

RARE SET OF TWINS

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Dedication

My dear girls, I wrote this story to you. When I began it, I did not realize that you girls had grown quicker than the book I am writing to you. I can't wait for you to get older, read your story, and see what we have been through together and how we fought together to bring you into this world.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank every person who stood up to my side and did not leave me alone in my journey. The first person I would like to thank is my fantastic husband, and the second person is my mom. My mom was by my side when I was in the hospital for three months away from my home. She took care of my kids. Special thanks to my incredible husband, who went up and beyond for me during and after my pregnancy. I want to thank my kids, Jenna, Mohammed, and Zaid Ramadan, who talked to me on FaceTime almost daily and calmed me down regarding everything I worried about. Reem, who was by my side at the doctor's visit.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friends:

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Meerna, for the fantastic food that I was craving

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About the Author

Rima Yousef is an inspirational author and speaker whose experiences as a mother have touched the hearts of many. Rima has a background in psychology, which she has skillfully applied to her writing to explore deep emotional and familial themes. Her memoir, *Rare Set of Twins*, delves into her journey through a high-risk pregnancy with monoamniotic twins, showcasing her resilience and dedication.

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Chapter 1: The Surprise

People often say that you should expect the unexpected. However, the question remains, “How can you expect something you can’t even imagine?” There is no such thing as being prepared for every possibility in life.

If we always expect the unexpected, then the element of surprise will be absent from our lives. The truth is that we can never be prepared for anything life throws at us. That is why it’s called the present—the element of surprise will always be there.

As a mother of three, I thought I was prepared for everything in this life. After all, it takes superpowers to raise three kids. You get used to the surprises your life and your kids throw at you.

Oh, how wrong was I?

It was just another day, and I was hanging out with a close friend of mine. We were chatting as we usually did. However, she said something that made me reel back in bewilderment.

“Are you pregnant?” My friend asked me.

“No, why are you asking me that?” I asked, confused by her question.

“I don’t know. Your face is shining — no wait. It is glowing. Something is going on with your face!” My friend responded as we sat to have breakfast.

I started to wonder why she would say that. I was already a mom of three children and did not plan to have another child.

Different thoughts started to go through my mind as I tried to figure out why she had to point that out.

Suddenly, I realized that my period was a few days late. I started calculating the days and figured it was five days late. I thought that it must be due to some other reason, but the thought of me being pregnant did not cross my mind.

My friend has two daughters, and she offered to take me to Walmart to get a pregnancy test kit.

Although I did not feel like it, I gave in to their excitement and agreed to get a pregnancy test.

She drove me to Walmart, and I bought a pregnancy test kit from the pharmacy section of the store. As we were on our way back home, anxiousness began to grow in the pit of my heart even though I did not believe that I was pregnant.

So, when we got to my friend's home next to mine, she eagerly waited for me to go to the bathroom and use the test kit. I went to the bathroom and used the test kit but decided not to check the results on my own.

I got out, handed the kit to my then-six-year-old daughter, and told her to open it. We all waited for her to open the kit, and everybody started to scream with joy when she did.

I felt a rush of emotions flush over my face as it took me a moment to digest the news; tears began to pour down from my eyes as I realized what had just happened.

And so, that is how I found out I was pregnant!

RARE SET OF TWINS



It was a huge surprise. I went home super excited and happy. It was so unexpected, but it was good news. I could not wait to share the news with my husband. So, when I got home, I looked for my husband and put the test in front of him. He, too, was shocked and jumped up and down, rejoicing at the good news. That was my big surprise to him, and we cherished the news together as a couple. Perhaps it was the unexpectedness of the news that made it altogether an extraordinary moment. That was the moment when I believed that expecting an unexpected notion was boring. If we were constantly looking for every possibility, it would just take away the element of joy.

After a few days, I started having morning sickness. I was working at a school at that time, which got me a bit worried as I had to manage my work and was not prepared for pregnancy then. However, I could not do anything. It is not something that you have control over, anyway, and I was happy.

Eventually, the morning sickness started to get more intense. During the day, I felt like I had no energy left in me. I know this is a common symptom, but it had never been this intense for me before. I had never experienced anything like this in my previous pregnancies or felt so weak before. I knew it was different; a lot about this pregnancy felt different. I told my husband how I felt so we could get it checked and find out if something was wrong.

I still remember how my sons reacted when they noticed my husband and me celebrating upon seeing the test result. Back then, my boys were fourteen and twelve, and they asked me what had happened and why we were celebrating. When I told them I would have a baby, one of my sons said I was too old to have a baby.

His reaction was funny, and it astonished me that he would think like that. But children are children, and in the end, they always take us by surprise with their innocent thoughts. I was nine weeks pregnant when my doctor did a sonogram. She gave me the news that I was going to have twins. I burst into laughter, initially thinking she was kidding because we have no history of having twins in our family. After reality kicked in, I realized she was serious, which was a huge surprise for me. I just could not believe it.

First, the decision to continue an unplanned pregnancy was difficult in itself. Now that I found out I was going to have twins, saying I was shocked would be an understatement — I just got up from my seat and left the doctor's room.

I headed to the bathroom and started crying so badly that I could not process any of my overwhelming emotions. Tears just

kept on falling from my eyes. The doctor came running behind me and asked me if I was okay, and I told her I was not. I told her I already had three kids, and now she was telling me I would have twins.

How was I going to take care of five children at a time?

The doctor started to laugh when she heard what I had to say. Afterward, she told me to calm down.

Gradually, I calmed down. Maybe it was just hard for me to accept the situation all alone. When I finally started to think straight again, I called my husband to give him this news. During the COVID-19 epidemic, my husband could not accompany me to the hospital visits. Nevertheless, he was always present on FaceTime whenever I visited the doctor. At the same time, when I received the news that I was going to have identical twins, I was informed about the rarity of my case. The doctor told me the babies were monoamniotic-monochorionic twins. I did not know what it meant, but the doctor made me understand. I was told that the babies had developed in a single amniotic sac and were sharing the same placenta. Even the doctor admitted that she had not seen a similar case before. I was scared, and my worries kept growing as I began to truly understand the uniqueness of my case. It was a very rare situation with a high risk to the babies of getting cord entanglement and other health issues.

The rarity of having monoamniotic-monochorionic twins is so great that it happens in only 1% of all identical twins and less than 0.1% in all pregnancies in general. A lot of questions popped up in my mind, and I wondered what was going to happen.

Were my babies going to survive?

The risk was just too high. There was a high risk of issues with the cords since the babies were in the same sac, and there was a greater risk of them getting tangled. And if they were tangled, the blood supply would be cut off.

My doctor recommended that I consider being admitted to the hospital earlier than people usually do. She told me that the babies required constant monitoring as they continued to develop. That is when I decided to call the hospital my home for three months in a stretch.

My friends even kept my baby shower in the hospital. The fear in my mind was crippling, and I constantly prayed every waking minute. The babies were monitored every day, in the morning, afternoon, and night. And I heard their heartbeats thrice a day. My anxiety was so over the top that I kept searching on the internet about my case. Truth be told, that was my biggest mistake because the internet was just full of horrific stories. I kept asking every nurse if they had seen success in a similar type of case, but they had never received a patient like that. Thankfully, a nurse told me not to search too much online because it would only cause me to panic. She told me to stay positive and take care of my health. She assured me the babies would be fine, and so would I.

Still, my anxiety could not settle down. I asked everybody I saw many questions during my stay in the hospital. I was just afraid that I might lose my babies, and it was just a natural reaction, given the rarity of my case.

My husband's support was crucial at that time. He always remained positive, giving me hope when I felt low and telling me not to worry.

The babies were delivered seven weeks before the due date. It was the doctor's decision and the right one now that I look back. My girls, Raya and Naya, were delivered successfully and miraculously. They weighed three pounds each at their birth, and against all the odds, they both came out healthy. However, due to the riskiness involved with my case, the babies had to be admitted for around three weeks in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

My pregnancy was indeed a difficult one; it was a roller coaster ride of emotions and a very scary journey, but I pulled through. That is where my inspiration behind writing this book comes from. I want to give hope to those in a similar situation and comfort and support other mothers. I understand that things can get uncertain and cause stress over the situation, but you can do it. And I want to get my message through that if you're having monoamniotic-monochorionic twins, you can still do it! After all, this world is full of surprises and miracles. I believe that my twins were my miracle babies, and the journey they took me on solidified my belief that everyone has the power to make it through tough situations in life.

Chapter 2: Morning Sickness

Morning sickness is a common condition experienced by many women during the early stages of pregnancy, usually occurring in the first trimester. Feelings of nausea and vomiting characterize it and may include other symptoms such as dizziness, fatigue, and food aversions. The exact cause of morning sickness is unknown, but it is thought to be related to hormonal changes during pregnancy. Women who experience morning sickness often feel queasy, dizzy, and fatigued. The severity of symptoms can vary greatly from woman to woman, and it can be quite debilitating for some.

Of course, I know what morning sickness feels like; I had three pregnancies before having my twins. Even though it can make you feel out of sorts, most women make it through it; I even did it three times.

However, the morning sickness was quite different when I was pregnant with my twins. Having experienced it many times before, I knew something about this was off. My pregnancy went on quite smoothly when I was pregnant with my boys. At least the morning sickness wasn't as bad.

I was pretty okay comparatively; I used to wake up in the morning without a problem, have breakfast, and go about doing my daily chores. I felt energetic throughout the day, and then later in the evening or night, I would throw up once or twice. Throwing up does feel bad, but you get used to it in the end. The morning sickness was not the same when I was pregnant with my first daughter. It wasn't good, as I would throw up right after

waking up, but there was nothing that I couldn't handle. I would gather the strength to do my day's work. I would try to hold it for a few hours and get done with cooking and cleaning up my home. Sometimes, I would even go to pick my children up from school. So, yeah, it was tough but doable, and I did it. I could handle it. As every mother does, I guess.

But when it came to my twins, it was a completely different experience. I felt like staying in bed the entire day as I couldn't bring out the energy to stand up and go about doing my work. The first thing in the morning would be to get up and run to the bathroom to throw up, and then I would want to go back to bed and lay down for the entire day. I felt very weak and tired all the time. The morning sickness was just too intense this time and nothing like I had experienced.

Initially, I told my mother and husband about not feeling well and how my body would ache all day. But then I stopped telling them because I did not want them to worry. I tried my best to hide that something was wrong with me. All I knew during that time was that this was not normal. I booked an appointment with the doctor and anxiously waited for it. I thought it would answer all my questions, and the doctor would also figure out why I was feeling the way I was.

It took three months, but finally, the morning sickness was getting better; I started to feel normal again and gradually began to do it again. One day, when my children saw me not lying on the couch, they were excited. They all came running down the stairs and were like, "Oh my God, Mom is not on the couch." They were so happy to see me walking into the house. Like most pregnant women, I was now craving random stuff. Sometimes, I

felt like having apples, and I would crave sweet French toast and, sometimes, fruits. After four months, my nausea started getting better.

Finally, the time came to know the gender, so my husband planned this with the doctor without letting me know. The doctor put the result in the envelope and gave it to my husband. He planned a party with his family at his sister's house.

One day before the party, I had a dream that I had delivered two beautiful baby girls, and when I woke up, I told my husband right away that I felt I was going to have twin girls. He tried to play with me as he said that you might have boys you never know. The next day was the gender reveal party. It was so beautiful. I started jumping when I found out about the result. My sister-in-law made an excellent video for me and reviewed it on social media. It was a beautiful video, the best moment, and a beautiful memory.



Yet, it was not a planned pregnancy, so I did not have the chance to clear up my work. I worked at a school with a very strict boss who would not understand my problems or take any excuses. He certainly did not consider my situation, the pain I was going through, or the lack of strength I had to make it through each day. I had to reach work at seven sharp in the morning, and getting up, getting dressed, and reaching work on time was tough.

I still remember how I used to have panic attacks in the morning. My hands would tremble as I tried to prepare and reach work on time. Juggling with morning sickness and handling work had become immensely burdensome. Even if I were a minute or two late, my boss would complain and even go through the official route of emailing me. He would assign me tasks that were out of my job description. It was the coldest time of the year when all of this happened. Some days, I would wake up feeling extremely nauseous or sick; sometimes, the traffic would make me late. But regardless, I had to show up at work on time.

