

12.

"This suffocating blanket of grief—will I ever be free from its crushing weight?"

Estelle's eyes uttered open, heavy with the residue of anaesthesia. She groaned, the light stabbing through her eyelids. A dull throbbing pain radiated through her bones, but it was the sharp, intense pain in her belly and legs that jolted her fully awake. She winced, her hand instinctively moving to her abdomen, fingers pressing against the bandages wrapped tightly around her stomach. Her heart lurched, and her eyes flew open, wide with confusion and fear.

Something is wrong.

She tried to sit up, but the IV tugged at her arm, and a wave of dizziness crashed over her, forcing her back down. She scanned the sterile white walls, the machines whose relentless beeps sent her head spinning, and the overpowering scent of antiseptic. The room felt suffocating, and the panic rising in her chest made it hard to breathe.

Where is she?

Then, like a bolt of lightning, the memory struck her—just that morning, she had discovered the life growing inside her. The disbelief, the bittersweet joy, the overwhelming fear of how Hunter would react. And then...the accident.

Her heart pounded in her chest as she bolted upright, only to be slammed back by the searing pain in her belly. Panic surged through her and she pressed her trembling hand harder against the bandages, desperate to feel something—anything—but all she felt was the searing ache that now radiated through her entire body.

Something is definitely wrong.

Her eyes darted around the room, wild with fear. "My baby," she croaked, her voice barely a whisper. She swallowed hard, trying to force the words out again as she pressed harder on her belly, ignoring the pain that ached with every movement. Just then, Anna appeared in the doorway, a tray in hand, which clattered to the ground the moment her eyes fell on her daughter.

"Estelle," she gasped, rushing to her side, tears welling in her eyes. "Oh my God, Estelle!" she cried, grabbing Estelle's cold hand. "I'm so glad you're awake," she whispered, her voice trembling as she tried to smile through the tears.

But Estelle was beyond comfort. Pain and panic clawed at her chest, her breathing turning into shallow gasps. Something is wrong with her baby. She could feel it. "My baby," she croaked again, her eyes wide with terror. "What... what happened to my baby?"

Anna hesitated, her face twisting in agony as her eyes ickered toward the door. How does she tell her that she has lost her baby? "I'll get the doctor," she said instead, her voice breaking as she turned to leave, desperate to escape the truth. But before she could move, the door burst open, and a nurse rushed in.

"Mrs Gray, please, you need to calm down," the nurse urged, moving quickly to Estelle's side. Anna stepped back, allowing the nurse to approach. Estelle shook her head furiously, trying to sit up again, but the pain in her belly tore through her, but she didn't care. Her heart was in turmoil, a feeling only a mother knows when something is wrong with her child.

"No, no, no. Something is wrong. I can feel it. My baby...my baby." She looked down at her stomach, then up at the nurse, her eyes wide with panic. "I need to know if my baby is okay."

"Mrs. Gray," the nurse said gently, placing a calming hand on her shoulder, trying to ease her back into bed. "You were in an accident. The doctors did everything they could..."

The words hit Estelle like a physical blow. She shook her head, refusing to accept them. "No, no, please, no," she choked out, tears streaming down her face. Her hands clutched at her belly as if trying to will the life back inside. "I just found out. I just found out I was pregnant."

"Oh my God!" Anna sobbed, turning away, unable to bear the sight of her daughter's agony. She stumbled backwards against the wall, her hands covering her mouth as Estelle's cries grew louder, more desperate.

The nurse leaned closer, her voice soft but firm. "Estelle, I need you to breathe. Focus on my voice. You need to stay calm for your health."

But her words were drowned out by the panic raging through Estelle. "No, that can't be possible. I just... I just..." The pain, both physical and emotional, was too much to bear. She felt like she was being ripped apart from the inside. Her vision blurred, her throat tightened as she gasped for air, her sobs wracking her body.

Just then, the door swung open again and the doctor and two other nurses stepped in, a syringe in hand. The nurse stepped aside to give him room. "Mrs. Gray," the doctor said gently, "you need to rest and this will make you sleep."

Estelle's hands gripped the sheet, her knuckles white, and her eyes wide with terror. She shook her head again, more violently this time. "No," she screamed, her voice echoing down the corridors as she thrashed on the bed, trying to get them off. "No! My baby! Please, no!"

The nurses sprang into action, holding her down as she fought with all her might, even as the sharp tip of the syringe pierced her skin. "No, please," she sobbed, her strength fading. "I just want to know if my baby is okay."

Within seconds, the light drained from her limbs, her sobs grew quieter, her eyes uttered shut, and the room faded into darkness once more.

But her wounds didn't fade with the darkness. When she opened her eyes again sometime later, the weight of her loss settled over her like a suffocating blanket of grief. She felt it in every part of her body and soul, accompanied by a burning anger directed at her. It gnawed at her, tearing at the pieces of her soul that were still intact. Even as the doctor spoke to her, her family peering at her with the same pitiful look she was beginning to hate, she couldn't help but think to herself__

I don't deserve their pity.

I did this.

I killed her.

I killed my child.

It's a thought too awful for a mother to bear, but she couldn't shake it. This wouldn't have happened if she hadn't clung to a man she knew could never love her. If only she hadn't gone looking for him that night, then her baby would still be safe, growing in the protection of her womb.

My baby...my baby...

Tears trickled down her closed eyelids as Anna held her hand, massaging her palm with tears streaming down her face. "I'm sorry," Anna whispered, her voice breaking. But Estelle didn't open her eyes. She hadn't done so since she woke up and had no intention of doing so anytime soon either.