

# PAIGE CARTER

*Deputy Sheriff*

## *Newborn Harvest* *Season 1, Episode 6*

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*by:*

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## Newborn Harvest

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Amy woke to the sun shining through the window hitting her square in the face. She slowly rolled to her side and glanced at the clock. *Wow*, she actually felt rested. *Finally!* She couldn't remember the last time she'd slept until ten. But then again, she rarely slept through the night these days. With a deep sigh, she started the arduous task of forcing her body into a sitting position. She had her legs over the side of the bed and was trying...unsuccessfully...to force her beached whale of a body forward.

That's how Jason found her. He smiled, rushed to his wife's side and gently set the tray on the bed. "You should have waited for me." Once he got her situated and upright, he slid behind her and wrapped his arms lovingly around her extended belly. Amy was nine months pregnant and could go into labor at any minute. "How are my two favorite people this morning?"

"I can't believe it's ten o'clock," she said with a smile as she gently placed her hands over his and they marveled at the movement of their son. "He's active this morning."

Jason brushed Amy's hair away from her neck as he pressed soft kisses to his favorite spot. "Maybe today's the day."

"Maybe," Amy said, hope engulfing her as she stared out the window. "It looks like a beautiful day. Did you take care of the animals already?"

Jason grinned. "Yep, just saved my favorite one for last." He reached for the tray of fresh fruit and toast. "I bet you're starving."

"You have no idea," Amy said popping a strawberry into her mouth. "But I need the bathroom first."

Jason climbed from the bed and stood before her, holding out his palms in a gesture she'd come to love. He was so good to her. For about the hundredth time, Amy wondered how she had gotten so lucky. Once on her feet, she waddled to the bathroom and shut the door. Within minutes, she was on the verge of a panic attack. "Jason!"

Jason was standing near the window waiting for Amy when he heard the distressed cry. He was across the room and through the door within seconds. "What's wrong?" He asked, taking in his wife then darting his gaze around the small room.

"My water broke," she admitted staring at the liquid running down her legs.

"Hospital," Jason barked. "We need to get to the hospital. Where are the car keys?" He started frantically patting his front pockets as he rushed out of the room.

Amy smiled at her husband's desperate movements. It was exactly what she had needed to calm down. She grabbed a towel off the rack and dropped it to the floor. Then she leaned against the counter and did her best to grip the dry cloth with her toes.

## Newborn Harvest

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Jason stepped back into the bathroom, wondering what his wife was doing. They needed to get to the car. They needed to get to the doctor. He frowned when he realized she was trying to dry herself off. He immediately dropped to his knees, yanked the towel from her toes and dried her legs as best as he could. Then, he tossed the damp towel into the tub and took her hand in his. “Better?”

“Thank you,” she smiled then grabbed her stomach as a sharp pain shot through her system. “I need my bag and we need to go.”

Jason bent and retrieved the go back they’d packed weeks ago and ushered the love of his life out the door and into the car.

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Amy was exhausted. She’d been in labor for nearly thirteen hours. Another trickle of sweat dropped from her temple and ran down the side of her face, eventually landing on the uncomfortable pillow. She tried to focus on her baby. Soon she would be cradling him in her arms. The sweet anticipation helped her settle a little. Jason placed a gentle palm on her forehead and brushed back the sweat dampened hair that was sticking to her face. She must be a mess but her husband never left her side. He was holding her hand, rubbing his thumb in gentle circles over her palm as he brushed the hair away from her face again. Amy sighed and closed her eyes.

Jason was worried. Amy was in so much pain. He leaned over and kissed her temple then her cheek. “You’re almost done, baby. Trevor is so close.”

“One more big push,” Dr. Seaton said with compassion. “I think one more will do it and we’ll have a bouncing baby boy.”

The contraction hit and Amy pushed. She squeezed Jason’s hand with so much force she was sure he would have a bruise, but she couldn’t let go. Within seconds...which seemed like hours... Amy heard her son cry. She glanced down to see Jason cutting the cord and the doctor placing their baby in the arms of the nurse.

“Okay, then,” Dr. Seaton said with a smile. “Nurse Raiskin will clean him up and make sure everything is okay and then it’s time to be a mom. If you have any questions, just ask one of these lovely nurses. They’ll take good care of you until tomorrow.”

“What?” Amy said near panic. “Are you leaving?”

“I’m afraid so,” Dr. Seaton frowned. “I wish I could stay a few minutes but I have another baby on the way. I’m told she’s anxious to see the world. Be sure to set up an appointment with the office for some time next week. I’ll tell Julie I need a little extra time so I can give you my

# Newborn Harvest

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undivided attention and answer any questions you might still have. For now, you're in good hands. The nurses are probably more capable than I am," then he was gone.

Amy looked at Jason, who shrugged and smiled. "I'm a daddy!" he exclaimed as he took her hands in his.

"Nurse," Amy called. "Can I hold him now? I need to see my baby."

"Uh..." the nurse said as she shook her head. "He seems to be having trouble breathing. I need to get him upstairs. I'll send someone down as soon as I can."

Jason frowned and Amy began to cry.

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## Two Months Later

Amy pulled into the parking lot of the Sanpete County Sheriff's Office. As she stepped from the car, she glanced around. She hadn't been out of the house in weeks. The air was getting cooler now. In no time at all, it was going to be autumn. The leaves at the top of the mountain were already starting to change.

She took a deep breath, glanced in the side mirror and scowled. She looked horrible. She'd lost thirty pounds since that fateful day in the hospital...the day her world collapsed. The day the nurses took Trevor away. The night her husband told her, through unshed tears of his own, that their son hadn't survived. Her dress now hung off her frame haphazardly. She used to love this dress. Jason used to love this dress, the way it hugged her curves and made her look and feel feminine and beautiful. These days, nothing made her feel...period. Her thoughts turned to her husband. The man who used to adore her was barely speaking to her these days. Their marriage was in trouble. A part of her wished she could just accept what had happened and move on. But a bigger part of her, a part deep down in her soul, knew she was right. Call it mother's intuition, call it divine intervention, call it whatever you wanted. Amy knew with every fiber of her being that Trevor was still alive. Now, she just had to convince this Deputy Carter that she was right.

Amy took a deep breath and made her way to the front door. As she stepped inside, it took several seconds for her eyes to adjust to the dim lighting. She casually looked around and spotted a woman in her fifties sitting behind a desk. The lady was currently on the phone. Amy took another deep breath, she could wait. A few extra seconds might help calm her nerves. She moved forward and quietly sat on the chair in front of the desk.

"May I help you?" the receptionist asked as she gently rested the receiver on the base of the phone.

## Newborn Harvest

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“I hope so,” Amy stood. “I am here to speak with one of your deputies. A woman by the name of Paige Carter.”

Margie frowned. Paige hadn't told her she was expecting anyone. “Do you have an appointment?”

“Umm, well...no actually,” Amy said, flustered. “I... well, my brother is a friend of hers and he said I should stop by and talk to her. He thought maybe she could help me with a problem.” Amy stopped, not knowing what else to tell this woman.

“Have a seat right over there and I'll see if Deputy Carter has a minute.” Margie stood and headed for the back room. “Paige,” she called.

“Back here,” a muffled voice answered from the corner of the warehouse. Paige stood and moved into the aisle. “You know,” she added as she began walking toward Margie. “I'm not the only one around here that can inventory and destroy old evidence. I thought Dean was going to help me today.”

Margie grinned. “He's on a call.”

“Right,” Paige said skeptically. “And I'm a two-ton elephant. What can I do for you?”

Margie laughed. “There's a lady here to see you. She says you know her brother.”

“What's her brother's name?”

“I didn't ask,” Margie admitted. “She umm...well, she doesn't look well. I don't know if it's stress or if she's unhealthy. I could tell her to make an appointment.”

“Nah,” Paige shrugged. “I could use a break. And if I really do know her brother, I don't want to put her off.”

Amy looked up when two women emerged from the backroom. She was surprised to see the Deputy was so young. The way Sean talked about her, she was expecting someone well...someone in the same age bracket as the first woman. This Carter lady must be good at her job if Sean respected her that much. She couldn't be any older than he was.

Paige approached the young girl and frowned. Margie was right, she did look a little worse for wear. She stopped directly in front of the woman's chair and held out her hand. “Hi, I'm Deputy Carter. Margie says I know your brother.”

“Oh,” Amy hadn't expected that. She wasn't planning on dropping Sean's name right away. “Yeah,” she glanced around nervously. “Is there maybe somewhere I could talk to you privately?”

## Newborn Harvest

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Paige straightened, even more curious now. The young girl still hadn't mentioned her brother's name. Was that just a ploy to get a one-on-one? But why? Did this have something to do with her mother? Paige had been asking a lot of questions around town lately. "Let's head into the conference room." Paige glanced at Margie, who nodded her approval then went back to work. Paige held out her arm, directing the girl toward the private room. Once inside, she closed the door and moved behind the large table. "So, what can I do for you?"

Amy took a deep breath. She didn't really know where to begin. "I have a problem."

"Why don't you start by telling me who this infamous brother of yours is?"

"Oh," Amy frowned. "Okay, I didn't want to namedrop. I had no idea the receptionist would tell you that."

Paige laughed. "Do not tell Margie Gonzales she is a receptionist." Paige smiled when she saw color flow to the girls' cheeks. "Margie is Wonder Woman. She's the sheriff's assistant, dispatcher and all-around ace around here. So much more than a receptionist."

"I'm sorry," Amy fumbled with the strap on her purse. "I seem to be making things worse every time I open my mouth."

"Not at all," Paige sat back. "Now, name dropping aside, who is your brother?"

"Agent Wilkens," Amy said softly.

"No shit?" Paige said grinning. "Sean said he had a sister that lived out west, but he didn't tell me you were here in Utah. Do you live in Manti?"