What was more backbreaking was the fact that COVID-19 was in full swing. And right after reaching school, my boss would assign me duties like delivering breakfast to the children. It was because of COVID that the cafeteria was closed, so I would have to go to around four or five buildings. I'd have to go to the primary students' building first, then another building about a ten-minute walk away. During these walks, I would have to stop and run to the bathroom, throw up, and come back to continue my work. When people used to see me in the mornings, they would see my face and ask me if I was okay. Some would comment that I looked very sick; almost everyone around me

seemed to care except my boss. One such day, I was battling between my health and my job. I felt very tired and sleepy, so I kept my head on the table and rested. I wasn't sleeping; I was awake and fully aware of what the kids were doing. They were doing their homework on the computers, and everything was under control.

I was resting, but not for long. Someone saw me, and I still don't know who it was, but I assume it must be some teacher. And that person approached my boss and told him I was sleeping in the classroom. I was called by my boss and asked if I was sleeping. I told him I was not; I was lying down because I felt unwell. I was sick. In return, my boss said, "If you're feeling unwell, why did you come to work?"

I tried to explain to him that I only had a limited number of absences left and wanted to save them for later days if I didn't feel fine or could not work. Without even acknowledging my condition, he put it under my report. After a few weeks, he approached me and said he was reporting me because I kept telling people I was sick. I argued that it was not me telling people about being sick; it was the people who recognized me by my face and asked me themselves! Only he was blind to my condition. I was doing my job and doing everything he asked me to.

He would report me even if I left two or three minutes earlier than my usual time. He would be after me all the time. It was one really cold day, and after I had dismissed the kids, I returned to the other building to get my stuff. As I was going there, I saw the middle school principal, and he asked me if I could get some kids

out of the class, and I agreed. It was obvious that I was not going to say no, as a middle school principal asked me to do the work.

So, I went and pulled these kids out, and when I was doing that, my boss saw me. He approached me and asked, "Why are you still here? You should be signed out and leave because it's already past your time."

I told him the principal had called me, and he asked me to do this work. But my boss remained insistent on the point that I should not work after my duty hours. He asked me to come to his office and explain the entire scenario. However, I explained the entire scenario to him and tried telling him that things were not that easy for me at the moment. I explained to him that walking from one building to another takes time, and walking to another to get my stuff takes time. This is why I had to click out sometimes. But he did not want to listen or understand.

All in all, he knew I was pregnant and was trying to find ways to fire me. But, as per the rules and regulations, he couldn't. He did his best to ensure I quit my job on my own, but unfortunately, I just couldn't quit because I needed the insurance.

When I thought all the drama was over, my boss came to me a week before spring break and told me he wanted to move me to a different building and location. I disagreed with that because my daughter was in the same school, and if I moved to another place, then that meant I wouldn't be able to drop and pick her up at the same time. This was when things got worse at my work. I was already dealing with my morning sickness, and now I had to deal with the toughest routine ever.

Chapter 3: When I Found out I'm Having Twins

Usually, when people find out they're having twins, they get ecstatic and start jumping with joy. But in my case, I felt extremely overwhelmed and scared because I already had children to take care of. And then, this pregnancy itself was unplanned, and it took me quite some time to accept it and get myself ready to raise not one but twins instead.

At first, I thought that the doctor was probably joking with me after she had done the sonography, so I started to laugh. But when I realized she was not joking, I felt a huge burden on my chest. I was shocked; we had no history of having twins in our family ever. And then, suddenly, there was a roller coaster of emotions in my mind; I was thinking about so many things at the same time that I just stood up and ran to the lady's washroom to cry. I just could not figure out how I would be able to take care of two infants and three of my other children at the same time. This was scary.

The sonography lady was kind enough to follow me to the bathroom, and when she saw me crying like crazy, she asked me if I was okay. I told her that I was not playing at all! I was so very confused at that time. I told her how worried I was about caring for my family and now this news scared me even more. I just could not see myself handling all this alone and giving my family a balanced life. The sonograph lady burst into laughter and assured me everything would be fine and that I would manage it all.

Of course, I was happy at the news, but at the same time, I believe my anxiety overshadowed my happiness. When the doctor gave me the news that I was pregnant with twins, my husband was on FaceTime with me. I remember hearing this news, I returned to where my mom was waiting for me while my husband was still on the phone. They tried calming me down, and my husband said, "It's okay. We are here. We are gonna help you. Everything is gonna be fine." However for me, there were not enough words, but eventually, my mother and husband's presence made me feel better.

Once I was okay, the woman who conducted my sonogram told me that the doctor was calling me to discuss my case. At that point, I had no idea what else would come my way. I thought, *"Okay, now that I know I'm having twins, the doctor is probably going to tell me what precautions I should take,"* and so on. So, when I went to the doctor's office, she informed me that there were three kinds of twins. I was told that apart from the normal type, where the twins are in two separate amniotic bags with their placentas, there is another type where the twins share the same placentas but are still separated with a lining present between them. And then she told me about the third type, where both twins share one placenta and one sac.

I started to wonder what type of twins I was going to have. She told me that they probably don't think that my case was the latter because that is very rare to happen. So, she just told me to pray that I don't have that condition. And that, at the moment, it was too early to say anything about that. Anyhow, after I was done with the doctor, I headed home, and there was this one question lingering on my mind: what type of twins am I going to

have? And that is when I started to make the most foolish mistake of my life. I turned to the internet and started researching my case. I wanted to know what was going to happen to me and my babies. By that time, my mind was settled. I thought, *"I'll take care of the babies,"* but the question troubling me was whether I was going to have healthy babies or not. I had become mentally prepared to support my babies, but now, all I was worried about was their health.

After a couple of visits to the doctor, she said to me, "We still don't see the lining between the two babies. It is missing somehow." Then, they transferred me to a doctor who was a specialist in high-risk pregnancies. I was already visiting two doctors who were specialists in high-risk pregnancy cases; they had traveled the world to conduct surgeries and diagnose patients. So, I first went to the two doctors and then the one my doctor recommended. The specialist my doctor advised me about told me they needed to see if there was a lining between the two babies. According to the doctors, it was too early to tell by then. So, we had to wait. The waiting period was nothing less than a nightmare; I would have the worst possible thoughts.

I needed someone by my side when I visited the doctors, but as COVID-19 was on the rise, there were restrictions in the hospitals, and I would have to FaceTime my husband every time I was in the doctor's office. So, I was sitting in front of the doctor, and with a very soft tone of voice, he asked me if I was ready for the news. It does not matter what tone you use or how supportive you try to act; when the doctor asks, "Are you ready for the news?" everyone gets the chills. My husband, too, was on the call, watching everything. And it was then that the doctor

disclosed to us that we were going to have monoamniotic-monochorionic twins. And then he asked me if I had any idea what that meant. I had no clue what he was talking about; my husband and I were dumbfounded. We told the doctor that we had never heard about it before. He told us that it is a very rare type of pregnancy; only 1% of pregnancies are monoamniotic-monochorionic, and out of identical twins, only 0.1% of pregnancies have the chance of falling under this category. This was quite shocking for us, to be honest; it was like my heart had stopped beating for a moment.

Although it only scared us more back then, I now believe the doctor did the right thing by telling us the facts straight. It prepared us for what could have happened, and when we got out of that difficult phase, it made us equally grateful to God. We were told that our case was very high-risk and that there was a great chance that the babies might get tangled. Tangling may cut off blood supply from the cords or food reaching the babies or, even worse, cause the babies to stop breathing. The doctor had told us that if the cords tangled, the pregnancy could become very complicated.

The doctor also informed me that I would have to be admitted to the hospital three months before the surgery. Three months in a hospital sounded like a lot, but that was the only way to ensure that my babies were safe. After listening to all that the doctor said, I asked in a bleak voice if my babies were going to live. And the doctor was straightforward enough to tell me that he did not know. But he, too, told me to keep praying. When doctors tell you to pray, you understand that the situation is very complicated. I returned home to my husband and was very upset

with the news. I just couldn't stop crying. When I finally got home, I just couldn't stop crying. I remember I had a phone call from the doctor's nurses who were trying to calm me down. It was very nice of them to do that, as they were by my side most of the time. I sat by my husband and told him how worried I was about the babies and how scared I was about the fact that they were going to live or not.

I was also worried about my work. I wondered if continuing to work would be dangerous for my babies. I had to walk from building to building to serve breakfast to the kids, and it was very cold, too. The doctor told me that I should limit my movement as much as I could because that would increase the chances of the babies getting tangled. So, to save my job, I tried walking as carefully as possible. But at the end of the day, so much stress had built up—stress from work, stress from the pregnancy, and stress from my boss—that I felt like I was losing it all. My boss was not even a bit considerate about my situation and kept on complaining about my performance, not keeping in mind that I was pregnant.

The doctor again told me to pray that the cords get untangled naturally because they couldn't operate 23 weeks before the delivery date. However, if it was after 20 weeks, they could admit me to the hospital and operate. I now had to visit the doctor every Tuesday, and I was so worried that I would just wait for Tuesday all week. It was important, as I got a sonogram done every Tuesday to ensure that my babies were fine. It was like I was on the edge of a cliff; every Tuesday, the doctor would tell me that the cord was still tangled, but luckily, my babies were still breathing. This kept on going every Tuesday until the doctor told

me that the babies were growing, and the cords were still tangled.

He said, "You have to be in the hospital the next day."

It shocked me as the specialist wanted me to be hospitalized early on Wednesday morning. He further told me I had to stay at the hospital for at least three months. That was another moment of shock for me. I was a little resistant to this idea because I wanted to spend a little time with my boys and set everything up at home, so I asked the doctor to give me more time, "I can't come that early. I can't be in the hospital the very next day. I need at least one day to see my kids and family, stay with them, and have time to explain that I will not be there for them for a few days." I was glad that the doctor agreed. And so I went back home to break the news to the family. As I reached home, I started to cry frantically, and my mother got worried and asked me what was wrong. I told her that the doctors wanted me to stay in the hospital for three months, and I was worried about what would happen to my house and my kids, who were 6, 12, and 14 at the time. She calmed me down and told me that she would be at my place to care for my children and that I didn't need to worry about anything at home. She advised me to think about all this positively and not build up a negative scenario in my head. That was comforting and gave me a lot of courage.

Of course, I had this weird nervous feeling since the day my doctor told me I would have to be admitted for three long months. With that feeling, I started to pack my stuff for the three-month hospital stay. I packed my clothes, pajamas, and a lot of other stuff, even though I did not need all that because I would be in hospital clothes; it was a sentimental time for me. My

daughter came and started to help me with the packing. She handed me a lollipop, thinking I would want it at the hospital, and then she brought various snacks for me to pack with my stuff. After I was done packing, I sat with my kids that night and spent time with them. We had a movie night, and it was a lot of fun. We dozed off watching the movie.

The cutest part was when my children told me to wake them up before I left for the hospital so that they could see me before I left. So, I woke them up in the morning and met them before leaving. I remember it was 8:00 am, and all of my children were up to say goodbye to me. They were hugging and kissing me as tears rolled down their cheeks. There was a weird feeling when I was leaving the house. "Am I gonna come back or not? I might not see my kids anymore." These were the thoughts that kept circulating inside my head. And the feeling just kept on getting worse as the time to go to the hospital got closer.

One of my sons was upstairs looking at me and waving goodbye, and the other one was downstairs hugging me and saying goodbye. Before I left, my son from upstairs also came down and gave me a big goodbye hug with my other kids and told me they would miss me. It took me a lot of courage to walk out of my house, leave my kids behind, and go to the hospital with a partial chance that I might not even make it back alive. When I reached the hospital, the first thing the nurses did was test me for COVID-19, and thankfully, I was not positive. My husband supported me even then, telling me that I didn't need to stay for three months; it could be much less than that. His support is one thing that greatly helped me through my journey. He told me that maybe the doctor would later change his mind after examining

me, and I might come back earlier. All those hopeful words helped me a lot! The nurses at the hospital all seemed very nice and welcoming. They helped me prepare for everything; they helped me change into the hospital clothes, prepared my room, and showed me around the room, like where the fridge and the emergency button were. I started to unpack all my stuff and kept a special drawer for all the snacks my daughter had brought me. My eyes were filled with tears when I put her stuff in the drawer. I was anxious, doing everything, but my mind was not there.

