

With her thumb, Dianne rolled the tiny ball on the thin cable that lead to the EKG defibrillator. She watched as the numbers of the voltage display climbed to the desired number.

"150! Clear!" she cried as her thumb moved up to the plunger at the end of the cable. She pressed down on it, hard, as if the extra force would somehow translate into a life-giving charge for Belinda. The jumping lines on the EKG display evened out into a sinus rhythm for a moment; a moment that Nikki and Dom seized to move Belinda onto the surgical table. The built-in scanner began its sweep of her body, and Nikki took a pair of scissors to Belinda's clothing.

Suddenly, the steady rhythm destabilized, and Dianne took the cable up again, cranking the voltage even higher.

"200! Clear!" Belinda's body spasmed with the energy that flowed through it, but this time there was no change. The piercing alarm kept up its wail and Dianne grimly brought the voltage up higher still.

"250! Clear!" Dom and Nikki both stepped back as the electricity surged through Belinda again. Dom glanced over at Dianne.

"She's still in v-fib, Doc," he warned.

"Ah can't go any higher," Dianne replied, her voice tense. "There's a baby to consider."

She watched as the scanner reached Belinda's abdomen and slowed. A separate window popped up on the screen, and the scan of the baby's body was shown there, while Belinda's form still dominated the scanner's display.

Suddenly, the EKG flatlined, one wailing alarm replaced by another. And Dianne, her eyes on the scanner's display, made the choice every doctor hates to make.

"The baby's in distress. Ah have to do a c-section."

Dom, his face paler than normal, swallowed hard, then nodded his agreement. Nikki's eyes flicked back and forth between her colleagues, then she moved from where she had been cutting off Belinda's blouse to the other end of the body, and began working on Belinda's skirt.

Dianne ripped off her bloodied gloves, rubbed her hands quickly with an antibacterial/antiviral gel, then drew on a clean pair. She palpated Belinda's abdomen carefully.

"The baby's not far into the birth canal. We can do this," she stated flatly.

Dom cleansed his own hands and put on fresh gloves, then pulled out a sterile tray of instruments. Once Nikki had cleared away Belinda's clothing, he smeared the mother's swollen abdomen with some of the cleansing gel. Dianne glanced over at Nikki and caught her eye.

"En, set up an incubator. We're going to need it."

"Yes, Doc," Nikki replied. She left the surgery and went out into the main medical cabin. As she was pulling out the collapsible incubator unit, Christopher called from outside, where he and Virgil stood.

"En, how is Belinda?" he asked.

Nikki turned to him, and the sorrow on her face told him the truth more clearly than words could.

"Belinda's heart stopped, CJ. She... didn't make it. Doc is trying to save the baby now."

Christopher's face paled and he looked at Nikki with a lost expression as the words sank in. Virgil glanced up at the nurse and gave her a solemn nod.

"Thanks for telling us, En. We were very concerned." He gave a tug on Christopher's sleeve. "CJ. Come on."

CJ rounded on Virgil, prepared to shout at him, scream at him about how insensitive he was, but he saw the sorrow on Virgil's face, and suddenly his anger dissipated.

"You don't get used to it, do you, Vee?" he said sadly.

"You never get used to it, CJ. But we can't give up trying. Not ever. Now, come on. Let's finish the job. There are others who need our help."

Virgil began to walk away from Thunderbird Seven, back the way they had come, the oxyhydrite tank over his shoulders. Christopher looked back at Nikki, who was setting up the incubator, then shook his head slowly and turned to follow Virgil back into the pile of wrecked cars.

Suddenly, a sharp, squalling cry pierced the air. Christopher wanted to turn back, but Virgil kept on walking.

"Time is against us, CJ. We can't stop to smell the roses right now," he said as he picked up his pace. "Though I must admit, that's got to be the best sound I've heard all day today."

Christopher nodded wordlessly and matched his stride to Virgil's as they plunged back into the pile of cars to look for more signs of life.

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