"No, Sterling."

"Sterling..." Paige closed her eyes and tried to remember where that town was. "South of here, right?"

Amy smiled, she could see why Sean had sent her here. She could clearly see why they were such good friends. "Right."

"Okay, still in Sanpete so I guess I can hear you out," Paige gave her a nod indicating she should proceed.

"I think someone stole my baby," Amy blurted, shocking them both. She lowered her face to her hands and started to cry.

Paige frowned. "Think?"

Amy nodded as she continued to weep.

## Newborn Harvest

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“Wouldn’t you know?” Paige asked, confused. “I mean that’s kind of something I would think a mother would be sure of. You know, if her baby was missing.” She stood and walked to the other side of the room grabbing a box of tissue from the overhead cupboard. On her way back, she snatched up a pen and notepad from the stack on the cabinet. When she returned to her seat, she gently pushed the tissue box towards the woman. “Let’s start with your name.”

“Sorry,” Amy looked up and grabbed a tissue, wiping her nose. She placed her hands in her lap and nervously played with the thin material until it started to fray, pieces dropped onto her dress and she abruptly stopped, not wanting to make a bigger mess. “My name is Amy Powell.”

“Okay, so you’re married?” Paige asked.

“Yes,” Amy lowered her eyes. *For now anyway.*

“And your husband? Where is he?” Paige pressed.

“Jason is at work,” Amy admitted. “He trains horses.”

“Okay,” Paige shifted the notepad and began to write. *Complainant – Amy Powell. Husband, Jason Powell.* She looked up. “How old is your baby?”

“Trevor would be two months old,” Amy swallowed.

“Okay, I’m just going to ask,” Paige decided. “If your baby was kidnapped, why is your husband at work instead of here reporting the abduction with you?”

“Jason doesn’t believe Trevor was abducted,” Amy whispered softly. “The nurse said he died in the hospital. Jason believed her.”

Paige frowned. Sean didn’t say his sister had a mental disorder or a learning disability. Was it possible she was suffering from some kind of depression that led to denial? “I think you need to start at the beginning.”

Amy took a deep breath. “I know you don’t believe me. I expected that. Nobody believes me. But Trevor did not die. I will never believe that. If he did, why wasn’t I allowed to see the body?”

Paige was even more confused.

“It was our first,” Amy began. “We were both so excited. Jason was adorable. He took such good care of me the entire time. I went to the doctor, every appointment. Dr. Seaton assured me everything was fine. We all expected a healthy baby boy. When my water broke we rushed to the hospital and thirteen hours later I gave birth to Trevor. But they wouldn’t let me hold him. The nurse said he was having trouble breathing. The next thing I know, she’s back giving me some kind of shot. I was crying, demanding she let me see my baby when I basically

## Newborn Harvest

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blacked out. Jason said the nurse told him it was a sedative. She said I was exhausted from the delivery and it wasn't safe for me to get so upset. When I woke up, he gave me the bad news. He said Trevor didn't make it.

Again, I demanded to see him. If my baby had died, I needed to see his tiny, lifeless body for myself. The nurse wouldn't allow it. I was discharged the following day. Jason and I went straight to the mortuary, but we got the same excuses. It was against policy to show a grieving mother her deceased child. He told us we would have to have a closed casket. We had a small, intimate service. The day of the funeral, I tried to open the casket but it was sealed shut somehow. By the time we got back to the mortuary, the caretaker was gone. I insisted Jason take me back the next day, but the casket had already been buried."

Paige's frown deepened. There was no reason to keep the body from this mother. In fact, there was every reason to let her see her child. She needed closure, no wonder she was holding onto the belief he was still alive.

"I was supposed to schedule a follow-up appointment with Dr. Seaton. When I didn't do it, he had his nurse, Julie, call me. I told Julie they said Trevor didn't make it. She gave her condolences and about an hour later, Dr. Seaton called me back. He had a ton of questions and I could hear something in his voice. He wanted to know exactly what happened and what I was told. He was having a hard time believing the story I gave him. He was as surprised as we were that Trevor had died. When I asked him flat out if Trevor really died, and why he hadn't detected a health issue in time to fix it, he faltered. He said there was no reason to doubt the account given by the nurse, he gave me his condolences and ended the call abruptly. It was all so bizarre."

"Didn't your doctor deliver Trevor?" Paige asked.

"He did," Amy nodded. "But it was a busy day. Dr. Seaton had to rush out and deliver another baby, so he turned things over to a nurse."

"I see," Paige tapped her pen on the notepad. Something didn't feel right. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something was off. Not letting the mother see the baby, the doctor not even being aware his patient had died, the mother being sedated. Was she overly sensitive because this was Sean's sister, or was there something more here?

"You believe me," Amy said with wide eyes. "Nobody believes me, not even Jason."

"I don't know what I believe," Paige corrected. "I'm not discounting what you are saying but it's too early for me to reach any kind of conclusion." She stood to pace the room. "Where did you have the child? What I mean is where did you give birth? Was it here, at the clinic in Manti?"



## Newborn Harvest

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“No,” Amy dropped her head and studied her hands. “It was at the clinic in Laurel Bluff. Dr. Seaton normally works here, in Manti. But, like I said, it was a busy day. He was filling in for someone else so he diverted us. We didn’t mind because Laurel Bluff is actually closer, about halfway between our home and the Women’s Clinic here in Manti. Jason was thrilled with the switch. He was so nervous and just wanted me to get to the hospital fast.”

“If I recall correctly, Laurel Bluff has their own police department. Any reason you didn’t report this to them?” Paige asked.

“I did,” Amy admitted. “They didn’t believe me. They said I’m in denial. The officer got my name and stuff but said I needed to go home and deal with my sorrow rationally, like every other mother that has lost a baby.”

Paige frowned. *Insensitive prick.* “I’m guessing you spoke to a male officer, then?”

“Yeah,” Amy sighed. “I wasn’t surprised. Even my husband thinks I’ve gone off the deep end. I’m not wrong, I know I’m not. I just can’t get anyone else to believe me.”

“What about Sean?” Paige wondered.

Amy shrugged. “He wouldn’t say either way. He just said to talk to you. He said if there was foul play, you’d figure it out. He made me promise to trust you, whatever you decided, he made me promise I would listen. In other words, *I think you’re crazy and if Paige tells you the same, you have to believe her and put this behind you.*”

Paige grinned. “I doubt that was the message Sean was sending.” She sobered. “Can you? Trust me, I mean?”

“I’m going to try,” Amy said taking a deep breath for strength. “I used to have the perfect marriage, the perfect husband and we were going to have the perfect family. I know that sounds corny and a little naïve, but it’s true. Now my baby is gone, my husband barely talks to me and my neighbors look at me with pity. I can’t take it. I have to know the truth.”

“Amy,” Paige said, taking the seat next to the young girl. “You have to consider the possibility that you already know the truth. I know it’s hard. I can’t even imagine what it felt like to be told your baby didn’t survive. But if that’s where my investigation leads, you are going to have to find a way to accept it. Do you think you can do that?”

Amy looked Paige directly in the eyes. “Does that mean you will investigate? I mean really investigate?”

“I will,” Paige promised. “It’s going to be tricky. Local departments don’t like the Sheriff’s Office stepping in unless they ask for us. But I’m going to talk to the sheriff and call in a favor...for Sean. You need to know that, I’m doing this for Sean. He’s a great guy and I

## Newborn Harvest

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probably owe him, so I'm going to look into this situation for his sister because I know he's solid. You also need to know I'm going to call him. Is there anything he's going to tell me that might change my mind?"

"No," Amy shook her head. "And, thank you. I know Sean is solid. He's the second best man I know. I love my husband, Deputy Carter."

"Paige," she said. "Just Paige."

"Okay, Paige," Amy agreed. "I love my husband and he's a good man. He is struggling with this, too. I want you to know that. He is devastated and heartbroken just like me. He just trusts the system. He believes in doctors and hospitals and all of that. I admit I am a little too trusting sometimes as well, but Sean's an agent. What little he's told me about his job has been a real eye-opener. I believe there are bad people out there. People that would steal my baby and tell me he died."

"You're right," Paige said soberly. "There are. But there are also tragedies. Things that we fight and refuse to accept because they just don't make any sense. Like babies dying just after they are born from some unknown, unexpected defect and parents being murdered for no apparent reason."

"I'm going to trust you, Paige Carter," Amy decided, wondering what the murder thing was about. "I'm going to put my life in your hands and trust you. Whatever you find, I will accept it. I promise. I have to, you're my last hope."

"Okay," Paige turned the page on her notepad and pushed it toward Amy. "I need to know every name you remember. Every single person you encountered while in that clinic. Doctors, nurses, the laundry boy. Every single person."

"Okay," Amy took the pad and pen then looked up. "If I don't know names, should I list them anyway? You know, a guy came in to clean up the room. A young girl brought in a picture of water."

"Yes," Paige nodded. "I'll give you a few minutes alone to see what you can come up with."

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Paige stepped back into the room. "Finished?"

"I think so," Amy confirmed. "I can't think of anyone else." She took a deep breath then continued. "When are you going to call Sean?"

## Newborn Harvest

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“Probably after you leave,” Paige studied the girl. She couldn’t be out of her twenties. “Why? Are you afraid of what he’s going to tell me?”

“No,” Amy shook her head. “It’s just...well, once Sean knows you’ve agreed to help, he’s going to tell Jason. I need to be prepared for the fallout.”

“Your husband really doesn’t support you in this, does he?” Paige decided.

“Jason loves me and he used to support everything I did,” Amy stopped to take a shuddering breath. “I think in some ways he blames me. Like, I should have known our baby was sick and done something to help him. But Trevor wasn’t sick.”