With everything done, I was now on the verge of what was going to be the riskiest event of my life. My children's faces, home, and husband were on my mind. The thought of them managing the chores and everything if I was not going to return home was threatening me. I was not worried about myself but my children and my home.

Chapter 4: Hospital Stay

First day of anywhere can be quite challenging, whether at school, work, a new city, or, in my case, at the hospital. I was feeling highly emotional; I had never left my children and house unattended like this before. This burst of emotions did not completely manifest until my husband was there with me.

But that was just the beginning. When my husband left the hospital after settling me down and helping me prepare the room, I suddenly began to cry. I did not even know that it was going to happen. Tears just kept on rolling down my cheeks, and I felt so alone.

A huge reason behind this was that due to COVID-19, visitors were not allowed to stay at the hospital. So, unlike normal situations when we have an attendant by our side at the hospital, I was alone. The cherry on top was that my case was so sensitive that I was scared out of my wits.

How was I going to survive this? My pregnancy aside, just the fact that I would spend the rest of my days in this empty room alone was daunting.

Who would I turn to when I felt hopeless? Who would calm me down and tell me that it will all be okay? I just kept on crying my eyes out as it seemed the walls were caving in on me.

Thankfully, it all started to get better gradually. I began to feel a little comfortable as time passed. I recalled this quote I read somewhere, *"Time heals all. Give time, time."* And for the first time, this quote made complete sense to me. For the first time, I

completely and deeply understood what it meant. Perhaps we have to be in certain situations to be able to understand what certain quotes and proverbs mean exactly.

I also learned something new: the human mind has a great, almost supernatural ability to adapt to any situation. As the nurses started coming in to check on me, their presence began to comfort me.

And due to the critical nature of my case, they came pretty often. They would come shift by shift, and at least three nurses would monitor me and the babies' condition throughout the day. This felt like a blessing in disguise.

As I mentioned earlier, it was important to constantly check on the babies due to the risk of the cords being tangled. They would monitor the babies' heartbeat, breath, and other fetal vitals.

As a mother, every time they would come to monitor the babies, my anxiety would shoot up due to the fear of the unknown, but thankfully, it was all fine every time. The first day felt the heaviest, but day by day, it started to get better, and time seemed to go by faster.

The first few days were specifically difficult as I missed my children and worried about how they would be doing without me. I was admitted on Thursday, and my husband brought my kids to meet me at the hospital on Sunday.



Seeing them was a great relief, and it considerably calmed me down. However, due to the COVID precautions, they weren't allowed to visit me in my room, so I had to go down to the visitor's area to see them.

It was difficult, as I was bed-dressed, so I had to call the nurses to help me dress appropriately and then put me in a wheelchair.

And only after that would they take me downstairs. But the ordeal was nothing compared to the joy I felt seeing my children, although it had only been two days without them. But I'm sure every mother, in fact, every parent, can understand how it felt.

Seeing my children felt ecstatic and very difficult at the same time. Their innocent faces would make me wonder how they would make it without me for so long or how I would make it without seeing them, especially in the later stages when I could not move as much. But who said parenting was an easy job?

“Being a mother is being willing to die for someone else...It’s being strong when you are weak, and brave when you are scared. It is being an example when you know nothing worth teaching, giving hope in hopeless times and love beyond all reason.”

– Anonymous



And even after all these exhausting preparations to just go down a couple of floors in the elevator, I was allowed to spend only 30 minutes with them. It was, of course, in the best interest of my health and the babies in my womb.

I believe it was the motherly instincts and the effects of pregnancy that made me extremely poignant. Saying goodbye to my children was extremely difficult after spending the 30 minutes with them that I was allowed to. It felt less than 5 minutes. That, too, taught me what it meant by the term that time is relative.

So, I had to say goodbye to them and head back to my confined hospital room. I wasn't alone in feeling this way; the kids and my husband also had difficulty saying goodbye.

One problem that I had besides my health and being without my family was that I was working at the time when I was admitted to the hospital. I had to email my boss, inform him about the situation, and tell him that I could not return to work due to my condition.

He, in turn, would have to email his boss to notify him about the situation. To my surprise, they were heartless enough to fire me. I tried to file a leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which did not work.

I tried to file for disability and tried everything to let them know that it was not my choice not to come to work and that I had been hospitalized. But they were unwilling to understand; they told me I couldn't work anywhere because I was admitted to the hospital and, hence, was fired.

That was just not something I could afford. I had insurance through my job, and if they fired me, how was I going to pay the bills for this three-month-long hospital stay? I didn't know how much it was going to cost me, but it was obvious that such a long stay at the hospital would cost me an arm and a leg! I even called the school I was working for and told them that I could work from the hospital as, due to COVID-19, everything was online. I knew they needed somebody to cater the online classes, so I told them I could do anything online. But they did not understand the situation and told me that they needed me on campus, and I told

them I couldn't be on campus because of my situation. Their response was, "That's why we have to fire you!"

They tried to act nice and told me I was welcome to apply next year, but I knew that was all rubbish and they didn't mean it.

The huge burden of the bills and getting fired got my stress levels high. I had to email the different departments at school and insurance companies, trying to explain my situation to them, but it was to no avail. My ever-supporting husband told me not to worry about all that as I was already under so much stress.

Even the nurses who visited me and got friendly with me discovered what was happening and agreed that this was not right. So, I had to go through Cobra so that I could stay on the same insurance.

But I had to pay for Cobra monthly by myself to keep that insurance for at least one year. So luckily, a huge part of the problem was solved that way.

Then, after my first month in the hospital, the Islamic month of Ramadan came. It is when we fast. I, of course, could not fast due to my pregnancy, but every single moment of the day, I was just praying to God for my babies to be safe and healthy.

It became pretty difficult for my husband to visit me that month because he had to go to work, drop the kids at school in the morning, and offer the Ramadan prayers. So, after getting done with all that, he would get free at night.

He would come to stay with me for an hour or a half. Seeing that he had so much on his plate, I told my husband he should go home because the kids needed him. During that time, I was all

alone in the hospital. Of course, I had the company of the nurses I had befriended. But basically, I was on my own. My husband was sweet and considerate enough to get me a Firestick for the hospital so that I could watch Netflix and stream other things. Watching movies and TV series kept me busy and mentally occupied, so it was good to have a distraction.

At that time, I also started writing. I maintained a journal and wrote everything down about my stay at the hospital and the things I had to go through so that I could show it to my girls when they grew up. I wanted them to know that their arrival in this world was nothing short of a miracle!

Having to spend the holy month of Ramadan all alone for the first time in my life, and that too in the hospital, was a scenario that I had never imagined. Ramadan is all about mingling with the community, praying, spending time with family and friends, and breaking our fasts together at sunset.

We, as Muslims, have celebrated Ramadan this way since childhood, but it was all so different this time. It made me feel so lonely and just plain weird. It upset me, but I knew I had to keep a positive mindset. It was important for me and my to-be-born babies' health.

A positive mental attitude not only keeps you psychologically stable but also largely contributes to physical health. We all have heard about the power of positive thinking and how miraculous it can be. So, I won't go on to waste your time with motivational stories that most of you might have already heard, but yes, it was crucial to keep my mood stable; it wasn't easy but it was important. And I believe I did my best.

Finally, Ramadan was over, and it was time to celebrate Eid. Muslims celebrate Eid for three days after the month of Ramadan when the next Islamic month, Shawal begins. We meet our family and friends and give presents to children or those who are younger than us. However, it was so different this time, and it made me very emotional.

On Eid, my friends made an amazing video for me, which was a surprise. In that video, each person said something to encourage me. It was a pleasant memory I could never forget.

Moreover, thanks to my loving and supportive family, they came to the hospital to celebrate it with me. It was very uplifting for me. Of course, the rules were the same due to COVID-19, so they couldn't come up to my room.

So, I had to get dressed with the help of a nurse and get in a wheelchair to go to the ground floor to see my family. The moment I saw them, tears of joy started to roll down my cheeks. I was so happy that I did not even realize how much I had missed them.

I just couldn't stop looking at my children, whom I had left alone for the first time and such a long period. I had hidden a toy gift for my six-year-old daughter, but due to this sudden hospitalization, it was left back at home. I asked my mother to bring the toy to the hospital so I could give it to my daughter as her Eid gift.



My mother brought it to the hospital and gave it to me so I could gift it to her. She was not expecting it, and it was evident by the expression on her face. She was baffled at how I could get her a toy while I was here lying on the hospital bed. She was really happy to see the toy, and I could tell it from her eyes. Being a mother, I could see how protected and secure that one surprise gift had made her feel.

The entire family sat together after a long time, and it felt so wonderful. We all were talking, having a great time catching up on all that had been going on. I stood up to take a few photographs of my daughter and boys. All was going well, but then I started to feel a little dizzy. I began to feel extremely tired. I thought maybe it was because I had been on bed rest for so long that walking around was a bit difficult for me, and before I could even figure out what was going on, I suddenly blacked out. I could not see anything. I couldn't even stand on my feet. Fortunately, my husband was just beside me, so I fell into his arms. For the

first few moments, even my husband did not understand what had happened to me.

He kept on asking, "Are you okay?" But there was no reply.

My husband yelled and called for a wheelchair, and the nurses came rushing and sat me in the wheelchair. My son got really scared after seeing all that. He must have been like, *what's going on with my mom?* My husband told him that I would be fine and that he should take care of his sister at the moment.

The nurse later informed us that it was probably a blood flush, so I got dizzy. The doctor also explained to me that I could not be roaming around walking for long periods. The more bedrest I took, the better it was for the babies and me. I was fine after a little while and insisted that my husband should go back as the children needed to be taken care of. The doctor suggested that it would be a good idea to monitor the babies to ensure everything was alright. This added to my anxiety, but thankfully, everything was fine!

But then, somebody from the NICU came to me and said stuff that scared me. She asked me, "Do you know what might happen to the babies?"

I shrugged it off, saying that I knew that they would be going into the NICU. But that wasn't all. She started to scare me with the possible problems that may come with their birth.

At that time, I wished to see my children at home just for once, as I had no idea what would happen from this point onwards. So, I asked the doctor, "Can I leave the hospital for a while and then return? I want to see my kids and spend time with them."

Her quick reply was a no. She told me my case was complicated; if I left the hospital and something happened to me, the hospital would not be responsible for it. She explained further by saying, "We can't help you at home. But in the hospital, if something happened, we would deliver the baby right away. But at home, you would never know what is happening with the baby." I understood her concerns, and so I stayed at the hospital.

She told me that the babies could have congenital disabilities or have to stay in the NICU for a long time if they had to be delivered earlier than planned. Even though I was aware of all this, this lady coming to me and telling me my worst nightmares just scared the hell out of me!

Chapter 5: NBC5 News

I started to hyperventilate and pray for my babies. I had no idea if they would be born with missing fingers, toes, or other problems; no one could predict what might happen. One day, a nurse came up to me and warned me that there might be some issues with my babies, and once again, anxiety took hold of me. The nurses asked me not to worry too much about this news and not to search for every bad thing on Google because it would only scare me with negative stories.

I spent my days in the hospital monitoring my babies' heartbeats, and one day, suddenly, one of the heartbeats flatlined. The doctors and nurses rushed inside with emergency equipment and IVs. They did some medical things for the next thirty minutes but could not hear one of the heartbeats.

I was 28–30 weeks pregnant then, and according to the doctors, the babies were premature for delivery. After constant monitoring and trying by the medical team, they finally found the missing baby's heartbeat. I took a breath of relief, and my doctor assured me that my babies were safe to stay inside the protection of my body for a while longer.

Some time passed, and everything returned to normal. The doctor also informed me that there was no need for an emergency delivery. My babies were under strict monitoring for the next hour to ensure everything was fine so I could return home. After the scary incident had passed, I called my husband and told him everything. However, I assured him he did not need to come as everything was copacetic now.

During my hospital stay, I searched for baby names and considered names such as Selena, Leah, Tia, and Elena. I had written all the potential names on a board and often asked the nurses for opinions on the names they liked. My family visited me once a week and brought me food from outside, or sometimes they would drop by in the morning and bring me breakfast. Those were fun times, and we would all eat downstairs in a potted bay where the tables and the umbrellas were installed as it was an outside eating space. So, every time I had to meet my family, I would have to go downstairs in a wheelchair. I was allowed to meet my family for only thirty minutes as that was the only time allowed to visit.

