

9.

"Nothing is more shocking and regretful than losing the ones you could have met and loved if only your actions had allowed it."

Hunter's mind spun, the words blurring together. Estelle. Pregnant. Critical condition. Lose the baby. Save the Estelle. Lose Estelle. None of it made sense. His knees buckled, and he stumbled back, hitting the wall.

Estelle's mother, Anna, collapsed into sobs, clutching her husband, who stood like a stone. "My baby," she wailed. "My poor baby."

Christian's face was pale, his eyes red and empty. He didn't even move to hold Anna as she swayed from her sobs, his tears streaming down his face.

Meanwhile, Hunter stood there, frozen, as various emotions overwhelmed him. He couldn't believe it. Estelle had been pregnant, and she hadn't told him. A part of him felt anger bubbling up. Had she kept it from him on purpose? To use it against him in the divorce?

Christian's head snapped up, rage igniting in his eyes. "You selfish bastard!" he yelled, lunging at Hunter. Hunter was confused and oblivious to the fact that he had spoken out loud until he felt the sharp sting of a hand connecting with his cheek.

"How dare you," Anna spat, her voice low but raw with pain and anger. Everyone stood still in shock, staring agape at Anna. "You think she kept it from you to manipulate you? She didn't even get the chance to meet her baby because of the way you treated her." She screamed the last sentence, tears rushing down her reddened cheeks, and Hunter could only stare at her, his cheek burning, not just from the slap but from the shame. He opened his mouth to defend himself, but no words came.

"My poor baby didn't even get to find out she was carrying a child before it was snatched away from her, and you dare spit that from your gutter mouth." She yelled, hitting Hunter on his chest as she wailed.

Ethan rushed to his mother, "Mom—"

"I never meant for that to happen," Hunter whispered, his voice trembling.

"Never meant for this to happen?" she repeated sharply as if in disbelief. "Look at where we are, Hunter! My daughter is lying in that hospital bed, fighting for her life because you broke her heart." Her anger rose, her voice sharp as she jabbed her hands furiously at the operating room's closed door. "Do you know what it's like to watch your child suffer? To see her in so much pain because the man she loves doesn't love her back?"

Hunter didn't say anything

"Mom," Ethan said, trying to pull his mother away, but she didn't budge. Her furious eyes were glued to Hunter's. "I thought you loved her, Hunter. I really did," she continued, tears trickling down her face. Her voice became lower as she spoke the next words. "That's why I blame myself for this. I regret agreeing to this marriage. I regret ever thinking you would be good for my daughter. And if God could allow me one more chance, just one more chance, I'd do anything to make sure you and my daughter never crossed paths again," she stated bitterly, her eyes burning with hatred.

Hunter's heart clenched painfully at the statement. He couldn't bring himself to speak, nor could he bring himself to meet Anna's gaze, but he could feel the burning effect of her hatred oozing into his body. Ethan sent Hunter a death glare before guiding his mother away without a word and depositing her into Christian's arms, where she immediately broke down into another sob.

Christian's jaw twitched with the raw pain emitting from his wife. He shot Hunter a menacing look before turning to the doctor, who waited patiently while they argued, his expression displaying professional sympathy.

Finally, Christian spoke up, his voice hoarse. "What are the chances? If we choose both, what are the chances they'll survive?"

The doctor sighed, rubbing his temples. "I'm so sorry, but the embryo is not viable at this stage. We only need to focus and act quickly to save Estelle's life."

The room fell silent again, the weight of the situation pressing down on each of them. Hunter looked at Estelle's parents, then back to the doctor. "We... we need to save her," he said nally, his voice barely above a whisper. "We need to save Estelle."

"Shut up, or I swear I will shut you up forever," Christian bellowed, his veins ticking and his stance ready to pounce on Hunter. But he was held back by a tired-looking Anna. She shook her head, tears streaming down her face. "Estelle, she's our priority," she muttered softly.

Christian didn't look away from Hunter; he so wished to completely ruin his already disfigured face, but instead, he held Anna tightly and closed his eyes as if trying to block out the pain before nally speaking. "'Do whatever you need to do to save her,'" he said, his voice lled with determination and sorrow

The doctor nodded solemnly. "We'll do everything we can," he promised, before turning and heading back into the operating room.

Dave grabbed Hunter's arm, pulling him away before another ght could break out. "Hunter, you need to get out of here now," he whispered. Hunter c****d his head arrogantly. Dave sighed. "This isn't about you right now. It's about Estelle, and upsetting her parents isn't the best thing to do, especially now that they harbour the feeling of killing you at a glance. I won't deny that seeing your face doesn't bring that thought to my mind either, but dude, you have to listen to me on this."

Hunter glanced around the room, and his heart clenched painfully at the faces around him—Estelle's mother, broken with grief; Christian and Ethan, seething with anger; his parents, worn and weary. He gritted his teeth and clenched his sts as a wave of guilt and shame crashed over him.

Dave is right. He should leave. He had been so focused on his resentment and anger that he had forgotten about what truly mattered, which was saving Estelle. He wouldn't want to see his face either if he were in their situation. So, with a curt nod, a constricting heart, and a blood-stricken, battered face—one eye swollen, torn lips, and a bloodstained shirt—he staggered out of the hospital.