“This wasn’t your fault, Amy,” Paige frowned. “And if your husband blames you for it, he is the one that needs to start dealing with the situation in a more healthy and productive way.”

Amy frowned.

“I know that sounds harsh, he just lost his little boy. But, blaming you is not the way to deal with that loss,” Paige said vehemently.

“I think,” Amy paused. “Well, I don’t know. But, I think it’s harder on him because I won’t accept it. He has shut me out, but I think it’s because he can’t deal with my denial. My insistence that Trevor is still alive. I believe he can’t let himself hope for that and every time I tell him our baby is out there, it throws him. He deals with the unbearable sorrow by shutting me out. It’s the only way he knows how to deal with the pain. I just worry that he’s going to shut me out forever.”

“Then let’s get started,” Paige gave her a weak grin. “The sooner we find answers, the sooner you and your husband can get back on track.”

“What next?” Amy asked.

“I need your information,” Paige took the notepad back and flipped the page. “Your full name, your date of birth, your address, your doctor’s name and his address and phone number.” Paige was writing the answers as fast as Amy gave them. “I also need you to call this Dr. Seaton. With the strict laws pertaining to doctor / patient privacy, he won’t tell me anything unless he knows it’s okay with you. Here is my card. Please call him, tell him he can talk to me and have him call me at his earliest convenience. I’ll need to know anything and everything he can tell me. Are you okay with that?”

“Absolutely,” Amy agreed, taking the card. “I’ll tell him there are no secrets. He will have my permission to disclose even the most personal information to you. If it helps, I’m all in.”

“Great,” Paige hesitated. “One last thing.”

## Newborn Harvest

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Amy sensed the cop's hesitation and wondered what this was about. "What?"

"I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I have to ask." Paige studied Amy for any reaction.

"Okay," Amy said cautiously as she studied Paige.

"During the course of this investigation, I'm going to need the help of the DA, judges for search warrants, the works. Before I move forward, I need to know if there is anything in your past that is going to come back to bite me. Have you suffered from depression? Been prescribed an anti-depressant at any time in your life? Been admitted for a mental breakdown? Anything?"

Amy tried not to be offended, but she was. "No, nothing."

"You're sure?" Paige pressed.

Amy sighed. "Yes, I'm sure. I would think I would know if I was locked up in a mental hospital."

"I would think so, too." Paige smiled. So, the girl was a little like Sean after all. "While I do a little digging, talk to your brother and wait for your doctor to call, you could try to do a little family research. I know you think I'm out of line here, but believe me, if we find something...this is going to be important. If we are dealing with doctors or medical professionals stealing babies... they are going to question your stability and mental wellbeing. They will use that to try to block us. That means no locking yourself in your room, no falling apart on me. No therapy visits unless they are absolutely necessary. And I need to know if there is a history of any kind of mental illness in your family."

"My mom is big on genealogy. I'll see what I can find from her." Amy promised. "But I'm pretty sure we are a normal, boring, sane family, Paige," she grinned. "You have met my brother."

Paige grinned too. "I'm not sure I'd use Sean as a reference. I've accused him of being crazier than a loon on more than one occasion."

"Yeah," Amy stood. "But you didn't really mean it."

Paige followed her out of the room. "No, not really."

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"I know why you're calling and no, my sister is not crazy," Sean answered when he saw Paige's face flash onto his screen.

"Are you sure," Paige asked. "I mean, she is related to you after all."

## Newborn Harvest

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“Funny,” Sean stood and left the room. “I only have a few minutes. We’re on a big case and the pieces are starting to fall into place.”

“Serial?” she asked sobering.

“Yeah,” Sean admitted. “Talk about crazy. This guy’s certifiable. He’s a sick SOB, that’s for sure.”

“Sorry to hear it,” Paige settled into her chair. “Can’t say I miss those. It’s great when you catch them but the journey is a little too dark and... soul-sucking for me. Always has been.”

“You turning soft on me Carter?” Sean teased. He knew she never did like cases like the one he was working. He didn’t much care for them, either.

“No more than usual,” she replied. “Tell me about Amy.”

Sean didn’t take the hint. “Well, we miss you even if you don’t miss us,” he couldn’t help adding.

“I miss you, the people I mean. Well, a few of you. But I don’t miss the work. Things are interesting out here. I think I’m hooked.” Paige thought of the cases she’d worked since getting hired. A murder, a crazy religious cult, and then there was the twenty-something serial killer just getting started. “Anyway, I just caught my own sociopath last month. Things are crazy everywhere my friend. Tell me about Amy.”

“No shit?” Sean said, surprised. “I thought all was quiet in Mayberry.”

“Is there a reason you are avoiding my question?” Paige said irritably. “I’m beginning to regret telling the girl I would help her.”

“No,” Sean said immediately. “Nothing like that. I just prefer to keep my personal life... especially my kid sister, separate from my work. Talking to you...that’s work. It just feels awkward to talk about the squirt right after we discussed murder and mayhem.”

“I get it,” Paige said in understanding. “But I’ve got to know what I’m in for here. Is she off her rocker? Is she in denial? Is she grounded with good intuition? What?”

“Amy is as solid as they come,” Sean began. “If I wasn’t so busy, I already would have flown out there myself. To help look into all this, and to knock that pigheaded brother-in-law of mine over the head with a two-by-four. The only thing stopping me is that I know he loves her and he’s devastated. He was really looking forward to being a dad. I don’t think Jason knows how to cope any better than Amy does.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“I can understand that,” Paige considered. “Don’t get mad, but do you really think somebody stole the kid? Or do you think he passed away and Amy just can’t accept that reality?”

“Jason thinks he didn’t make it,” Sean admitted. “But then Jason is not the worldliest guy in the village.”

“You might want to explain that,” Paige smiled. “There are all kinds of clichés dancing through my brain. You know things about idiots and villages.”

“Nah,” Sean disagreed. “Nothing like that. Jason is actually a pretty intellectual guy. He’s just from a small town. Lived there all his life. He doesn’t think bad things happen in happy valley. Oh, he knows about serial killers and baby snatchers, but those things happen in the big city. Not out in Sterling, Utah. Not in a town so small everyone knows everyone.”

“We both know that’s not true,” Paige considered. “I mean, it’s actually easier for someone sinister to move into a small town, gain the trust of the locals and then take advantage of those too naïve to stop them.”

“Agreed,” Sean said soberly. “Which is why I think Amy might be correct. What she told me about the situation is unusual at best. But if you talked to her, you already know there are red flags popping up all over the place. It might just be my protective older brother surfacing or the agent in me, but that situation doesn’t pass the smell test.”

“I agree,” Paige was glad Sean was getting the same vibes she was. There wasn’t any one thing that jumped out as a smoking gun on this one. But, like he said, it didn’t pass the smell test.

“So, you gonna help her?” Sean finally asked.

“I’m going to try,” Paige hesitated. “None of it happened in my jurisdiction and she went to the locals, so now they have a report. Not that they plan to do anything about it, but it’s there. Before I can really dig in, I have to talk Jericho into backing me.”

“Jericho the boss?” Sean asked disappointed. He knew how things worked. She was more likely to get shot down than to get the go-ahead.

“Jericho is the Sheriff,” Paige answered. “And don’t give up on me yet. I’m going to inform him I owe you a favor and see if he’ll back me on this one. Then I’m going to charm him with my winning personality and convince him there’s something to this. Woman’s intuition, or mothers, or whatever. I’ve got this. Go take down a serial killer.”

“Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help,” Sean told her. “And you don’t owe me anything. If a favor is owed, I’m pretty sure I owe you.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“I’ll remember that,” Paige teased, then sobered. “But seriously Sean, I do owe you. If it wasn’t for you, I might not be here to help out your sister. Be careful, I know better than anyone just how quickly things can go south. Did they give you a decent back?”

“I was just doing my job and we both know you would have done the same for me,” Sean disagreed. “You do not owe me for that. And yeah, I’ve got Brinkley. We’re solid.”

Paige relaxed. Trent Brinkley and Sean Powell together made a formidable team. Her friends would be fine, she had to believe that. Her thoughts returned to the night Sean had saved her life. She wasn’t paying close enough attention and she’d walked right past the killer hiding in the shadows, tucked away ready to attack. He’d gotten behind her, placed her in a choke hold and nearly strangled her to death before Sean caught up to them and put a bullet between his eyes. The entire situation had taught Paige a valuable lesson and to top it off, she’d made a friend for life. “Good,” she finally said. “I’ll keep you posted on this end.”

“Thanks,” Sean said sincerely. “I know it’s not the way we typically do things, but I’d appreciate that.”

“Consider yourself in the loop,” she assured him. “Talk to you soon.”

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It was nearly four the following afternoon when Paige got a call from Dr. Blake Seaton. That conversation had been interesting. He was extremely suspicious of the clinic’s claim that Trevor Powell had passed away shortly after birth. The good doctor had checked the baby over quickly and when he left the room, Trevor was breathing on his own and appeared completely healthy. He wouldn’t go so far to accuse someone of kidnapping, but he too had called the mortuary and gotten the runaround from the caretaker.

“To be completely honest with you Detective, none of this makes any sense to me whatsoever,” Seaton confessed.

“I’m actually not... never mind,” Paige decided. Their department was too small to have designated detectives, but she’d go with it for now. “How often do you deliver there? At the clinic in Laurel Bluff?”

“Not frequently,” he confessed. “Like I said, I was covering for Doctor Montgomery that week. She had three deliveries that day, one the previous day and two the next. This was all in addition to my own patients. It was a busy week, which is why I left Amy and Jason in Nurse Raiskin’s care.”

“Okay,” Paige wrote that down. “So the nurse on duty, the one that took the baby was Raiskin?”

## Newborn Harvest

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“Right,” Seaton confirmed. “She seems competent enough.”

“But?” Paige pressed. “I feel a but coming...”