So, during our meetups, my family would bring me food from outside and sometimes home-cooked food, which we always used to eat and enjoy together.

My doctor would visit me every morning around 7:00 am for three months, and it felt amazing, considering how she was one of the front-line workers in those days. Whenever she visited me, I would greet her with a smile. One day, she complimented me and said that I was very special since I smiled every time she came to me.

A specialist would also check up on me every Tuesday for a sonogram.

In the last month of my stay at the hospital, I suddenly started to feel some pain in my feet and called for the nurses. The doctor immediately ran some tests to ensure everything was fine with my babies. The sonogram Dr. usually checked my baby's heartbeat, but at that time, he could not tell me anything, so I

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had to wait for the doctor to update me. Ultimately, it seemed like a minor hiccup, and everything was fine. One day, a nurse entered my room and informed me that the media had requested an interview. Initially hesitant, I discussed it with my husband before finally agreeing. The media, NBC5 News, had heard of my story and wanted to interview me once I delivered after ensuring that my babies and I were doing well.



They provided me with some paperwork to fill out, and one of their representatives also called me to confirm the interview. The lady who was going to interview me also visited me one day to introduce herself. She explained the entire interview process, and honestly, her visit made me feel more comfortable after knowing the person interviewing me.

One day, I was struck with good news, as the hospital started allowing visitors due to the ease of COVID-19 restrictions. My six-year-old daughter was the first to visit me, and it was incredible seeing her come through the door. I couldn't contain my excitement.

It was an emotional reunion; we hugged and cried; after all, we had been apart for around two and a half months. Finally, my daughter was able to regularly visit me and spend the entire day with me, often sleeping next to me as well. My friend also visited me and brought bracelets and coloring books for my daughter to enjoy with me as well.

It felt like a much-needed change of pace from the monotonous hospital life I had been living for the past months. Seeing my daughter's face light up with excitement was heartwarming when I told her about all the new activities we could do together as mother and daughter.

Seeing my kids care for me like that filled my heart with joy. Whenever I needed to get up from bed, my boys would rush to my aid and help me stand up. They were always there, waiting by the door; whenever I needed to shower, they were ready to hand me a towel and assist me in any way they could.

While it was difficult, I was unable to see my kids as often as I would have liked, but having them visit me in the hospital was one of the special moments I know I will always cherish forever.

With how they used to rush to me during their visits, it was clear that they missed me a lot and were extremely grateful to spend some time with me, just as I was grateful to have them there.

One day, once the restrictions were eased, my friend asked to throw a baby shower at the hospital. We had to ask the management, which allowed us to celebrate it in the hospital cafeteria.

My friend was ecstatic and started preparations for the baby shower. They took care of all the arrangements, from decorations to invitations. My husband set the table up for party favors. My hair was done by a salon guy called by me.

While the preparations were going on, one of my girlfriends brought some board games and cards for us to play, and I had such a lovely time having one of my friends to talk to and play games with. Another one of my friends brought me a care package with snacks, magazines, and toiletries, which was extremely thoughtful of her.

A third friend came with a homemade meal, and it was so delicious. I was so emotional after having a home-cooked meal after a long time. The media guy also heard about the baby shower and called me to ask permission to take photos and videos of the event, and I obliged.

Chapter 6: Baby Shower

I started having contractions about a week before the baby shower. So, I told the doctor about my condition, and they said it was too soon for me to deliver the babies. Therefore, to alleviate my contractions, they began giving me some kind of shots to my shoulder, which used to burn like hell.

It was the most challenging time of my pregnancy because I had to take the shots thrice daily. I recall that my contractions increased the night before the baby shower, and I began having them every five minutes. I informed the doctor, and she suggested administering the shots once more.

One of my friends accompanied me that night, and she jokingly said to me, "Imagine you delivering babies during the baby shower." And I was like, "No, no, No... That's never going to happen." I was apprehensive about it the entire night, but things got better when the sun of Sunday morning came out.

The baby shower was, without a doubt, a lovely occasion. I wanted it to be flawless. My friends sent out invitations to everyone a day before the baby shower, inviting them to come and see me. My husband was in charge of setting up a table for the party favors my friend had prepared and brought.

I asked my mother to bring me the dress I wore last when I had my daughter. I also needed someone to do my hair. So, I called the hairdresser and said, "Hey, can you come to the hospital to do my hair?"

It was a very unusual request, and so he replied to me in amazement, saying, "What? You mean come to the hospital and

do your hair? How is that possible?” I told him that they would allow him and that he would not face any repercussions from anyone. He agreed, came in, and did my and my daughter’s hair just as I wanted him to.

When he worked on my hair, he smiled and told me that he would never do it for anybody else, but he did it for me only, which made me feel special.

My friends sent out invitations to everyone a day before the baby shower, inviting them to come and see me. My husband was in charge of setting up a table for the party favors my friend had prepared and brought.

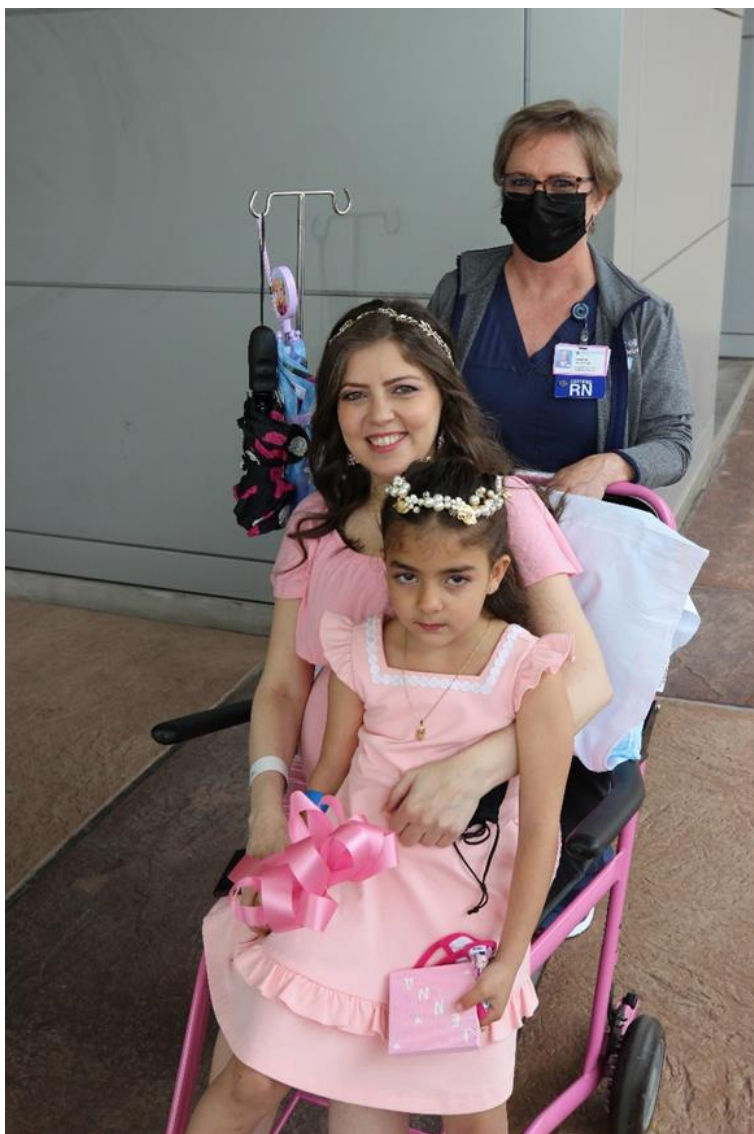
The media representative also called and inquired about the baby shower that we were planning at the hospital. He asked if he could come over and photograph us for free. I told him he was very welcome and that I appreciated him for asking. As a result, he also attended the baby shower and captured all of the special moments in photos and videos.

When the event began, the nurse wheeled me downstairs in a wheelchair while my daughter sat on my lap. My mother was with me at the time to assist me while I was being shifted downstairs. I was overjoyed when I came down and saw all my friends and family waiting for me. It was a beautiful event, and I had never seen such a big celebration inside the hospital before. Everyone came together and brought gifts for me. I became so emotional over having friends I had not seen in a long time. My entire family was there, including my mom. The entire area was beautifully decorated, and everyone was watching from outside;

it felt like an out-of-the-world experience after being confined in the hospital for so long.



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However, everything was lovely. I noticed the balloons and the overall decoration that was done for my soon-to-be-born children and me. People were watching us from outside, wondering what was happening in the hospital because nothing like this had happened before. Because I was excited, I walked around and saw everything while my husband was concerned about my health. He constantly told me to sit down, but I replied to him, saying, "I'm fine. I'm not dizzy or anything. I'm okay. I need to take some pictures with my friends and family.

He understood that I was trying to make the most of this moment because it was all I had missed since arriving at the hospital. I stayed at the party for an hour only because I was not allowed any more time, but the time I spent with the people I cared about the most gave me the strength to keep going. It is amazing how much difference a small gesture or a visit can make in someone's life. Those visits from my friends made my hospital stay a lot more bearable. It made me appreciate the people in my life and the importance of a support system.

During Ramadan, my husband could not visit me due to fasting and exhaustion. However, he insisted on coming and staying one day despite me telling him no. He came and stayed with me at night because he could not visit during the day.

It was extremely difficult for my husband to do so due to his work and the month of Ramadan, yet he still did it, and it made me appreciate his love and efforts. It made me feel so much better that he was there with me during those challenging days.

Chapter 7: Delivery

After the party, I returned to my room and changed my clothes with my mother's assistance. My husband brought me some food. I recall the hospital's upstairs waiting room closed during COVID-19, and no one could stay there. When they reopened it, however, there was a rule that only two people could sit there. Because I couldn't come downstairs, I asked a nurse to allow my entire family to come upstairs to eat together. With a smile, she said, "Okay, I am gonna let you do it this time, but please, we can't do this again."

So, she opened the visiting room for the whole family that day. My two boys, my daughter, my husband, and my mom came upstairs, and we sat in the waiting area and ate the food together. We were having a good time as a family, but suddenly, another nurse came in, and with a straight face, she said, "Who said you all can be with her in here?" I told her we were eating and would leave in a couple of minutes. I assured her they would go as soon as we were done.

She agreed to let us spend some time together, but I could tell she was unhappy. She told us to hurry because if anyone saw us, they would complain about the hospital staff not allowing others to do such things.

I replied to brighten her mood by telling her I was hospitalized for several months, not just a week. On the other hand, my family ate as quickly as possible and went downstairs.

After they all left, I returned to my room, accompanied by another friend. She came to see me in my room because she couldn't get to the baby shower. My doctor was another special

guest I invited who could not attend the party. So, after the baby shower, she also came into my room with a bucket of beautiful flowers. My doctor spent an hour in the room with me, talking to me. It was another lovely moment of the day, and I thanked her for the flowers she had brought for me. We even took pictures to preserve the memory.



It was unquestionably a beautiful day, but I had contractions every ten minutes by the evening. I noticed that the time between contractions was getting shorter and shorter, down to six and even five minutes. When the contractions began, I wasn't sure if they

were real or just a stomach ache. I had no idea what was going on with me, and the hospital staff only gave me those painful shots.

There was a specialist that I used to visit every Tuesday to see that my babies were okay. So, a week after the umbilical cord was untangled, the specialist doctor came in and said, "Hey, I heard like that cord is untangled. It's a surprise as this has never happened before." I prayed daily for it to happen, and God answered my prayers. However, I recall the doctor asking me for a casual date on which I expected to deliver my baby. So, after some thought and discussion with my husband, we decided to schedule it for Thursday, 5/27/21. I wanted to have my babies on this date because it was my children's last day of school and the day of their final exam. So it was easier for them to come to see their new siblings and me the day after they were born.

Monday was my rest day, and Tuesday was when I saw my specialist again. So, as usual, my specialist came to see me on Tuesday morning, and I informed him about the contractions I was experiencing. I complained, "It's been a week for me having some contractions, and then they keep giving me shots, and those shots hurt so bad." I was expecting him to change the shots for me, but he got mad hearing this and said to his staff, "If those babies want to come to this world, we cannot stop them. More than that, because they get bigger every day they stay inside, and those cords get more tangled. So, they are not safe inside." Then he told the staff and me that I needed to deliver the babies today if I started having contractions again today.

