

## 11.

"In that cold room, my will to live, to return stood strong"

Whereas, in a large operating room, Estelle was battling for her life. The room was silent apart from the steady beeping of the monitor and the hum of other machines. Fluorescent lights cast a harsh glow on the sterile white walls and the team of surgeons and nurses clad in scrubs, masks, and gloves. Dr. Matthew Lean, the lead surgeon, stood at the head of the operating table, right above Estelle who lay unconscious, her face pale and serene, almost as if in peaceful sleep apart from the huge cut on her forehead and reddened face. They had just nished the delicate process of removing the two-week-old embryo. The embryo, barely the size of a poppy seed, lay in a tiny petri dish on a table beside the doctor. It had just completed the critical process of implantation into the uterine lining and was beginning to settle the foundation for the heart, brain, spine, and other vital structures that would have formed in the coming weeks if it hadn't ended up bare in the lab.

Suddenly, the monitors erupted in a chorus of alarms. "Her blood pressure is spiking!" a nurse exclaimed, her voice tight with alarm.

"Administer 20cc of epinephrine!" Dr Matthew barked, his eyes on the monitor while the team sprang into action alongside the erratic beeping of the monitors. The room became a blur of motion as Estelle's condition deteriorated before their eyes in seconds.

"She's crashing, Doctor," another nurse reported, her voice tinged with panic.

"Get me the debrillator!" Dr. Matthew's voice was loud and urgent, his hands ying over the controls to stabilize her. The room erupted into a urry of motion as people grabbed things. Syringes were passed, uids were administered, and electric paddles were prepped for debrillation.

"Clear!" Dr. Matthew shouted, and Estelle's body jolted as the electrical charge coursed through her. The heart monitor stuttered, then atlined. "Again!" he demanded, sweat dripping from his brow. Another shock, another jolt, but the line remained at.

"Come on, Estelle," he whispered, his hands moving with frantic precision. "We can't lose you."

And then, miraculously, a beep—faint at rst, but growing stronger—was heard. The line on the monitor spiked, then settled into a steady rhythm. A collective breath was released, the tension in the room deating like a punctured balloon.

"She's stabilizing. We did it," Dr. Matthew conrmed, his voice hoarse with relief. The team exchanged glances, a silent celebration of their victory as they glanced from the monitor to Estelle lying still on the operating table. Yes, they did it.

"We need to close her up, now," He instructed, his hands moving quickly to complete the procedure. After what felt like an eternity, the surgery was complete.

Outside, in the waiting room, the atmosphere was grim with grief and fear, the wait unbearable. The family sat on edge. They had heard the raised voices, the alarms, but now there was a silence that was somehow more terrifying. Christian, no longer standing, sat with a blank face, his hand tightly wrapped around the cold hands of his wife who was trembling in fear beside him as they waited impatiently for the door to the operating room to open. Ethan sat on the oor, his back to the wall and his head resting on his knees, while the Gray family sat far away, cuddling each other and glancing at the door now and then. The door nally opened and Dr. Matthew stepped out, pulling off his mask.

The family rushed to him, Anna rst, her eyes wide with fear.

"How...?" She couldn't nish the question, her voice breaking as she sobbed, clutching her chest with a trembling hand in fear. Estelle, her poor baby.

Christian placed a hand on her shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze, his eyes still on the doctor as he asked in a steady voice that belied his trembling stomach, "How is she?"

"She's stable," Dr. Matthew said, his voice tired but reassuring. "We managed to save her."

A collective gasp of relief ooded the room just as Anna slipped to the ground, sobbing quietly into her hand and Sarah whispered loud enough to be heard, "And the baby?" Christian's brows creased and his jaw tightened in anger at the question but he didn't utter a word, just stared at nothing above the doctor's head.

The doctor glanced at their faces, his expression sympathetic as he responded, "A two-week-old embryo cannot survive outside the womb, even with the most advanced medical technology available. It relies completely on the mother to survive, not to mention the injury it sustained during the accident. I'm sorry, we couldn't save it."

Silence followed, punctuated by quiet sobs from both Anna and Sarah. They knew it might come to this; they were all aware of the delicate condition, but they had hoped for a miracle that would save both mother and child. Tears of both relief and sadness sprang to each of their faces, including Christian and Paul, who had been holding in their emotions.

"Can we see her?" Christian asked, gingerly sning back the tears before they fell.

"Huh, Estelle? I'm sorry, no, you can't for now. You will be able to when we are sure she's ready for visitors. But you can see the embryo..." Every ear perked up, eyes widened a fraction, and sobs ceased. "...that is, if you want to, although it hasn't formed into a baby. It's just a cluster..."

"We can?" Sarah interrupted just as Christian said, "That wouldn't be necessary," dismissing Sarah's response with a wave of his hand.

"Huh..." The doctor's gaze ickered to Sarah, who leaned into the crook of Paul's neck, obviously crying, then back to Christian's stern face. He nodded and said, "Okay, that's ne. I'll be in my oce if you need me."

With a nal glance, he walked off through the long corridors, leaving the family in tense silence lled with both relief and grief.