Seaton grinned. “Not actually a but. Nurse Raiskin is competent and professional, but her bedside manner leaves a lot to be desired. She’s not exactly Miss Congeniality.”

“Not a crime, but I’ll keep it mind,” Paige answered. “Let me ask you this...” she paused trying to figure out a way to ask without getting the proverbial *no comment due to HIPAA* response.

“You know I can’t tell you much, but go ahead.” Seaton pressed.

“I know,” Paige acknowledged. “I’m just wondering if there have been any other...let’s say suspicious incidents. Are there any other patients that lost a baby, a baby you believed to be healthy until after the birth?”

“Do you mean at that clinic?” Seaton asked, thinking.

“That clinic or any other clinic nearby,” Paige clarified.

“The only other situation was one of Bridget’s patients,” he mused.

“Who is Bridget?” Paige asked.

“Oh, sorry. Bridget is the doctor I was covering for. Bridget Montgomery. She works mostly out of the clinic there in Laurel Bluff, but she occasionally works out of the Women’s Clinic in Manti,” Seaton provided.

“And that’s the same doctor you were covering for when Amy had her baby, is that correct?” Paige asked.

“Yes,” Seaton agreed. “But I’m not saying I think Bridget had anything to do with this. If there even is *a this*. She’s been a colleague and a friend for over a decade. I trust her.”

“Okay,” Paige didn’t, but she wasn’t going to tell him that. “So, you delivered a baby for one of her patients. What was suspicious?”

“The parents...what were their names?” he hesitated. Paige could hear papers shuffling in the background. “Branson...Bradford...no, Brosnan. Sierra and Jade Brosnan. They had twins. A boy and a girl. Sierra had a tough pregnancy and was bedridden the month before she gave birth. She kept having Braxton Hicks and actually went into labor far too early. They were able to stop the labor, but that’s when Bridget insisted Sierra stay in bed. Anyway, she ultimately went into labor early and her babies were premature. Again, the birth took place at the clinic in Laurel Bluff and if I remember correctly, Olivia was the nurse then as well.”



## Newborn Harvest

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“Olivia?” Paige interrupted.

“Sorry, again. Yes, Olivia,” Seaton affirmed. “Nurse Olivia Raiskin. I believe she is the senior nurse at that facility. Well, in that unit anyway.”

*Coincidence?* Paige thought not. “So, those babies didn’t make it either?”

“Well, one did,” Seaton corrected. “The little boy. I heard later that evening that the little girl didn’t make it. When I checked into it, the chart said the baby suffered from IUGR.”

“Cop here, not a doctor,” Paige said. “English, please.”

“It’s a condition that is fairly common in twins. It causes one of the babies to grow slower than expected. I was told the babies organs were not fully developed due to the condition and the fact that the children were born prematurely. I believed they were both healthy in spite of the fact they were born early. I ordered them to be transferred to NICU due to their premature condition. I wanted them monitored for a couple days. I was told the little girl did not make it through the night. She supposedly suffocated because she could not get enough oxygen with her underdeveloped lungs.”

“But you didn’t buy it?” Paige inquired.

“I was surprised... let’s put it that way,” Seaton corrected. “Sierra was not my patient and she did have a history of problems. Learning one of the babies didn’t make it wasn’t exactly astonishing. But still... when I left, they seemed fine. Again, the little girl appeared to be okay. Otherwise, I would have taken a closer look myself. I was also busy that day, but it wasn’t nearly as chaotic as the day Amy delivered.”

“Anything else?” Paige asked. “I realize you have probably already disclosed more than you should have, but I do appreciate it.”

“I have had a bad feeling about this situation with Amy for some time now,” he admitted. “I don’t normally question nature. I mean, children die sometimes. Childbirth is dangerous, not nearly as dangerous as it was a hundred years ago, but things still happen. I just...” he considered. “I don’t know, something didn’t feel right and the more I looked into it, the worse I felt. I had forgotten about the twins until you asked. When Amy told me she’d found a detective to look into this for her, I decided to skim through my files. Which is why I just happened to have the Brosnan information on my desk. Detective Carter, do you really think something... well some kind of baby snatching enterprise is occurring here... in Manti? The whole thing just seems so farfetched and yet...” he stopped, not knowing what more to say.

“And yet,” Paige parroted. “I don’t know, but I intend to find out.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“Right,” Seaton took a deep breath. “Well, if there is anything more I can do... within the confines of the law that is, please don’t hesitate to call. I will help in any way I can.”

“I appreciate that,” Paige said before hanging up.

“You really think someone is stealing babies?” Gage asked.

“It’s starting to look that way,” Paige sat back and closed her eyes. She needed to think.

“You look stressed,” Gage observed.

“I am,” Paige grumbled. “I need something more, anything concrete. But I can’t go to the clinic until I have evidence. If I spook them, we may never get to the bottom of this.” Paige stared out the window and pondered. “I need to exhume the body of that baby,” she straightened. “Do I need a court order if I have permission from the parents?”

“Do you think you can get permission? I mean, I thought the hubby didn’t want anything to do with this?” Gage pointed out.

“Right,” Paige tried to think back to her academy days. What was the law here in Utah about digging up a grave? Sean might be able to help, but Sean was working a big case of his own. Catching a serial killer was more important. Well, until she had something more tangible that is.

“I’m pretty sure you have to have a court order anyway,” Gage added. “Ask Jericho, he’ll know. We don’t really exhume bodies here in Manti. Normally, once they’re in the ground...they stay there for all eternity.”

*Okay*, she needed a court order. So, how was she going to convince her boss, and a judge, that they should dig up the remains of a newborn baby? Inspiration hit and she dialed back her new favorite doctor.

“Doctor Seaton’s office,” came a friendly female voice.

“Hey,” Paige practically cut her off. “I need to speak to the doc. This is Deputy Carter again and it’s important.”

It only took a couple minutes for Dr. Seaton to pick up the line.

“Sorry to bother you again but I have another question,” Paige began.

“How can I help you?” he asked hesitantly.

“Who signed the death certificate?” she said bluntly. “I mean you were Amy’s doctor and you delivered the baby but you said you didn’t know he had passed away until the following

## Newborn Harvest

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week. According to Amy, the whole thing was fast-tracked so quickly there couldn't have been an autopsy. So, who signed off on the death?"

Blake Seaton frowned into the phone. "I have no idea."

Both of them remained silent, each contemplating the question.

"Give me five minutes," Seaton finally said. "I should be able to pull that information up in the system. I'll call you right back."

The phone went dead.

"This is getting interesting," Gage admitted. "That might be your way in."

"Huh?" Paige asked absently.

"No autopsy and the couple's primary doc didn't sign off," Gage told her. "That might be just the ticket you're looking for. If you're serious about getting that court order to exhume the body that is. I think you could make a case off just that, especially if Amy is willing to go along with it. The only snag is dear old dad. He might fight it if he's really against all this. He might not be too happy about digging up the body of his dead son."

"I know," Paige admitted. Her phone rang before she could go any further. "Did you find anything?"

Seaton laughed. "I thought you guys answered Sheriff's Office or Detective Carter speaking."

"You're killing me here," Paige practically whined.

"There's a problem with the death certificate," he admitted.

"What kind of problem?"

"It wasn't signed by a doctor. It was authorized by Nurse Raiskin," he added.

"Really?" Paige's mind went into overdrive.

"Can I assume you plan to exhume Trevor?" he asked.

"I'm thinking about it," Paige admitted.

"Jason won't be happy," he warned.

"I know," Paige agreed. "Any ideas?"

"Let me talk to him," he suggested.

## Newborn Harvest

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“How about we talk to them together,” she countered. “I have to be there, to explain the legal stuff, anyway. But I want their blessing before I take this to the DA. It’s going to go a long way if you, as their doctor, support this in addition to the parents.”

“Tomorrow afternoon? Say, two o’clock?” he asked. “I have a short appointment at one but I should be able to meet you at their ranch by two.”

“Two it is,” she agreed. “See you then.”

“You need a partner?” Gage asked.

Paige considered then nodded. “If you’re not busy, I think I could use your help.” She glanced at Jericho’s door. “Now, I have to go fill in the boss.”

Gage laughed. “Yeah, well...good luck with that.” He stood and left the office.

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The following afternoon Paige, Dr. Seaton, and Gage stood on the Powell’s front porch. Gage reached up and rang the bell. It took nearly a minute before a young, good looking man opened the door. He spotted the two deputies in uniform then Dr. Seaton and frowned. “Can I help you?”

“Hello, Jason.” Dr. Seaton began. “We need to speak with you and your wife, is Amy available?”

Jason’s frown deepened. “What’s this about?”

“I’m afraid it’s not something we can explain until we have both of you together,” Paige offered. “I’m Deputy Paige Carter and this is my partner, Deputy Gage Clayton. Do you mind if we come in?”

“Yeah, I kind of do, but it doesn’t sound like I have a choice,” Jason said moving away from the door to let them inside.

Amy stepped from the kitchen and worry immediately covered her face. She turned an unhealthy shade of white.

Dr. Seaton was across the room in an instant. He placed an arm around Amy’s waist for support and guided her to the sofa. She settled in and chewed on her bottom lip.

“Did you do this?” Jason accused.

“Amy did not do anything,” Gage scowled. “We are here on official business. Now, Mr. Powell, I’d appreciate it if you took a seat. We have something important to discuss with you.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“Did you find something?” Amy asked quietly.

“You did do this,” Jason glared at her, accusingly.

“Amy is the sister of a good friend of mine,” Paige interjected. “Sean spoke to me about your situation and I agreed to help out an old friend.”

“You should mind your own business,” Jason grumbled.

“I disagree,” Paige said narrowing her eyes at the man. “You see, Sean saved my life once. So when he asked me to do him a favor, when he asked me to step in and help out his sister, because he can’t get away himself, I had no other choice but to say yes.”