The doctor took excellent care of me from start to finish. He made me feel like he was my brother or someone related to me. So, he made the decision and requested that the other doctor

make time for me today. He told her that I had to deliver these babies, on Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. I went to my room, and I was so nervous. My heart was beating fast, and sometimes I was missing a beat. I was shaking when the nurse came in and said, "You are gonna be okay." I told her I was scared to deliver babies after three months of being admitted in hospital . She said nothing but called my husband and informed him that the babies were coming today.

He came in with my mother while the children were at school. My husband and I were prepared for the delivery by the hospital staff. My husband was given the OT suit to wear while accompanying me in the operating room.



One of my closest friends also arrived after learning that I would deliver my babies ahead of schedule. She took my hand and assured me that my daughters and I would be fine.

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However, the hospital staff wheeled me to the room where the epidural would be administered. They told my husband to wait outside while they prepared me for the C-section and that

they would call him inside once they were finished. I wanted my husband to be with me, especially during childbirth. He was present with me when we had all three of my children. He was there for me every step of the way. This was the first time he didn't accompany me to the epidural and other preparations.

However, they were preparing me, and then I told them not to start until and unless my husband was here. The nurse replied to me, saying, "Don't worry. He is going to be here." And so, he came in and stood beside me while the doctors brought my daughters to this fantastic world. So, while delivering my daughters, the doctor asked my husband to make a video of a cord in which my babies were tangled because it was a rare moment that they didn't have to see it daily. It was overwhelming when my husband started filming it. Witnessing my twins holding each other in a cord was heartwarming for everyone there.



Meanwhile, I was nervous and praying for the lives of my twins. I couldn't wait to see and touch my babies, but I knew I had to wait. As a mother, I was going through an unexplainable pain, but the thought of seeing and holding my twins in my hand was reducing my pain.

I remembered having a strange dream a few days before in which one of the babies came out not breathing. This dream terrified me so much at the time that I couldn't express my fear of losing my child.

I told my mother I had a terrible nightmare but didn't elaborate on what I saw. She assured me that nothing wrong would happen and that I needed to think positively and clear my mind of all negative thoughts.

I remembered this dream in the operating room because I heard one cry when my children were born but did not hear the other. I had no idea what was happening at the time because they told me they couldn't put my baby on my chest.

Because my babies were born prematurely at 35 weeks, they needed to be treated immediately to ensure their health.

As a result, the nurses took the babies as soon as they were born. My husband, on the other hand, videotaped everything. The time difference between the births of my two children was nearly twenty seconds. They were both adorable.



They cleaned the babies and brought them to me so I could also see them. And it was the best time of my life. Everything was fine, and it was a lovely moment. I kissed their heads and wanted

to put them on my chest, but I couldn't. It was also not okay for them to be out of their incubator for an extended period, so they took the babies and returned them to where they would live for the next few weeks.



I was taken to a different room to calm me down and to give me some medications to ease the pain I was still feeling. They gave me some shots, and the doctor said to me, "It's gonna hurt you so much, but it is gonna relieve the pain quickly."

And as it was said, the shot was really bad. I felt like it was not meant to be given to humans. I was screaming over the top of my lungs for a few couples of minutes as I was in even more pain. But after some time, all the pain eased down.

After two or three hours, they shifted me back to my room. It was obvious that the babies were going to stay in the hospital for a long time. I asked the doctors to at least allow me to go back to my house, and they agreed. They allowed me to go back home for a day, but a day before I left, they opened the visit for me. The nurse there was very nice. She allowed my kids to come up, visit, and see me since I was done with delivering my babies, and

everything was fine now. So, my husband went to my kid's school and brought them to the hospital directly from there. This was the first time my kids were allowed to stay with me in my hospital room for the longest time. It was the best moment as I could finally see my kids properly after months. I felt relieved after months as I could spend some time with them, and my newborn twins were also doing fine in the hospital.



Chapter 8: What Is Love?

There is just one feeling that surrounds a parent when they stare into their child's eyes: love. People think they understand life when they love a significant other, a family member, or a close friend, but that love pales compared to the love a parent feels the day their child is born. That is the love I felt when my babies were born into this world.



I'll never forget being led to the operating room. I was worried for the lives of my unborn children, who were about to be born prematurely. But, I felt I had to take this action to secure and maximize their chances of survival.

So, after the babies were born, the doctor informed me that one of them came out not breathing. This was the exact moment when I remembered the dream; I was telling the nurse about it before the babies were delivered. Of course, this new information made me very anxious, as I was not sure what the doctor would tell me next. I breathed a sigh of relief when the doctor told me that they were able to retrieve my newborn daughter, and she was fine now.

The days in the hospital were no doubt long and anxious. Although I was happy that after the babies were delivered, my other kids were allowed to visit and see me in my hospital room for some time. They stayed with me for a couple of hours. They were very happy and excited to know their new siblings were finally here with them. I could tell there was a lot of waiting for the moment they could finally see the babies. Unfortunately, they were not allowed because of hospital rules. Nobody under 16 was allowed inside the NICU. According to the hospital rules, only two people were allowed in my room at a time. But because the babies were in the NICU, the rules there were even more strict. They even had rules for Mom and Dad. Before entering the NICU, we had to wash our hands and follow all the steps correctly. Then, we had to sanitize our hands as well. Apart from that, we couldn't enter the NICU without wearing a mask and a hospital gown to cover our usual clothes.

For my kids, not being able to see the babies made them sad. For them, it was all very unfair. They waited so long to be able to see the babies. They even sacrificed living with their mother for three months to have their siblings. So, this was heartbreaking for them. But to cheer them up, I showed them some pictures of

the babies. They couldn't stop gushing about how cute their new siblings were. I think they were restored at that moment, but I could tell that the kids still wanted to see the babies.

However, they had to leave after staying with me for a couple of hours. So we said goodbye to each other, and they left. After my kids left, the nurse came to me and told me, "Hey, this is important for us to tell you that we cannot take the babies out of the incubator. They have to stay inside. So, you can't put them on your chest, and you can't breastfeed them."

This was not very happy news for me that I could not touch or hold my kids, but what made me even more anxious was that I couldn't breastfeed them. I was concerned about how and what my babies would feed on. So, the nurse explained to me, "You have to either squeeze or pump the breast milk for your babies after every two hours."

Finally, I was glad that my babies were going to feed on my breast milk. So, I put an alarm on my phone that would go off every two hours to remind me that I had to pump my breast milk. I used to wake up every two hours, even at night, to ensure I had enough milk for my babies to feed on.

I was pumping for two babies, so it was obvious that the amount of milk I was producing was never enough for my babies. I remember using a measuring device just to find out that I could only produce two ounces of milk in one sitting. I became frustrated and stopped doing it. Then, I squeezed the milk out and took some of it on the spoon. Then, I would give it to the nurse who would feed my daughters. Every time after pumping, to keep the breast milk as fresh as possible, I used to keep it in

the fridge. So, every couple of hours, the nurse came and asked me, "Hey! Do you have some milk?"

And every time, my response was affirmative. I wondered and asked her if the amount of breast milk I produced was enough, but I never got a clear answer from her. I was pumping just around two ounces of milk every two hours. It was crazy for me. One day, the nurse came in to ask if it would be okay if they put my babies on formula. I was against it, so I said to her, "No, they need to take my breast milk."

The hospital staff understood that I did not favor unnatural formulas for my babies. So, they offered me a milk donor, and I agreed. But I argued that initially, my babies would feed only on my milk. This was because I knew that the first yellow milk, called colostrum, was good and healthy for babies, and my babies needed as much healthy food as possible. They needed to grow and fight a lot of diseases and infections because they were born prematurely.

They were not like any normal kids; my babies were much more fragile than ordinary babies. I was responsible for ensuring they were getting as many healthy and nutritious things as possible. So, I pumped my breast milk for them for three days. It was, of course, very tiring and made worse because I was not getting enough sleep. Whether it was a day or a night, I was awake for my kids.

The best thing about the hospital was that they never stopped me from seeing my babies from a distance. Whenever I needed to visit them, the hospital staff took me in a wheelchair to the NICU, where the babies were kept. The reason I was in a

RARE SET OF TWINS

wheelchair was that the stitches from the C-section were not letting me walk without feeling severe pain in the lower abdomen.

However, they made me use the wheelchair for just a day, and the next day, they wanted me to walk. The nurse explained to me that the more I was going to walk, the quicker I would heal. So, I started walking little by little.



After my delivery, I stayed at the hospital for four days; after four days, it was time for me to go home. It was one of the hardest things for me to do, as I was leaving my babies alone in the hospital.

However, the day for me to leave the hospital came quickly, and when I was walking downstairs, I noticed that the postpartum floor, which had been filled with a lot of pregnant moms the first day I came, was now all empty.

I felt like only I was left there, feeling everything was so dark there. There was no light, and it was extremely quiet. All the rooms felt empty like nobody was ever there.

I felt like I was the last person leaving the hospital, and everyone else had already been sent home with their babies. It was a weird feeling.

However, my husband came and helped me pack my stuff and drove me home. I had no idea my older kids at home were preparing a big surprise for me.

When I went home, my kids were putting signs everywhere, outside and inside the house, that said, "Welcome, Mama! Welcome Home!" Their decoration was amazing—seeing my kids happy and running out of the house to see me made my day beautiful. They hugged and kissed me and then took me inside the house. It was just very chaotic but very beautiful.



As I entered the house, I told my husband that there was something different about our house. He looked at me, smiled, and said, "Everything in the house is still the same." But I felt like something was different, and then the realization that I had not been here for three months hit me hard. It was another weird experience I couldn't explain in words.

I came, sat on the couch, and started crying very badly. I was happy about returning home, but something just didn't feel right about anything. My husband came to me and asked, "Why are you crying?" I told him I felt sad and miserable knowing that I had

been away from my house for such a long time that it now felt strange and changed. Apart from that, the fact that I was here at home and my newborn babies were in the NICU was making me restless. My kids noticed all this and came to me to hug me. That improved things for me, but I was still worried about my newborn babies.

From that day onwards, I used to visit the hospital to see my girls thrice: in the morning, afternoon, and evening. But because I was not allowed to drive and my husband was working, my best friend helped me in this regard.

She used to come and take me from the house to the hospital so that I could see my girls. I remember she used to tell me, "Hey, whenever you finish, let me know. I will come and pick you up."

This was nice of her. I will never forget her or what she did for me. She even used to drop my mom off at the hospital when I was there and even used to pick her up. I can say that I am blessed to call her a friend. Apart from that, my husband also had a friend helping him with the pick-up and drop-off tasks. They were the most supportive people that we had in our lives.

However, during my visit to the hospital for my girls, I used to pump as much breast milk as possible in the NICU. But after two days, they put my babies skin-to-skin with me so that I could feed them directly. It was great progress. They used to hold one baby at a time to my breast so she could feed, and then they used to breastfeed the other.



Even though it was important, I was not happy with feeding just one baby at a time. I wanted to hold both of them together. So, I requested that the nurse allow me to hold both of them together. She agreed but asked me to be quick as they could not keep the babies out of the incubator for a long time. So, they put my babies on my chest for less than five minutes and then placed them back in their incubators.

After a week, the nurse asked, "Do you want to help change babies' diapers?" My babies were very little. They weighed even less than four pounds. So, I was a little reluctant to help the nurse change their diapers initially. I had no idea how I was going to do that for these babies. However, the nurse helped me and guided me as to what I was supposed to do, and I changed their diapers for the first time. It was an overwhelming feeling for me as I was seeing my babies grow and progress in front of me. Initially, my babies were fed through tubes inserted into their noses, but after a week or two, the hospital staff tried offering them some bottles to feed from. The nurse noticed that whenever one of the babies

advanced in something, the other did the same thing the next day and followed her sister. The nurse joked about it and said, “I think they are getting jealous of each other somehow.” This made me smile, and I was very happy that my kids were progressing and growing with every passing day.

