lip. “How would you like your hand held? Tenderly or—”

“WHY!” She groans, a mix of pain and exasperation. “Why do you always have to joke at the worst times?”

“Because you love me for my sense of humor,” I answer cheerfully. “And because if I can make you laugh, maybe you won’t kill me.” Grinning, I take her small, damp hand and wrap mine over it. “I love you, and I’m here with you. I will do anything you need me to do, okay, Wellsy?”

I sit at the side of the hospital bed, clasping her hand between both of mine. With my free hand, I reach out and tuck her hair behind her ears. When we first met in that lecture hall junior year of college, I never imagined we’d be here right now. Having a kid. Or rather, two kids. Engaged to be married. Soulmates.

I wouldn’t fucking change it for anything in the world, though. Hannah Wells came into my life like a sassy, bickering whirlwind and not a day has gone by that I don’t wake up overcome with gratitude that she’s mine.

I lean closer so that Nosy Nancy at the door won’t hear all the sappy shit that’s about to pour out of my mouth.

“I’m so fucking proud of you right now,” I tell my beautiful, brave girl. “I know I didn’t react well when I found out you were pregnant—”

“No, really?” She huffs sarcastically. “You acted like a total jackass and—”

She pauses mid-scolding, gritting her teeth as another contraction hits.

I talk her through it, not even complaining when she almost snaps my thumb in half. Luckily the hockey season is over, otherwise Coach would literally murder me if I showed up to play with a sore hand. “Babies are no excuse!” I heard him growl that to one of my Bruins teammates last season when the guy asked to miss a game to be with his wife for the birth of their first child.

“I know I was a jackass, and I’m going to keep apologizing for that until the day I die.”

Emotion clogs my throat. “But I need you to know there’s nowhere else I want to be right now, and nobody else I want to be doing this with. You’re my family, Wellsy. You’re my entire world. You’re the reason I breathe.”

Hannah bursts into tears. “WHY!”

I blink in surprise. “Why what? I’m baring my soul here.”

“I know, and it’s so sweet,” she blubbers, sniffing loudly, “but now my nose is all stuffy because I’m crying, and I can’t breathe!”

I turn to the nurse, who is trying very hard not to laugh. “Could I trouble you for another box of tissues?”

We’ve already gone through an entire box, half when we found out Hannah’s mom’s flight was delayed so she won’t be here for another eight hours, and the rest of the box when I made the mistake of turning on the TV and a dog food commercial came on.

“Okay, I won’t be sweet anymore. How about some music? They say music can be very soothing during labor.”

“Who’s they?”

“The baby book people. How about some calm, classical music?”

“Fine,” she huffs. “Just no rock.”

I fumble with my phone, trying to find a suitable playlist, when Wellsy lets out another primal scream.

“Garrett! Why won’t these assholes come out! WHY!”

“Because,” I say, in what I hope is a comforting voice, “they’re probably just taking their time, making sure they look perfect for their big debut.”

“This is all your fault,” she accuses.

“Well, it’s half my fault. I mean, you were there too. Team effort.”

Her eyes narrow, and I know I’m in dangerous territory. “Oh, we don’t play hockey anymore, is that it? We’re a comedian now?”

I strain my brain trying to remember what else the baby book people said, but there wasn’t a chapter titled “How Not to Get Murdered in the Delivery Room.”

Another contraction hits, and Hannah’s face contorts with pain.

“Make the assholes come out, Garrett,” she begs. “Please.”

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from busting out in laughter. This entire pregnancy, she’s been talking about our future children in such loving, gentle terms, and the moment her water breaks, they become “the assholes.”

“Why don’t we talk baby names again?” I suggest, trying to distract her from the pain. “Are you still set on Wyatt for the boy asshole?”

That one gets her. She snorts out a laugh that brings a grin to my lips. There’s my girl.

“Uh-huh. Do you still like it?”

I nod. “Yup. Solid name. Gonna look great on the back of a hockey jersey.”

It’s her turn to grin. “The back of the jersey will only say Graham,” she points out.

“Exactly. And we already know the name looks fucking awesome on a jersey.”

“Did you pick something yet for the girl asshole?” she asks.

Hannah and I made a deal that we each get to name a baby. Within reason, of course. Like, she’s not allowed to name our son Gerbil. Or Carl. I shudder at the thought. And I’m not allowed to name our daughter—

“Other than G.G.,” she interjects just as I open my mouth.

“We would spell it out, Wellsy. We’re not heathens. It would be Gigi.”

“No.” She sticks out her chin. My woman is stubborn.

“Fine. Then, no, I don’t have an alternative yet. Still mulling.”

“What will they write on the bassinet then?” she whines. “I don’t want it to say Baby Girl Graham until you come up with something.”

“We’ll just put Gigi as a placeholder.”

“Gigi?” the nurse’s voice comes from the door. She’s returning with a fresh box of tissues. “Is that what we’ve decided on for Baby Girl?”

“No,” Hannah says at the same time I answer, “Maybe.”

“I think that’s a beautiful name,” the nurse says, nodding in approval.

My smug face swings back to Wellsy. “See!”

She jabs her finger in the center of my chest. “Placeholder,” she reminds me. “It won’t be her final name.”

Dr. Laura walks in, greeting us with a bright smile. “How are we doing here?”

Before I can respond, Hannah looks up at her with pleading eyes. “Please get them out of me.”

The doctor chuckles. “Let’s see how things are progressing.”

As she goes to the foot of the bed to check on Hannah’s progress, I stand up and reach for her hand again. She squeezes it hard, and I can see the fear and trepidation flickering in her expression.

“You’re going great,” I assure her, bending down to brush my mouth over hers. “We got this, Wellsy. Okay?”

Her lips tremble against mine. “Okay.”

I straighten up, but not before planting a kiss on her sweaty forehead. “Just be warned that I’m going to burst into tears the moment the first asshole comes out.”

Dr. Laura lifts her head to give me a sharp look.

“Oh, it’s not me saying that,” I say quickly. “She’s been calling them assholes for the last two hours.”

I glance at Wellsy for confirmation but she’s shaking her head at me, her lips twisted in deep disapproval. “Those are our children, Garrett. How could you.” She shifts her gaze to our doctor, all innocence. “I would never call my babies assholes. Ever.”