“Sean had no business contacting you. This is my life and my family. She’s my wife. That was my son. He’s dead, can’t you all just accept that? Can you just let me grieve in peace? What good will it do to look back?” He turned to Amy in challenge. “This is all your fault. I want nothing to do with this...whatever it is.”

Jason stood and stomped into the kitchen and out the back door. Dr. Seaton stood to go after him, but Paige waved him off. “I’ve got this,” she looked at Amy. “Give me just a minute. I know you’re anxious to hear why we came by today, but we really need to resolve this first.”

Amy gave a quick nod and brushed tears from her eyes. Paige took a deep breath and went in search of the grieving father. She found him on the back patio staring into space. Paige slowly moved in next to him and settled into one of the patio chairs.

“I’m not interested in anything you have to say,” he grumbled, never looking at her.

“Well, that’s too bad,” Paige said casually. “You’re going to hear it, anyway.”

“You have no idea how difficult this is,” he shook his head. “I need to put this behind me.”

“You’re right,” Paige agreed. “I have absolutely no idea what it’s like to lose a child. I do however, know what it’s like to lose a mother. My mom, she was murdered when I was still in high school. I didn’t think I needed answers, either. I ran. The instant I graduated, I got as far away from this hick town as I could get. I told myself I’d never look back. Then, I spent the next decade...looking back.”

“What’s your point?” Jason asked, not wanting to be interested, but Paige knew he was.

“My point is that we all grieve in our own way. You want to shut out the world and blindly move forward. Amy, she needs to dig. She needs answers. She needs to know, not believe but know, that her baby died in that hospital. And ultimately, so do you. Amy told me that before all this happened you two were madly in love.”

“We’re still in love,” Jason said absently.

## Newborn Harvest

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“Are you?”

Jason bolted upright. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Paige shrugged. “I don’t know. What I saw in there... that was far from a loving display. Two people as madly in love as Amy said you were should be dealing with this together. They should be talking it out. They should try to understand the needs of their partner. They should support those needs, even if it causes them pain.” Paige considered her next words carefully. “Did you know that Amy thinks you blame her?”

“That’s not true,” Jason disagreed. “Amy knows I love her and there was nothing she could have done to prevent this.”

“Have you told her that?”

“I don’t have to,” Jason shook his head. “She knows.”

“You’re wrong,” Paige leaned forward and placed her elbows on her knees. “Amy told me you blame her for losing your son. She needs answers because she thinks she’s losing you, too.”

Jason scrubbed his hands over his face. Was that true? Did his wife think he was going to leave her? Did she think he blamed her? Was that why she needed answers so badly, to prove to him she didn’t cause this? “I don’t know how to do this,” he admitted. “When they told me my son had died, it almost killed me. I sat in that room for hours waiting for Amy to wake up so I could shatter her world, too. We’re both broken and I don’t know how to put the pieces back together,” he inhaled a long deep breath. “And her incessant need to deny the truth is just making things harder.”

“Jason,” Paige said reaching out to touch his knee. “I’m sorry I have to be the one to tell you this, but Amy might be right.”

Jason’s head shot up and he stared at her with wide, wild eyes. “You think my son is alive?”

“I think there is a very good possibility that he is,” she corrected. “There are some... inconsistencies in the facts. There are some red flags that are extremely suspicious. That’s what we came here to talk to the two of you about today. Do you think you could come back in and listen to what I’ve found with an open mind?”

Jason stood and moved to the railing. He stared out into the open field for several minutes. To Paige, it felt like half an hour before he finally turned, gave a brief nod and stepped back into the house. He moved to the sofa and sat next to Amy, taking her hand in his as he waited for the news they came to share.

## Newborn Harvest

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“I’ve been looking into the situation... the circumstances surrounding the death of your son,” Paige began.

“Wait,” Amy raised her palm up in a motion to stop. “Before we do this, Jason you need to know I did go to Paige. Sean sent me and she didn’t agree to help until after she talked to him, but I did do this. I’m going to be honest with you, even if that means I lose you. I am going to be completely honest with you. I need answers and Sean thought Paige could help me find them. He sent me to her, but I went.”

Jason studied his wife in shock. She did think he blamed her. She thought he was going to leave her? He shifted slightly and moved forward resting his forehead against hers. “Baby, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize...” he swallowed. “I didn’t know you thought I blamed you. I don’t. I love you. I need you. I’ve been so swallowed up by grief and self-pity that I didn’t realize what I was doing to you. I do not blame you for this. I need you to hear me loud and clear on that...I don’t blame you. You are my world, I could never leave you. Especially not for doing something that might get us answers.”

Amy threw her arms around her husband and wept. “I know you are hurting. I know. But I can’t let this go. I have to be sure.”

Jason pulled Amy against his chest and faced his guests. “Tell us what you found and what you want. I’m smart enough to know you’re here for a reason. What is it?”

“I have to warn you, you might not like it,” Dr. Seaton advised.

“Tell us,” Amy sniffled.

“The events surrounding the supposed death of your child are suspicious.” Paige glanced at the doctor then continued. “Dr. Seaton delivered a strong, healthy baby boy that night. He did a cursory exam before turning your child over to the nurse. He was taken completely by surprise when he was advised that Trevor didn’t survive. So surprised that he did a little digging himself. Nothing makes sense...to any of us.”

“What kind of digging?” Jason asked. Had Amy been right all along and he’d just retreated into himself as a means to cope with the loss? Was he the one in denial, not her?

“I studied the charts,” Dr. Seaton began. “The cause of death was suspicious to me. I called the mortuary and I too was denied access to their records. That alone is unheard of. I questioned the reason the two of you were not allowed to see the body.”

“Saying goodbye is part of the healing process. For the mortuary to deny you, the parent’s, access to the body is unheard of,” Paige put in.

## Newborn Harvest

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“But that’s just...” Jason considered. “What if they were just insensitive and uncaring? Maybe inept. That doesn’t mean Trevor is still out there somewhere.”

“There’s more,” Dr. Seaton said hesitantly. “Some I can’t tell you because I need to preserve another couple’s privacy and we haven’t spoken to them in depth yet. But there is more, some things that are just too coincidental to be well... a coincidence.”

“There are other parents, another couple that lost a baby the same way?” Amy asked.

“Yes,” Dr. Seaton affirmed. “Another delivery of mine. Another child that seemed completely healthy but the next day was listed as deceased.”

Jason frowned. “Is someone stealing babies and the medical staff is telling us our baby died? Is that what you are saying?”

“We don’t have any concrete proof of that, yet.” Paige studied the couple. Jason seemed calm, how would he react to her request?

“And that’s why you are here,” Jason said in understanding. “You want some kind of proof?”

“We want to get a court order to exhume your baby’s body,” Paige said softly.

Jason jumped from the couch. “You what?”

“Jason,” Dr. Seaton cut in. “I didn’t sign the death certificate.”

Jason furrowed his brows in confusion. “What does that mean?”

“It means that either the body has to have an autopsy or a doctor with knowledge of the condition has to sign off on the death certificate. Neither one of those happened,” Dr. Seaton explained.

“Who signed it?” Amy asked.

“One of the nurses,” Dr. Seaton answered calmly.

“Then why is there a problem?” Jason pushed.

“Because a nurse does not have the authority to sign the certificate. I should have been contacted immediately. I should have examined little Trevor. I should have been the one to decide cause of death and sign off on it so an autopsy wasn’t required. I did not,” Dr. Seaton explained. “I wasn’t even notified of the death.”



## Newborn Harvest

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“Do we have to agree?” Amy asked. She wasn’t sure she could do it. She wasn’t sure she could look into the coffin and actually see her baby’s body. But then again, wasn’t that the closure she needed? The final step to prove her baby really was dead...or that he was alive?

“No,” Paige said soberly. “I’m not going to lie. I have to get a court order to exhume a body and if the baby’s physician and the parents both agree, it’s going to be a lot easier to get a judge to sign off on this. But no, you don’t have to agree.”

“Do it,” Jason said immediately. Amy gaped at him in shocked surprise. “Jason?”

He moved back to the couch and sat next to his wife, taking her hands in his. “This is the closure we need. This is the answer. Either we see our baby lying there in that coffin or we know he’s out there...somewhere. And, we find him. Either way, it’s going to give us the answers we need. You need to do this, baby. We need it. I think you might need it more than I do, but we both have to know. I haven’t supported you these past two months. What if you are right? What if our baby is alive and someone else has him? Then some stranger is raising our little boy. I want him back. And if not, at least we’ll know.”

Amy looked at Paige. “Do it.”

Paige produced a document for the couple to sign, she’d gotten it directly from James Tolman, Sanpete County’s DA. He’d looked at her like she was crazy but finally told her if the doctor and the parents were willing to sign, he’d see what he could get from Judge Potter. He warned her to expect disappointment but Paige was an optimist. With any luck, she’d have her order by the end of the day.

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Paige pulled into her driveway and climbed from the car. She didn’t have her court order, but she was making someone mighty nervous. She still wondered how the medical staff had found out. Was there some kind of tracking system that showed Dr. Seaton had accessed the clinic’s system? In time she would know, but right now she just hoped they hadn’t gotten so spooked they’d bolt. She needed them here if she was going to locate the Powell baby.

After the phone call she’d received, she had no doubt they were onto something. She was ninety-nine percent sure little Trevor was still alive and he’d been sold. That was the only thing that made any sense to her. Dr. Bryant Morse had been pleasant enough. Pleasant but demanding. He wanted answers. He wanted to know why Dr. Seaton had accessed their system and he wanted to know why his colleague had been spotted with the police... not just any police...Paige, a deputy from Manti.