Chapter 9: Time to Go Home



Things were moving slowly, but I was grateful for the little things. I finally got to give my babies a bath with the nurses. Everything was carefully monitored; a breastfeeding specialist had to come in to help my babies latch on so I could feed them. It hurt sometimes, but it was bearable. A pediatrician was also assigned to check up on my babies frequently.

Our story also caught the media's attention; they asked me to let them come in so they could do a story on my babies. I agreed. I carefully laid out the clothes for my babies before the day the media was supposed to come so the nurses would know what to do.

Unfortunately, that did not happen the way I expected it. They came during the day, but I could not be there on time to make sure my babies didn't wear hospital clothes. That was something that made me disappointed. I didn't want my babies' pictures to be in hospital clothes.

On the flip side of the coin, for the other shoot they had planned, they asked me to join in the pictures with them. I could control the circumstances this time and ensured the pictures were beautifully taken. I carefully laid them on my chest for the pictures. I was happy I could share the moment with my babies.

They stayed at the NICU for three more weeks, and during that time, things gradually improved. They got better by the day, which I was thankful for. I went to visit my babies whenever I could in the NICU. At home, I pumped every two hours to produce enough milk for them when I saw them next. And just like that, everything fell into a routine. I did try my best to make more milk for the babies. The hospital helped by providing them with donor milk to make sure my babies were well-fed. In time, I did start producing enough milk. That was a relief for me—that I could do this for them.

Breastfeeding them was difficult because they were not as responsive as other babies. They would not latch on every time. Things got easier when the hospital decided to start them on the bottle. The little things made me aware that we were making progress every day. I decided to capture the milestones with pictures. I wanted to capture all the beautiful moments, such as the day they were born, took their first bath, and started the

bottle. Every time there was any kind of highlight, I took it upon myself to capture that moment in photographs at the NICU.

I was spending my entire day with my babies. I would leave for the NICU in the morning, and my husband would pick me up at night. After a few weeks, they started taking a couple more ounces in the bottle, and I could feel we were getting closer to the day we could leave the hospital. The hospital wanted to run a few tests before we could take them home. They instructed my husband to stay with the babies for a few days to monitor them. We were set up in the family room to stay with them.

The media called us again to update them on the babies' progress. They wanted us to give an interview about how the babies were doing. They set up a specific day for the interview at the hospital, and my whole family came in for it—my boys and my daughter. They interviewed the doctor as well, who answered promptly. It was NBC Five News that wanted the update on the kids. I was incredibly restless that day, even though it was a beautiful moment. That day, we decided to take some photos and videos for the interview. I felt like it was a good beginning. My babies were almost ready to go home.

Before they could do so, the doctors were meticulous in their tests. They checked their oxygen levels. They also informed me they would finally remove the tubes so the babies could properly drink from the bottle. With the tube, they could only consume about 90% of the bottle. I asked them to wait for me to be there before they did so. I went there early the next day for it, only to be told by the doctor that she had to share some good and bad news with me. She told me that one of the babies had already taken the tube out by herself with her finger while the other twin

followed suit, which was a surprising turn of events because they had never seen anything like it. This meant that they were all set to go home. The bad news was that I was not present at that moment.

Apart from general checks, the doctors carefully checked any external factors; they asked to bring the car seats to see if they would suffice for the babies. I appreciated their meticulous work because I wanted to be careful, too.

Unfortunately, the oxygen level decreased when they tested the babies in the car seat. Hence, our leave was delayed for further test runs. After three days, they finally passed. We could move on to the next stage: spending the night at the NICU. My husband and I readily agreed; a wave of relief washing over us.

During our stay at the hospital, we settled in the family room, where a chair, pumps, and beds were set out for us. The nurse came to inform us about what to do; she handed us a chart with a schedule. She told us we needed to align our schedules with the babies so everything was in sync once we got home. The chart had their details down to the minute. I noted it and set the alarm on my phone to follow the chart.

My husband and I divided our duties to maintain consistency and never miss anything on the schedule. The alarm would ring every three hours, and we would get up to prepare bottles or diaper changes. We had to measure the intake and get them worked up for an appetite. Apart from everything else, we had to call the nurse to let her know we were on time. My husband and I were exhausted because that night, the nurse knocked incessantly and sternly on our door to the point where we got

scared. We woke up, panicking and groggy, saying, "We're late, we're late." I tried to reassure him, but the nurse reprimanded us for being thirty minutes late. That woke us up, and we quickly prepared the bottles and asked the nurse whether sleeping for thirty minutes more was as big a deal as she made it out to be.

The nurse told us we had to be on the exact schedule. Thankfully, nothing serious happened that day. We were discharged the next day after a quick check-in with the pediatrician. We quickly got changed and prepared to go back home with the babies. We drove home after getting help from the nurse. My children were eagerly waiting for us at home. We received about a dozen phone calls from them on the way, excitedly asking if we were there yet. I knew they had painstakingly decorated the house for the babies, so when we finally got there, they were in complete awe of the twins. They wanted to hold the babies and carry them around, but I had to be incredibly careful when handing them to them, as they were delicate. I could sense their excitement, and I was glad they showed that love to the newcomers in the house, but I almost had to adopt a medical standpoint. I remembered the nurse telling me babies usually did not leave the hospital at 35 weeks, weighing around 4 pounds. We also decided to keep the bracelets that separated them. We did not want to mess up their identities in the first few weeks until we could tell them apart. As a new mother to twins, I still confuse them sometimes.

The first few weeks were made easier because my mother was here; she had decided to help us out the first few weeks. However, when she left, things became significantly harder. It was just me, my husband, and my kids. My husband tried to help

out the first couple of days, but he had to wake up early for work, so I was careful not to wake him in the middle of the night because of this.

The routine was the same: feed, change the diaper, and then put them back to sleep. After thirty minutes, the other twin would wake up, and I'd repeat the process. I was practically staying up all night since they woke up every three hours, getting about thirty minutes of sleep every day.

I always felt tired, and it was difficult for me to wake up the next morning with as little sleep as I got. In addition to that, I had to set aside some time for pumping to prepare their bottles. My kids tried to be helpful, specifically, my teenage son, who could see that I was drained; he'd come in around 02:00 a.m. to help me care for one baby, feeding her, while I did the same for the other. Their timing altered occasionally, and sometimes they woke up together.

I was scared of a lot of things at first. For one, I couldn't give them a bath when they first came in; they looked too tiny, and I was anxious until my husband's sister came in to help me do it every couple of days. After a while, my husband started helping me give them baths while I changed their clothes.

I was reassured after a few months when the babies started developing. They opened their eyes, and I was relieved we were moving in a good direction. We received a call from the media again, who wanted to check in on the twin's progress. We sent in pictures and videos to update them, and it was on the news in a couple of days. We decided to inform our close friends about this coverage.

I look back on our time in the hospital with fondness. At home, it's too frantic. When they wake up together, it isn't easy to manage, to say the least. With my kids reaching a stage where they have started to work, I have to juggle between the babies and dropping my son off at his job on little to no sleep. On top of that, I prepared dinner for my family, which drained me of any energy I had left.

Of course, there was help along the way. The mother of my husband's friend offered her help when she was free. I did not ask for much because of the time difference. The babies had their schedules, and I couldn't ask people to drop everything to help me. I remember crying a lot, especially to my husband, when he called me to ask me what was happening. We had to be careful of everything. I attended therapy for the twins to ensure their health was progressing nicely on top of everything else. We had tiny scares along the way. I remember being incredibly anxious when Raya couldn't turn her head to the right.

Things got unimaginably worse when COVID hit. My fears were amplified. We were secluded from our friends and family, and I had to be extra careful given the babies were still growing, and I was not sure how strong their immune systems were even to expose them to something like that. That would worry every parent, but somehow, we got through it. I suppose that's all part of parenthood. Putting kids first at all costs.



Chapter 10: Babies And Chores



The babies were finally at home, and now it was time for us to adjust them to routine life. They were little and fragile, so they constantly needed someone to protect, feed, and cherish them. There were other children in the house as well who needed my support as their mother.

I struggled a bit between dropping off my son at work and caring for the babies between those thirty-five-minute drives.

At that time, I couldn't leave my babies at home because I had no one else to babysit them when I was out, so I had to take them with me while driving my son to work.

So, I used to prepare them and put them in their car seats as well while we drove off. It was not only this, but at the same time, I had to take my other six-year-old daughter and my other son to their schools as well. It was no doubt a long trip with the newborn in the back of the car, but I had no other way.

I remember that sometimes the babies used to cry, needed a diaper change, or even threw up in the car. So, to tackle those situations, I carried all the necessary supplies with me in the car, and whenever required, I changed them in the car.

I was tackling all five of my children on my own without any other help; it was no doubt difficult, but it was worth it.

One of the major struggles we had to face in that tenure was that the milk I produced was not enough for my twins. So, my friend offered her milk, and she said she had some frozen in her refrigerator. Then, I started giving my friend's milk to my babies.



They also started choking on her milk, so I got it checked. The doctor checked the milk and told me that it had more colostrum and was heavy on my babies. So, after a couple of bottles, I stopped giving them that milk and returned to my milk.

Other than that, I received calls from people who wanted to visit our house to check on me and my twins. So, my husband and I decided to decorate the house for the visitors and also planned to give them party favors. I also popped chocolate for the visitors. But to my surprise, very few of my friends came to visit me and my twins. I waited for my closest friends, whom I was expecting to see me, and for them, I waited for months. Sadly, they did not

come, and I had to remove all the decorations. It was upsetting for me because my pregnancy was not like a normal pregnancy; I stayed in the hospital with my twins for three months, so I was expecting the people to visit me whom I thought cared about me.

The summertime was slightly tougher as the school-going kids were about to be at home for vacations, and I remember when the vacation started, my six-year-old daughter complained about being unable to see her friend. I could tell she was bored at home, as there were no other activities she could do. Even I was busy with the newborn babies. During this time, I wanted to have a photo shoot for the newborn babies, as I thought it was important to secure their toddler selves in picture memories, but my husband was against it. He argued that they were too young, plus the kids wouldn't understand anything about the photoshoot. He told me that it would be better if we got it done when they were a bit older.

The summer season passed, and it was time to send the kids back to school. It was the month of August, and once again, I had to deal with the babies and drop my other kids off at school. Seeing that I couldn't manage everything on my own, my husband started to drop the kids off at school in the morning, but I still had to pick them up in the afternoon. My daughter's school used to get off at around 3 o'clock, so I had to leave the house at around 2:15 to reach her on time.

It was a very difficult time, as after picking up my daughter from her school, I had to wait another forty-five minutes for my sons to get out of school. Indeed, they were at the same school but had different hours. Also It was not allowed for cars to park in front of the school, so for waiting, I used to drive to the nearby

gas station and wait for my boys to get out of school. It was difficult not only for me but for my babies as well, and the entire process for them was tiring and exhausting. They used to cry a lot whenever they were tired, hungry, or needed a diaper change. As I said before, I used to have all my baby supplies in the car, but I had to deal with all of this on the streets. I used to change their diapers on the back of the trunk all by myself. But this was something that needed to be done. It was our routine from Monday to Friday, every day.

Luckily, after a month of my kid's school, I met a new friend who, after witnessing my situation, offered to pick my kids up from school. It was very nice of her, and I accepted her offer immediately, as I needed help during that time. Then, she started picking up my kids for two months in a row, even though her kids did not attend the same school.

After two months, I felt bad because she was doing a lot for me, so I told her we could handle this situation. We had another help. I thanked her for her biggest help. The next day, I visited her house with a gift I bought for her.

I remember this one time when I got an invite from a restaurant for dinner. By this time, my babies were about three months old. We were excited as we were going to a family gathering after months. But unfortunately, on the way to the restaurant, one of the babies threw up. This confused me, and I was wondering what the reason behind it was, as she was not even sick. However, I cleaned her up, and then we went to the restaurant. The entire day, she was fine and active. There were no symptoms to show that she was sick. So, we ignored it, thinking that it was not something serious.

Time passed, and the babies were growing up just fine and healthy. We had the same routine as before. My husband used to drop my children off at school, and then I used to pick them up. Sometimes, we used to switch our duties as well, as required.