Paige grinned remembering her response. The nosy man hadn’t taken too kindly to her suggestion that he mind his own business unless he wanted to be brought in for questioning

## Newborn Harvest

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himself. Questioning about what, he'd asked. Well, if he kept sniffing around, he just might find out. Paige started for the stairs then remembered the mail. She hadn't gotten it for two days. She considered waiting one more day but knew if she did, the mailman would hound her for weeks. She slipped back out the door and walked barefoot up the sidewalk. As she pulled out the large stack of mostly junk, she frowned. Then, jumped about a mile when she felt the hand on her shoulder. She jerked around to see Dax frowning as he studied the pile.

"What is that?" he reached for the stiff page.

"Don't touch," Paige warned as she balanced it on top of her other envelopes.

"It looks like one of those ransom notes, you know the one's in the movies," Dax considered. "You don't have a cat do you?" he asked as they entered her house.

"What? No, I don't have a cat," she looked at him like he'd lost his mind.

Dax shrugged. "I just thought maybe someone stole your cat and was sending you a ransom note with instructions on how to get it back."

"Funny," Paige said unamused. She dropped the mail onto her kitchen table and moved around the counter to retrieve two butter knives. With one she held the page in place, with the other she slowly unfolded the note.

*Paige Carter...  
Leave Now!  
You're not wanted in this town.  
If you don't leave, you will regret it.*

"So..." Dax drawled. "You have a secret admirer."

"Admirer?" Paige said with raised brows.

"Sure," Dax shrugged. "Didn't you ever have a little boy kick you at recess only to find out he had a little crush and didn't know how to tell you?"

Paige rolled her eyes. "I think whoever did this, has long outgrown the playground."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Dax countered. "I mean seriously? They clearly have never heard of a computer. Plus, they're childish enough to enjoy craft time. I think we stopped doing that in the second grade." He took another look at the note. "Yeah, that's about right. Second grade. So, what did you do to piss off an eight-year-old?"

"I'm surprised you're not taking this more seriously." She turned to study him. "Aren't you usually the guy screaming for me to call the police?"

## Newborn Harvest

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“I thought you were the police,” he said casually. He probably should take this more seriously than he was considering all the trouble Paige had experienced since moving here. It just struck him as ridiculous and childish. His gut told him it wasn’t the same person. So, who would do this? “A case maybe?” he suggested.

Paige frowned. She couldn’t see a doctor doing something like this. Nurse Baby-Stealer? She might do it. Paige hadn’t met Olivia Raiskin yet, but the way people talked about her made Paige think petty, vindictive and childish. “I don’t know,” she finally told him. “I am working a case, but it’s a little early for threats.”

Dax moved to lean against the counter. “I assume you are going to see about prints.”

“Sure,” Paige said as she carefully slid the page into an evidence bag. “But, I’ll be surprised if I find any.”

Dax grinned. “I don’t know, can’t you forensics people accomplish miracles. Like pull a print off the glue holding those letters onto the page or something?”

Paige flipped him off as she moved to place the evidence in her work bag. “This isn’t Hollywood, Ace. I’m afraid we live in the real world and whoever did this, probably made sure they didn’t leave such an obvious clue for me to follow. I’m sure they wore gloves.”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “Probably.”

Paige moved to stand in front of her neighbor. “Why are you here, anyway?”

“Welcome home to you, too,” Dax smiled.

Paige rolled her eyes again. She seemed to do that a lot around Dax Hamilton. “It’s late, I know you already ate dinner so what brings you to my humble abode this late in the evening?”

Dax shrugged. He didn’t have an answer for that. He’d been relaxing on his front porch when Paige pulled up. He’d watched her enter her front door and was surprised when she returned only a few minutes later. He hadn’t really thought about it, just automatically stood and went to greet her at the mailbox. “It’s a nice night, I was enjoying the evening while I still can.”

Paige accepted that. He must have been on his front porch and she hadn’t noticed. “If I remember correctly, winters are pretty severe out here.”

Dax shrugged again. “That depends, I mean you lived back east. They have winter, sometimes worse than out west from what I’ve heard.”

“True,” Paige said relaxing into a kitchen chair. “But I really didn’t notice because I mostly walked everywhere. I think it’s going to take some adjusting...you know, driving through a blizzard to get to a barking dog complaint.”

## Newborn Harvest

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Dax smiled. "Rough life, but someone's gotta do it." He pushed away from the counter. "Sweet dreams, I'm going to bed."

"It's only like..." she looked at the clock. "A quarter after ten. I think you just lost your man card, princess."

"Goodnight, Paige."

"Seriously?" she complained. "What? You need your beauty sleep?"

"My man card is just fine. Real men get up early and...oh, I don't know...work," he grumbled as he stepped onto the porch.

"Hey, don't go away mad. Just go away," she added softly. She was getting entirely too comfortable around the hot guy next door.

"And here I was thinking I'd bring you breakfast in the morning," he closed the door softly and never turned back.

Paige rushed to the front door and yanked it open. "I have coffee!"

Dax laughed. "I'll be here at seven."

Paige climbed the stairs and made her way to bed. Now that Dax was gone, she realized she was exhausted. Her thoughts returned to that letter. Exactly how many enemies did she have in this town? Her reaction was basically the same as her neighbors. No big deal. She didn't think it was her anonymous nemesis. Whoever had been harassing her since she'd arrived in town, had escalated to violence when he struck her in the back of the head and stole her police car. This person was passive aggressive and, in her opinion, petty. Seriously, a cutout magazine note threatening her and telling her to leave town. Did anyone really believe that was going to work? She slid beneath the covers and grinned. Apparently, someone did. It only took a few minutes for Paige to fall into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Next door, Dax shut off his lights and climbed into bed. He was spending entirely too much time with his sexy cop neighbor. But, he couldn't help it. He frequently found himself waiting on his front porch at the end of the day wondering when she'd return and what excuse he could use to just say hi. He hadn't felt this way in years, he scowled and pounded his pillow. And look where that had gotten him. He locked the door on that particular memory the minute it surfaced. He was not going to reminisce about the nightmares of the past tonight...or ever if had any say in it. He tossed and turned for nearly an hour before he drifted into a restless and troubled sleep.

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## Newborn Harvest

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Gage looked up when Paige stepped through the door. "Tolman called," he warned.

"What'd he say?" she wanted to know.

"No idea," Gage shrugged. "He insisted on talking to Jericho."

The sheriff chose that moment to step out of his office. "Paige, grab your coffee. I need you in my office. Now."

Paige shot a glance at Gage then rushed to the break area, filled her cup and headed for the gallows. She settled into Jericho's uncomfortable chair and waited.

"Tolman is not happy," he began. He turned to continue and spotted the evidence bag. "What's that?"

Paige looked down, surprised she still had the bag in her hand. "I'm not sure," she said hesitantly.

"Hand it over," he ordered holding out his hand.

Paige slowly handed him the bag and waited.

Jericho frowned. "Does anyone like you? Besides me, of course," he grinned.

Paige shook her head. "Seriously, who would do that? I'm kind of stumped."

Jericho considered. "I don't think it's the same guy. This strikes me as a woman's doing?"

"Now that sounds sexist to me," Paige grumbled, offended.

"No," he shook his head. "It's observant. You steal anyone's boyfriend lately?"

"Are you seriously asking me about my sex life? Because I think there are laws against that," Paige teased.

"No," Jericho's cheeks went red. "I do not want to know about sex. I said boyfriend, not... partner."

Paige laughed out loud. "No, I haven't stolen any boyfriends lately. But I'm glad you agree, I don't think it's the same guy. I'm not going to worry about that," she pointed to the bag. "Just dust for prints and book it. If anything else comes up, I'll take it more seriously. What did Tolman say?"

## Newborn Harvest

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Jericho sat and sighed. “He got the court order, for both graves. He wasn’t happy about it though. He thinks we should have run things past him or Stan before we went talking to grieving parents.”

“I didn’t go talk to anyone, Jericho. Amy came to me. So did the Brosnan’s. Dr. Seaton contacted them, but I had nothing to do with that. It’s not my fault they immediately drove to my office and wanted answers. It was Sierra and Jade that insisted their child’s gravesite be added to the court order. I hope you told him we did not seek out anyone involved in this.”

“I did,” Jericho assured her. “And that’s the only reason he went along with it. He’s up for re-election next year. We’re only getting his cooperation because he’s afraid of bad publicity. If he went against those two couples and it hit the news...or worse, the grapevine, it might hurt his chances for re-election. I do have to say, we were both a little shocked when Steven signed the order so quickly.”

Paige was grinning from ear to ear. She was onto something, she just knew it. And she wasn’t surprised Judge Steven Potter had approved her request. It wasn’t her first rodeo after all. She’d written countless requests for warrants and court orders during her time with the FBI. So far, she hadn’t been turned down once. You just had to know how to word it, a few strategically placed adjectives and the grumpiest judge in the land would say yes in a heartbeat. The secret was convincing them you had enough probable cause. One carefully worded document and they wouldn’t dare say no. Paige studied her boss. “So, what’s the plan? I assume our esteemed District Attorney wants to be involved from this point forward.”

“He does,” Jericho pushed a folder in her direction. “He emailed me those. He wants you to answer every question before three o’clock this afternoon.”

“What is this?” Paige asked, flipping open the top flap.

“He’s dotting every I and crossing every T, I suppose,” Jericho answered. “I read through them, he just wants to make sure you have covered your bases. He doesn’t want any surprises. And he won’t contact the Powell’s or the Brosnan’s until he reads your answers. And before you ask...he won’t even arrange for the backhoe until he contacts the parents. So,” Jericho glanced pointedly at the door. “You should probably get started.”

Paige stood and left the room. She hated politics and this...whatever this was, reeked of politics.

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“Olivia,” Lucy sighed. “I don’t care about your excuses. We told the Quinn’s they would have their baby boy before the end of the month.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“I realize that, but with that nosy cop and Dr. Goody Two-Shoes looking into things, we need to fade into the background for a while. The Quinn’s will just have to be patient.”