Sometimes, the babies got fuzzy in the morning, so I used to put them in the stroller and take them out for a walk; that would calm them. Some days, my husband used to pick up our daughter from school, drop her off at home, and then go back to work. We knew we had to do whatever it took to make sure our children were okay and living their lives to the fullest. Luckily, when my babies were six months old, my mom came back, and of course, everything changed a bit now that I had another hand to help me out. I used to leave my newborn babies with my mom when I picked up my daughter from school. Her presence around the house was a blessing.

A year passed like this and their birthday came. I can tell you that I was nervous. But I knew I had to ensure that my babies' first birthday was celebrated well. Though I was excited and happy about the event, I decided not to plan anything big for their birthday party; I decided to invite just close family and friends to the celebration.

I remember one time for the photoshoot, I visited this lady who lived a bit far away from my house. When we were on the way, the same baby who threw up just a few months before in the car did the same thing again. I was by myself, and my child needed me. So, I stopped in the middle of the street and went to check on her, as I was afraid that she might choke on the food particles that came out of her puke. I was glad to see that she was okay, but she was quite a mess now. So, I changed her clothes

and cleaned all visible stains from her body and the car seat. I was just five minutes away from the photographer's house, so I took my babies there and put them down in the house.

I checked my baby again for any other signs of sickness, but she was perfectly fine, so I ignored it once again. I remember that after my twin's first birthday, I decided to visit my brother and sister in Jordan during the next summer break. I was worried about taking them on a plane as they were very young, but there was no other way for me. My mom accompanied me, and I thank God that she was there with me.

It was a twenty-two-hour flight with just one stop in between. I knew it would be difficult, but I had to do it. To my surprise, the babies had fun, and we reached our destination without any problem. But then, when we drove in the car, I noticed that my babies were throwing up once again. This was the time when the thought that my babies might have motion sickness came to my mind. I took them to a doctor, and the doctor confirmed my suspicion. It was weird, as none of my other kids had this issue. I asked the doctor to recommend any medicine to make things better for my kids, but the doctor replied, "I can't give any medication because they are still young. So, all you need to do is buy a bracelet."

I was confused at first, but then he explained to me that this special bracelet controls the nerves and can help with your children's motion sickness. I bought it, but I was disappointed with the results, as it only helped to make things better by 5%. Again, we were left to take care of my babies' motion sickness the way we were doing before.

After the vacation, I was worried about them traveling on the plane, as I had no idea if they would throw up in the plane as well. But I was glad that they were okay with the plane and that it was only in the car that they had motion sickness.

We always had a bucket in the car in case they threw up. I remember when the babies used to have motion sickness after this point. My mom used to put one baby on her lap, and I used to put the other baby on mine.

Then, we used to hold their faces up on the bucket to make sure they were spilling their puke in the bucket. It was no doubt a frustrating situation, and there came a time when I started to avoid going out with my kids. I told myself, *"Okay, so I guess I cannot take my babies alone with me everywhere."* I realized later that it was not okay for the babies to stay at home all the time. So, we had to come up with a way to take them out without getting them and the car all messed up.

We decided that it would be better if I never went out alone with the babies. So, every time we had to take the babies out, my husband used to drive us. It was necessary to have someone sit in the back of the car with the baby and have all the necessary supplies present.

There used to be a time when both babies used to throw up at the same time, and that meant that I had to deal with both babies at the same time. In a situation like this, I put a bucket in front of one of the babies and then tried to catch the other one with a towel. However, we avoided taking babies out when it was not necessary. At times, when I had to do chores or pick up my other kids from their schools, my mom used to stay with the

babies. Their motion sickness was getting worse with time. I had a lot of other responsibilities to fulfill, and I couldn't leave my babies with my mom all the time, so I took them to the doctor once again. I thought that maybe the doctor would offer some help this time, but her reply was the same: they couldn't recommend any medicines to the babies as they were very young. All we needed to do was avoid taking babies out, and when we did, we were supposed to carry the necessary supplies to ensure that we could handle the situation well and promptly.

As I said before, I never liked leaving my babies at home all the time, and of course, taking them out meant that we had to clean them up before we could get them out of the car. It was a lot for us to handle, but we knew that we had to deal with it.

I used to avoid giving them milk or any other dairy product before putting them in the car because I was told that these products could make their situation worse. Unfortunately, avoiding milk didn't help their condition.

After they were around 18 months old and were still going through the same condition, I decided to make a video about it and post it on TikTok.

In the video, I said that I was looking for some doctors to help me out. Luckily, somebody heard my appeal and told me that there was a medication called "Dramamine" that could help my kids get better.

It did help. My baby's motion sickness was controlled to almost 95%. There were a few times when they used to feel dizzy in the back of the car, or I used to hear coughing, but they never threw up.

It was undoubtedly a very difficult situation, but we still overcame it by supporting each other and asking our community to help us. This is why I always tell everyone that all they need to do is ask for help.

Chapter 11: Hard Work

Raising children is never an easy task, and this is something only parents can understand. Children are vulnerable and require ongoing care until they are old enough to be considered adults. But to be completely honest, I believe that children need the same care as adults when they grow up. Every parent experiences a period when their child rebels against them and starts to wonder what they have done for them. Since parents sacrifice their rest and dreams to ensure their children are safe and content, this is undoubtedly one of the most heartbreaking questions.

Speaking for myself, it was never simple to raise my monoamniotic twin daughters. One issue would follow another, but I always knew I had to put up with it all to make sure my girls were safe and secure.

After finding out about their motion sickness, just when I thought nothing could go wrong now, I was proven wrong. After a few months, I became aware of Raya's sleep issues. She used to wake up screaming and crying every night with choking fits. I was very worried about this because I had no idea what was wrong with her.

At first, I assumed that she might be experiencing nightmares, but as things continued to get worse for her, my anxiety for her grew. She used to wake up every 5 to 15 minutes when she was asleep. I recall that the entire night was awful, and I had the constant impression that neither Raya nor I were getting enough rest.

I took Raya to the doctor as her condition deteriorated, explained Raya's predicament, and sought the doctor's advice. I used my phone to record her while she slept at night, and I gave the doctor a copy of the recording to help him better understand her situation. The medical professional speculated that she might have sleep apnea after viewing the recording. I was concerned because I didn't fully understand what this condition was.

I researched and discovered that a person with sleep apnea may have narrowed airways. The main causes could be large tonsils, obesity, or changes in hormone levels. However, the doctor immediately recommended surgery; her adenoids were at 90% and covered her airway. Since we had no other choice, we concurred.

So, the surgery took place successfully, and now she sleeps very well at night. It was a big relief, to be honest. Her sleeping difficulty is now totally gone, but right after the surgery, we needed to keep her in front of our eyes to make sure that she was fine. For this reason, she began to sleep in my room with me instead of in her room with her sister, Naya. Another reason we decided to put them in separate rooms was to ensure Naya was getting proper sleep. We didn't want Naya to stay disturbed through the night because of her sister, as she was still very young and needed a good night's sleep.

But this was something that Naya was not okay with. I noticed that Naya started getting jealous because Raya was sleeping with me. I remember when I put her in her bed, she pointed toward my room, indicating that she also wanted to sleep there. I felt so bad about it, as I felt like I was separating them. So, I went to the doctor again and discussed the entire situation with him. I said to

him, "What should I do? I feel so bad, and I don't want her to get jealous of her sister or hate her."

It was another very stressful situation for me, as I had this feeling that Raya's condition and the way I was trying to handle it was distancing them from each other.

The doctor looked at me and replied, "Don't ever separate them. Either you have to put them back together to sleep in their room, or you have to bring the other one to sleep with you as well. Whatever you decide, you need to put them back together. You can't just separate them because it is going to give her anxiety and can result in bad health issues."

So, I returned home and explained the situation to my husband. We decided that it was better that we let them sleep together in their room, but then it was obvious that they couldn't be left unsupervised. So I decided to sleep with them.

However, Raya found the change difficult because she was not used to sleeping in her bed. I remember whenever I tried to put her to sleep in her bed, she used to cry so much that she would end up throwing up. She even attempted to jump out of bed in the past. So, it was important for someone to keep a check on them. So, I used to spend the night in their room with them to try to resolve this dilemma. One of them used to sleep on my right and the other on my left, while I used to sleep in the middle. This was important to get them, especially since Naya used to sleep in their room. Another challenging circumstance that developed at this time was that my husband had to accompany his parents on a two-week trip abroad after Raya's surgery to collect his pay. At first, I was able to handle it because my mother

was helping me with the children. I believed that I could handle everything successfully and independently. Aside from that, I was aware of the significance of my husband's trip and understood that he couldn't miss it at all. I assured him that I would take care of the kids while he was away.

But things didn't turn out the way I had hoped. I was having a pretty difficult time keeping up with all the work. Since my other children were in school, I had to prepare the food, pick up my other daughter from school, and care for all the other children on my own.

One relief came from my 16-year-old son, as he knew how to drive. He used to drop off his sister, but I had to pick them up from school because their drop-off times were different. To pick her up, I always tried to make sure that my work was done before her dismissal. I used to ensure the house was clean and the food was prepared before she returned from school.

There's no doubt that it was a tiring moment for me. Indeed, you find it impossible to function without your husband when you've grown accustomed to his constant presence by your side, assisting you with even the smallest challenges. I was also experiencing the same problem. I can recall that I eventually began experiencing panic attacks. I used to cry uncontrollably every morning and evening. I was stressed and worn out. I wasn't sure how I was going to handle everything by myself. What was going on with me was unclear to me. My appetite was gone. I began to sense that something was wrong with my body. I wasn't eating well, and I wasn't drinking enough water. I went to the doctor, who gave me some medicine and told me to drink a lot of water because I was so severely dehydrated. My health was

deteriorating. I felt like I was going to puke every time I tried to eat something. I quickly shed almost 10 pounds during this time. At this point, everyone became aware of the bodily change in me, which also greatly worried my mother. She questioned me about what was wrong with me, and I said that I was unsure.

Then, after two weeks, when my husband returned from his overseas trip, it was like a big relief for me. The moment he entered the house, the girls got excited. They were running in and out of the house as a result of their excitement. As he entered the house, they all hugged him, and there was a screaming sound all around the house. This was the first time my husband had traveled anywhere without us, so of course, he was also very happy to see all of us, but when his eyes fell on me, his facial expression changed from being happy to being concerned. He asked me, "What happened? What's wrong with you?"

I replied, "I don't know."

When he returned, I was standing in the kitchen and preparing food for the girls, as I recall. He asked me what was wrong with me, and I immediately broke down in tears. I admitted to him that the girls were giving me a tough time. I explained to him that there had never been a day when I was cooking or cleaning the house without the girls crying on my feet.

He looked at my condition and suggested, "Maybe it's time for you to visit a counselor. But only if you want."

I agreed since I had known from the start that I needed counseling, but I had been putting it off because of how busy and occupied I was with work. But now that things were extremely awful, I figured it would be best if I went to see a counselor. Since

I didn't have many close friends with whom to discuss things, I wanted someone to confide in. As a result, I began seeing a counselor, and I found that talking to her helped me improve. Slowly but surely, my appetite returned. Every day, I was able to concentrate more on the girls. My twin daughter's second birthday also fell around this time. I was aware that I needed to provide something unique for them. I requested assistance from my husband with the suggestions. I had no idea what I would do or how I would do it, but I knew it needed to be a memorable experience for them.

But regrettably, I was unable to finish all the preparations in time. Even though I sent out the invitations a few weeks before their birthday, several guests still showed up for their party. And even though it wasn't quite as extraordinary as I had hoped, it was still a wonderful occasion. I am grateful to all the family members and friends who joined us to celebrate this important occasion.

By the time summer arrived, I was once again largely by myself. My mom decided to return to her house early, and my husband had to go to work. Therefore, we concluded that hiring a nanny would be better. I tried calling practically all the companies, but I didn't get any response.

Another reason hiring a nanny was so important was that we had a pool in the house, and my elder daughter had to practice swimming there every day. It was not okay for me to leave my other kids around the pool unsupervised. During this same summer, I remember that my children didn't enroll in any summer schools, so they had nothing to do during their summer break. That summer, I had to deal with all five of my children at

home while my husband was off at work for 12-hour shifts daily from Monday to Saturday. This was when I told my husband we should plan something for the kids. I told him, "We need to take the girls somewhere because they are bored at home." We didn't take them out a lot because of their motion sickness, so I decided that a good vacation was something that they deserved.

I suggested we go on a cruise, and my husband argued against it, saying it might be worse for the girls. He was not sure if we should take the girls on the cruise because of their condition. I remember my friends begging me to go overseas with them, but I turned down their offer, saying, "I can't go. Last summer, I went, and I had a very hard time with the girls.

We decided against taking the cruise in part because my father had passed away at this time. There was this realization that now that I was here, my father was not at home waiting for me to come back home. So, we decided to keep the plan of going on a cruise ship in the future when the girls are a bit more grown-up. However, we went to Cancun, and the girls had so much fun there for the first time.

I was looking for a nanny to travel with us, and after some searching, I found one. However, she told me that she had surgery, so she could not travel with us, and for that reason, I attempted to find a new babysitter in Cancun, but the cost was prohibitive. My husband reassured me that we could support one another at this point, and we did. We had some difficulty during the kids' naps because I had to put them to sleep, carry them to their beds in the room, and watch over them until they woke up.

I had to watch the kids the entire vacation, especially the twins. I had to dress them up and take them to the pool. Even when they were playing, I still had to be with them to avoid any mishaps. My husband helped me a lot, but of course, I needed to be the first person in charge of taking care of their needs. I can say that I was not enjoying myself a lot there, but I was happy to see that my kids were enjoying their time and having fun. Overall, we did have a really fun time there.

When we returned from Cancun, one of my daughters had a fever, and I took her to the doctor, who diagnosed her with hand-foot-and-mouth disease. She had itchy red lesions on her fingers, mouth, and foot. I had no idea what it was at first, but after learning more about it, I discovered there is no cure. She used to be okay during the day but would frequently cry at night due to the pain and itching. I offered her Tylenol and Ibuprofen, but nothing seemed to make things better for her. It was tough to see my daughter in pain. I used to cry, too, when I saw her in this state. I was unsure of how I might assist in her recovery.

But as the night wore on, I brought her to the ER, where the doctor once again informed me that there was no treatment for it. She did, however, propose that they could calm my kid down by giving her steroids. Fortunately, steroids significantly improved her condition, and she began to feel better.

The doctor also informed me that, while not all doctors prescribe it, a small study has shown that some new medicines were extremely beneficial in this case. I was given the choice of whether or not I wanted to try it on my kid. I didn't mind, though, because I at least had treatment for my daughter's illness. And it

did succeed. I was very relieved when it made her feel so much better in just a few days.

So, I grabbed that medication, and I started with her. It felt like she was getting a little better, not crying at all.

And then, after two days, her twin sister started getting the same symptoms as her. I observed that she had a fever and all the other symptoms. But this time, I knew what was wrong with her and what needed to be done. So, I didn't take her to the doctor, but I called the doctor for consultation, and with his advice, I started giving my other daughter the same medicine as well. I did this because the doctor said to me, "You don't have to worry. It's normal for her sister to have this disease, too, because she was probably going to have it. After all, this kind of disease spreads fast."

Even though the doctor told me not to fret about anything, still being a mom, it was too much for me. I couldn't get sleep during the night or day because I had to manage a lot of stuff and also had to be extremely careful with my daughters.

I had babies crying all day, so it was very hectic for me. I was proven wrong when I thought things couldn't get more difficult. After five days, my eight-year-old daughter got the same disease, too. Her symptoms also started with a fever. As the days progressed, she started feeling extremely tired, and eventually, she developed sores in her mouth. To some extent, I knew that if one of the twins had some problem, the other one would get it, too, but I never expected my older daughter to develop the same disease. This caused me to worry a lot because I thought it might be something else. So, I took her to the doctor, who examined

her and told me it was the same disease. He further told me, "It is going to be a lot worse for her as compared to her sisters because she is older."

I remember my older daughter fussing and crying almost every day because she couldn't eat or swallow anything as her mouth was sore. While taking care of my daughters, I was worried that the other kids would not get the same disease. But thanks to God, none of them got it, and everybody else was fine.

While I was trying to care for the three daughters who were sick, I had to make sure that they were getting their food and medicines at the correct time. All three of them needed to take Tylenol, Advil, and the special medicine that the doctor gave them. To manage that correctly, I wrote everyone's name on their medicine pouches to ensure I was not mixing it up.

I remember that after a couple of days, I noticed that their skin started peeling from their feet. I was terrified initially, but when I looked it up and asked people about it, I was relieved to know that it was all normal. One of the people whom I spoke to told me, "Like in hand, mouth, and foot disease, this is so normal. You will see their nails start falling, too."

So, as I expected, this happened after a couple of weeks. This was very scary, but at least I was aware that it was all normal and was expected because of the disease.

As it is said, the bad days do pass, and so do these days too. With time, all of my daughters got better, so I decided it was time to potty train them. To be honest, it was another very hard thing to do. The reason it was so difficult for me was that I hated to potty-train kids. I was thinking about how I would do it with two

kids together. But I knew that, as their mother, it was my responsibility. So, I removed all the carpets at home and let them be in the house without a diaper to try to teach them gradually.

In the beginning, I had a couple of accidents on the floor, here and there, on the first day, but then my twins started to understand what they were expected to do. I remember on the second day, one of my twins went to the toilet to use it. She did her business there, and I got her cleaned. However, it was not like she did it willingly. Even though she understood that she had to use the toilet every time, it was still difficult for her. On the other hand, the other one didn't even want to go inside the bathroom. She used to end up crying and fussing whenever it was her time.

Every time I put on a diaper or pull-up pants, I remember they would do the accident. I noticed that whenever they were not wearing a diaper or pull-up pants, they would say they wanted to go to the bathroom. Otherwise, they would do their business inside the diaper. It was another challenging time because, along with this, I also had to take care of everything else. I had to cook, clean, and look after my other kids and husband. I was juggling multiple tasks simultaneously.

This entire potty-training time was difficult because none of my twins could go to the bathroom alone. Every time I would turn my face to do something in the kitchen, one of the twins would say that she wanted to go to the bathroom, and if I did not act immediately, they would pee themselves, making a mess in the house. Another thing that made this entire time stressful was that whenever one had to go to the bathroom, the other twin would demand to go to the bathroom at the same time.

At that time, we had a bathroom that only had one toilet, so I had no option but to keep the other one on hold. And this would always end up with the one waiting, crying, and then making a mess. So, to tackle this situation, I bought one more baby toilet and put it in the bathroom to ensure no one was waiting.

Even though the bathroom was small, I had to make sure that both of my kids were getting what they wanted. I remember whenever they both had to go at the same time, I used to carry their iPads with them and play some songs for them.

It took almost a month for them to get used to the toilet completely, but things got slightly easier for me once they did. Even then, it was not like everything was sought after for me. There was still a lot on my plate, as I was the only one responsible for taking care of everyone else in the house. I guess this is what motherhood is all about, taking care of children and helping and supporting them in all the matters of life.

Chapter 12: Helping others

Undoubtedly, social media plays a major role in helping us stay in touch with individuals we know and strangers. The sense of support and community that social media can offer is one of the biggest advantages for modern moms.

Mothers can interact with other mothers globally, exchange stories, and gain knowledge from each other. Social media can also give women access to tools and data that will support them in making decisions regarding the health and welfare of their children. Mothers have access to many online resources, such as parenting seminars and workshops, parenting influencers, and online parenting groups.

Sharing their parenting adventures with others is another advantage of social media for women. Mothers can make online baby books, exchange milestones with distant relatives and friends, and publish pictures and information about their kids. This can foster a feeling of community among mothers and help them feel more connected to their loved ones.

I remember my social media journey starting when I was learning new things about parenting. During all this time, my sister-in-law called me and asked me if I was doing okay and if the babies were fine. I was stressed, but I always told her that we were doing okay.

This one time, I was talking to her, and she suggested, "Why don't you open a TikTok account?"

I had no idea how TikTok worked, but she promised that she would teach, and she did.

She explained to me, "We can work this out together. Just create an account, take some videos from my experience, and post them there."

She also explained how helpful it would be for people going through something similar. I agreed, and so I created my account on the platform and started sharing videos of my experience of the overall situation.

Like I said before, it was a new experience for me, but as time passed, I started getting used to it. I also thought about how much sharing my stories and struggles could help other nursing mothers going through the same situation. When I look back at my time, I can say from my experience that if I could, I would never let any other mother suffer the same way as I did.

The issue that I faced in my journey was a lack of information and awareness. I never thought I would ever witness such a condition with my children, but as I said, nothing ever goes according to plan, and life keeps surprising us. However, I wanted to be the most reachable person for those who were going through the same circumstances as me, and social media was the best platform for that.

So, I kept working on my TikTok page, and as expected, I got noticed, and many people started contacting me. I didn't stop there. I kept posting videos about my babies' development and followed a day-to-day routine on TikTok. As a result, we started to achieve our ultimate goal.

One day, I got a message from a woman who was reaching out to me after hearing my story. Her message read, "I am going through the same case. So, can you please tell me more about it? I'm nervous. I'm scared. The doctors have scared me as they are saying that my babies are not going to live." I could sense her fears and worries within myself, as I knew that I was at her place a few months ago. I knew how helpless it felt to know that the doctors were not sure about your kids. I read her entire message and calmed myself down before replying to her. I did this because I was aware that one wrong word at this time could do a lot of damage to this woman's mental health.

So, when I replied, I first consoled her and told her that I went through the same things. The doctors also told me that my babies would never survive.

I said to her, "Just keep this in mind. All you need to do is pray." I showed her the hope she was looking for. I supported her a lot by always messaging and checking on her.

I felt like this was what I was meant to do. I felt the need to support all women going through the same situation. As a result, they appreciated my efforts and compassion in doing that.

It was no doubt an overwhelming response from social media, but again, I was still really stressed out because I was managing the work of all five kids. I needed some time and some help for myself.

Social media, no doubt, put my story in the limelight, but it also placed a lot of burden on me. I was burned out because of how much I had on my plate. But despite all the hardships, I was aware that I had to keep a check on this woman regularly. I

remember that I used to message and even call her periodically to know how she was doing, and every time I talked to her, it left me with the realization of how difficult motherhood was, and to be honest, it was all worth it. I used to tell this woman that everything would turn out fine and that she and her kids would be okay. I could sense that my words affected her and that she always felt better after talking to me.

And I was not surprised when she told me that her twins made it; they were alive and kicking. I was smiling at her text, knowing that she had done it. There was a chunk of influence from my words and the courage I was giving her through my TikTok account, but her will and her hope pushed her to be there for her kids after knowing what the doctors said about them.

It only took her will and positivity; no matter how tough it was for her, I was certain that she might have gone through the days when she would have felt like giving up. She might have felt hopeless, exhausted, and frustrated, but she did not give up. Despite everything, she pulled herself back together and went beyond the horizon, like every mother would, to keep her kids alive.

All the mothers are the bravest soldiers, protecting their kids day and night without thinking about themselves. I felt proud of that woman and her motherhood.

Nevertheless, as said earlier, things never go as we want them to. Life is unpredictable, and it shows us to what extent of unpredictability a life can go. Among hundreds of mothers' messages, I received a text from a mother in the same situation as mine, but with great misery, I was informed that her twins

could not make it. Despite her efforts and bravest fight, she lost the battle against fate. I did my part in her battle; I continued texting and checking up on her. I encouraged her to keep going and keep hoping, but she could not get the reward she deserved, which was for her twins to be alive. I felt sorry for her; I just consoled her and did my best not to let her fall. Motherhood is precious and special; a mother loves her children and dares to go beyond her limits to protect and nourish them.

A mother's love is the same whether an animal or a human. You see a cat who hides her kittens beneath her to keep them warm and safe. A dog becomes the most dangerous species in the world if anyone tries to harm her puppies. If we gaze around to witness motherhood, I am certain we would find every mother the same for her kids: her love, efforts, strength, goals, and so on.

All I want to say is that no matter how difficult your circumstances become, always keep in mind that you must do everything in your power to ensure the safety of your kids. I wish to encourage all the mothers who are going through the same things as me by writing this book. Keep in mind that it was all worthwhile.

To all the mothers out there who require assistance, all I have to say is to keep in mind that I am always here for you. By sharing my journey with you through this book, I want you to know and understand that nothing is impossible. You are in charge of what is going to happen to your children, and all I want is for you to trust your gut and keep moving forward in your journey.