Lucy waited, hoping the silence would portray just how much she disagreed with the nurse’s assessment of the situation.

“Are you there?” Olivia asked.

“I’m here,” Lucy said coolly.

*Ugh*, Olivia wanted to scream. She knew she’d been paid well to take risks, but this was too much. If another baby came up with an obscure terminal illness that hadn’t been detected in the womb this soon after the Powell baby, while Dr. Seaton was snooping around...well, they just might be in trouble. How much did the cops really know? She hadn’t gotten anything from Dr. Morse. Apparently the cop had scared him. He was refusing to get involved. In fact, he was now refusing to see Olivia in any capacity. Privately or professionally. So much for their special connection. Clearly, there was a reason Morse was still single. Well, if Spencer and Lucy Fonseca thought she was going to take the fall for their million dollar enterprise, they were more delusional than she originally believed.

“You said the woman was close, how close?” Lucy pressed.

“I have no idea,” Olivia barked. She wasn’t some baby diviner.

“Guess,” Lucy insisted. “The Quinn’s have requested an update.”

“Here’s an update,” Olivia snapped. “Have your own crummy kid.”

“Watch it, Olivia.” Lucy was at her wit’s end with the obstinate woman. She would not tolerate this kind of insubordination. Olivia Raiskin worked for her, not the other way around.

“Fine,” Olivia bit out. “According to the records the baby is past due but the parents are refusing to induce. That works in our favor. We’ll list respiratory problems. The kid has been in there forty-two weeks already. I may not have to make this one up, the longer he goes, the more likely there will be problems.”

“You better hope they’re not serious,” Lucy warned.

“I’m afraid that is not something I can control,” Olivia said smugly. “I’ll call you when I have an update.”

“Still no word?” Spencer asked when his wife hung up the phone.

“No,” Lucy fell onto the couch next to her husband. “And that woman is getting out of control. Can you believe she wanted to call this off? I mean after what we’ve paid her and she wants to crawl into a hole and hide.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“I know you don’t like her. You never have, but we need her,” Spencer put his arm around his wife and kissed the top of her head. “I don’t like her either. But, we have people counting on us. You know how it feels, the hope then the disappointment and finally the desperation. We swore we were going to help those who can’t help themselves. Our mission hasn’t changed and to do that mission we need Olivia Raiskin.”

“We hired her because she’s greedy and selfish. We thought she didn’t have any boundaries; no scruples. We were wrong,” Lucy sighed. “She has boundaries. They just fall into the personal protection category. She was hired to take risks and the minute she’s faced with a little old obstacle, she wants to bail.”

“We’re not bailing,” Spencer assured her. “We promised Lynk and Elza their own baby boy and we are going to deliver a baby boy. We can’t afford to fail on this one. The Quinn’s have contacts, connections. They are not the kind of people you disappoint.”

“I agree,” Lucy settled closer to her husband. “Now, you just have to convince that nasty employee of ours that she needs to stay the course. Next time, it’s your turn to deal with her.”

Spencer frowned. He hated dealing with Olivia. She was a necessary evil, but when it came down to it...the woman was evil. And selfish. He might be able to use that to his advantage. But, no matter the price... they were going to provide Lynk and Elza Quinn the precious baby boy they had wanted for years.

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“Paige,” Dr. Seaton said urgently. “I need you to get to the clinic immediately.”

“I’m a little busy right now,” she replied as she watched the first casket being raised. Her heart gave a sharp pang and she had to swallow hard.

“I just found out there’s another couple. They were notified earlier today their baby didn’t survive,” he whispered.

“What?” Paige turned and briskly walked to her vehicle.

“I’m having a difficult time getting the details,” he admitted. “I haven’t exactly been subtle and the staff here doesn’t seem to trust me. But, I overheard one of the nurses. She was visibly upset and couldn’t understand how such a healthy baby boy had passed away unexpectedly like that.”

“Like what?” Paige asked as she turned the key to start the engine. She frowned when the passenger door opened and Sheriff Walters slid in. “Hang on a minute.”

“There’s no time to argue,” Jericho motioned for her to proceed. “Gage and James have things covered here. If I’m reading you correctly, there’s been another incident. I can help with



## Newborn Harvest

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Chief Beckett. Timothy's a reasonable man, but he's going to need an explanation. I can handle him while you figure out what's going on at that clinic."

Paige pulled away from the cemetery and grabbed her phone. "Dr. Seaton, you still there?"

"I am," he had regained his composure now that he knew the police were on the way. "I heard what the sheriff said about Timothy Beckett. For what it's worth, I agree. I don't know him personally, but in a professional capacity he's always been very reasonable."

"You were about to tell me how the baby died," she reminded him.

"Official story is respiratory problems brought on by a prolonged pregnancy," he moved into a small waiting room and shut the door, giving him complete privacy for the moment.

"Is that possible?" Paige wondered. She knew very little about pregnancy risks and childbirth.

"Possible, but not probable." Blake Seaton settled into a chair. "There are risks associated with a prolonged pregnancy just like there are risks if you go into labor prematurely. However, they are typically easy to overcome."

"So, this is another suspicious death involving a newborn at the same clinic?" she surmised.

"Exactly," Blake said solemnly. "I have to say, at this point, I have no doubt someone is taking these babies."

"You're that sure?" Paige frowned.

"I am," he answered as he looked up and spotted Nurse Raiskin. He casually slid the phone onto the chair, leaving the conversation open on purpose.

"Dr. Seaton," Olivia said briskly. "I was wondering if I could have a word with you."

"Sure," he said, hoping he appeared nonchalant and unconcerned.

"I noticed you accessed the file on Rachel and Jack Hulbert. Can I ask why?" she was glaring at him as if she had a right to question his authority.

"I wonder Ms. Raiskin, why are you so interested in my activities at this clinic?" Seaton countered.

"I'm not sure what you mean," Raiskin said defensively. "I was just adding some information and saw you had accessed the file. Since the Hulbert's are not your patients, it seemed unprofessional for you to be looking at their personal information. I'm just trying to decide if I should go to the administration on this."

## Newborn Harvest

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“I think that’s an excellent idea,” he stood and retrieved his phone. “Let’s go now. I saw Charlotte heading to her office about twenty minutes ago.”

Olivia got that deer in the headlight look momentarily before she regained her composure. “That’s not necessary.” She backed away from him. “I’m sure you had a reason for your actions.” She gave a nervous laugh. “And really, it’s none of my business what files a doctor accesses, right?”

“Do you think he can keep her occupied until we arrive?” Jericho asked Paige, who had switched the phone to speaker the minute she realized the baby stealing nurse had confronted her doctor.

“No,” Paige shook her head. “I think Olivia Raiskin is going to hightail it out of that clinic as fast her little legs will carry her.”

“I agree,” Jericho sighed and pulled out his phone.

“Who are you calling?”

“Timothy,” Jericho said placing the cell next to his ear. “I want him to meet us at the clinic.”

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Paige pulled into a stall next to the handicapped spaces. She was as close to the front doors as she could get. Jericho had affirmed that the local chief was going to meet them at the check-in counter. The instant she stepped through the doors, she spotted him. And Chief Beckett did not look happy.

“Jericho,” he scowled.

“Timothy,” Walters said with a half grin. “So, it’s going to be like this then?”

“I understand you have been working a case in my jurisdiction for some time now. Why exactly did I just hear about it tonight?” the chief demanded.

“Is there someplace a little more private we could talk?” Jericho said, placing a hand on the chief’s arm. “And maybe we could stop yelling, I think everyone including the north wing heard your growl.”

The three of them stepped into an office off the main waiting area.

“Explain,” Beckett said lowering himself into a chair.

## Newborn Harvest

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Paige was about to take a seat when her phone rang. She glanced down and saw it was Gage. “I need to take this,” she nodded to Jericho so he’d know it was the call they’d been waiting for.

“Well?” she answered, knowing Gage would laugh and call her on it. He didn’t laugh.

“The casket is, how do I put this?” he paused. “Not empty, but it does not have a deceased baby inside.”

“What’s inside?” Paige asked, perplexed. “Wait, are we still talking about the Powell casket?”

“Yeah,” Gage affirmed. “They have moved to the Brosnan site now, but they only started a few minutes ago. Paige, it looks like someone placed a large dog inside instead of a baby.”

“What do you mean looks like?” Paige pressed. “It has only been a couple months. You should be able to tell what’s buried in there.”

“Well,” he let out a frustrated breath. “That’s the thing. The animal was older than the baby. I’d say by up to a month. It’s messed with the timeline. It’s obvious it wasn’t buried the whole time so, the decomposition is off. Most likely it was a dog, but it could have been a coyote.”

“As in roadkill?” she was horrified at the lack of reverence these people had. How was she supposed to break the news to the Powell’s? She had to call Sean.

“Exactly,” Gage grumbled. “We’re sending it to the lab to figure it out.”

“Okay,” Paige sighed. “Okay, well stay there. I’ll update the sheriff. Let me know what happens with the Brosnan’s.” She hung up the phone and immediately called Sean.

“It’s about time,” he grumbled. “My sister is a wreck. Please tell me you have news.”

“Not anything good,” Paige leaned against the sterile wall. “Sean, we did the right thing. Your sister, the Brosnan’s... they didn’t need to see this.”

“See what?” tension was evident in his voice.

“There is not a baby in the casket,” she admitted softly.

“What’s in there?” Sean was barely holding onto his temper.

“Gage thinks a dog, or maybe a coyote,” she ran her fingers through her hair. “I don’t have much time. The sheriff is trying to smooth things over with the local chief and another baby has mysteriously died...and I say that with absolutely no conviction that the baby is actually dead.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“I get it, things are developing and it’s a little chaotic.” Sean understood how things went. “I appreciate the call, now I just have to figure out what to tell Amy.”

“I promised to keep you in the loop,” Paige stated. “But we need to keep this quiet... at least until we can figure out what’s going on here at the clinic tonight. I don’t know if they’ve already snuck the kid out or if he’s still here, but the new parents have enough to deal with. They don’t need to find out about this new development. Sean, I know you need to call Amy but will you wait until I talk to Jericho and we decide what to tell her?”

“I’ll try,” he agreed. “But the kid is calling every ten minutes so you are running out of time. I can’t lie to her. Get me something, I’ll follow your lead. I trust you, Paige. You know what’s best. This is your investigation and I won’t get in the way.”

Paige slowly made her way back to the room that contained her boss and the pissed off police chief. She slid the door open to four eyes waiting for her update. She filled them in, then admitted she’d talked to Sean. “He’s waiting for us to tell him what we want the family to know. He can’t lie to Amy and he has to tell her something.”

There was a brief discussion then Paige was sent out of the room to contact Sean. He was to tell his sister she had been right. That the baby was not buried in that grave but he would need to keep all other details to himself. When she stepped back into the room, Chief Beckett addressed her.

“I don’t like that you kept us out of this,” he began. “But I understand why. You were doing a friend a favor and my guy had already shut them down. From here on out, it’s a joint operation. I have a team on their way. We are going to search every nook and cranny in this place. If that baby is still here, we will find him.”

“Okay,” she turned to Jericho. “And the mortuary? We need to deal with the undertaker before he can destroy evidence.”

“I already took care of that,” the sheriff assured her. “Dean is on his way with a team. I’ve talked to Judge Steven Potter personally. He said Stan is working on a search warrant as we speak. He’s just waiting for the final paperwork and has agreed to sign off on it. It’s an eWarrant so we won’t have any delays. Once Stan completes the paperwork, Steven will be waiting. He’ll approve it and Dean will have it in hand almost immediately.”

Paige smiled. “I love it when a plan comes together.”

“Save the celebration for later,” Timothy growled. “We still have a baby to find and an administrator to convince we really do need access to everything.”

“I’m going to go find Blake Seaton,” Paige said, opening the door. “I think he might be able to help on that front.”

# Newborn Harvest

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It was nearly midnight when Paige pulled into her driveway. She was tired, frustrated and grumpy. They hadn't located the baby. The Hulbert's were confused and angry. Amy and Jason had arrived shortly after the police spoke with the most recent victims. They were a great help. Paige was amazed at the difference in the Powell's. They were a united front now. A force to be reckoned with, actually. They'd waited patiently outside the door, but the instant Paige stepped out of the room, Amy jumped to her feet. "They need us," she'd declared and Paige agreed.

The results of the exhumation of the Brosnan's casket was the same as the Powell's. Some animal had been placed inside. Looked like a pig. Hal Cramer, the caretaker at the mortuary, was now in police custody and all of his property had been seized or secured. A crew was going over his books at this very moment. It was a family business, but from all appearances, it looked like Hal was the only one involved.

Paige slowly made her way to the mailbox and cursed when she opened it up and spotted a new note inside. She was too tired to deal with this crap tonight. She used her gas bill to slide the note out of the box and onto the daily junk mail. Once inside, she repeated the whole butter knife routine until the paper was spread flat on her table inside a clear evidence bag.

*Paige Carter...  
I warned you.  
Leave!!!  
This is your last warning!*

"Seriously?" Paige dropped the bag onto the table and slowly made her way to her room. That nonsense was just going to have to wait until morning. Maybe it was an eight-year-old. They obviously never passed English.

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Dax knocked on the back door and waited. He knew Paige was in the kitchen, he'd spotted her light. Seconds later she was twisting the deadbolt and pushing open her French doors. "Why so cheerful?"

"Long day," she said shoving the plastic bag toward her neighbor. "And to top it all off, I got another love note."

Dax set the paper sack containing a hearty breakfast of Egg McMuffins and those little hash brown things he loved so much on the counter and moved to read Paige's latest gift. "Was it in your mailbox?"

## Newborn Harvest

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“Yeah,” Paige pulled the sack from the counter and grabbed a ham and egg delight. She loved these things. “I found it last night.”

“When did you finally get in?” he asked grabbing his sausage and egg breakfast and two hash browns.

“Late,” Paige said, brushing crumbs from her face. “This one is... I can’t even think of an appropriate adjective. I think people are stealing kids and filling their coffins with dead animals,” she scowled at her blunder. “Don’t repeat that. It’s supposed to be a secret. I just made about the worst rookie mistake of the century.”

“Who am I going to tell?” Dax asked. He liked that she felt comfortable enough around him to blurt things out he shouldn’t know. He wondered if it would last when she learned he had regular check-ins with Nathan Porter.

“I’m serious, Dax.” Paige stood, walked to the counter and poured two cups of coffee. “We haven’t even told the parents what was inside. They just know it wasn’t their babies.”

“I think sick is the adjective you were searching for.”

Paige shook her head. “No, it’s worse than that. And they took another one, right under our noses.”

Dax frowned. “Last night?”

“Yesterday,” she corrected. “They were gone before Dr. Seaton found out and called me. So we were interviewing the new grieving parents, the clinic staff, searching high and low for the missing child and at the same time we were exhuming two caskets... that didn’t contain babies. It was a very, very long day.”

“Sorry about the mailbox gift,” Dax sipped his coffee. “The timing on that really sucked.”

“I don’t have time to deal with it right now, I have three babies to find.” She stood and gathered up her garbage and moved to leave the room. *What am I doing?* “Sorry, thanks for breakfast. I have to run. You’re welcome to stay, but lock up will ya?”

“Nah,” Dax stood and grabbed the remaining breakfast bag. “I’ve got work, too.” They walked out together. Paige climbed into her car and paused to watch Dax walk back to his house. She gave herself a little shake before she put her vehicle in reverse and backed out of the driveway. She was liking that man way too much these days. And their friendship was starting to get far too comfortable. Since when did she share the details of a case with anyone? She hadn’t even talked to Elliott, her last boyfriend who happened to be a lawyer, about her work.

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## Newborn Harvest

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Dax stepped into the hardware store and moved directly to the back of the building. He'd been here about a million times and was well versed on where they stocked the power tools and which aisle held the sheetrock screws. He was also very well aware the owner's daughter had a not-so-subtle interest and constantly tried to get his attention. He was determined to avoid Marnie Breslow at all cost. He simply didn't have the time for pleasantries today.

Once he had the few items he needed, he made his way to the only checkout and sighed. So much for good intentions. Marnie was the only one working the counter today. Which meant, he was in for another painful attempt by the not so subtle blonde, to get a date. He studied the items in his basket...did he really need them right now? Unfortunately, the answer was a resounding yes.

Marnie looked up and gave Dax her famous smile. He was sure it had won her countless men over the years, but he wasn't interested. The woman was a walking, talking bundle of pretentious blather. He was sure the most interesting conversation she'd had in decades was her breakfast order at the town diner. They had nothing in common. It was hard enough to get through five minutes at the checkout without pounding his head on the marble counter. There was no way in hell he was going to ask the woman out on a date. Unfortunately, Marnie Breslow was not willing to accept defeat...or reality.

The man in front of Dax gathered up his merchandise and headed for the door. *My turn, lucky me.* He mentally prepared himself for the battle and moved forward.

"Dax," Marnie batted her eyes and her smile widened. "You look amazing today. Have you been working out?"

"Nope," he said pushing his items forward. She didn't take the hint.

"Well, whatever you're doing," she paused to give his chest a thorough perusal. "It's working for you."

"Thanks," he pushed his items a little closer. "I'm actually in a hurry. Maybe you could take care of these. I really need to get back."

Marnie frowned. She hadn't seen Dax Hamilton in over a week. How was she supposed to get a date from him if he was always in such a hurry? "You know, all work and no play makes you a dull boy."

Dax forced himself not to sigh. It was difficult...excruciatingly so, but he won the battle. For now.

"It's almost my break, maybe we could head over and have a fresh slice of pie," she reached out and ran her manicured nails across the back of his left hand.

## Newborn Harvest

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Dax pulled back abruptly. Marnie frowned.

*Crap!* Dax sensed a pout coming on. “Marnie,” he said through gritted teeth. “I really, really need you to ring up my stuff so I can get home. I’m in a hurry, remember? There is no way I can take a break to have pie.”

Marnie grabbed his first item and slammed it onto the counter, running the scanner over the barcode. She scanned each item then forcefully tossed them into the bag, clearly offended by his rejection.

Dax did sigh this time. He hadn’t meant to offend her, but clearly he had. Maybe she’d get the hint this time. He was never going to ask her out...ever. She reminded him too much of his ex-fiancé. One nightmare a lifetime was more than enough, thank you very much. He handed Marnie his credit card, signed the device and slid the card back into his wallet. He’d have to check when he got home to see if it was still in one piece. Marnie had slammed the plastic so hard onto the counter, he wouldn’t be surprised if the thing had a volcanic crack right down the center. He picked up his bag and, without a backwards glance, pushed through the door. He heard the cash register drawer slam shut before the outside door finished closing.

Dax shrugged as he climbed into his truck. A little hissy fit was not going to change his mind. In fact, it solidified his resolve to avoid that woman at all cost. As he glanced out the window, he saw Marnie exchange places with the regular cashier and stomp outside. The instant she stepped onto the sidewalk, she pivoted and grabbed four of the free magazines sitting on the outside rack, then hurried around the corner. His mind went into overdrive. Was this Paige’s new enemy? But why? She was certainly childish enough to spend time cutting and pasting those ridiculous notes but what did Marnie Breslow have against the town’s newest cop?

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Paige sat at her desk going over information. They had so much to skim through and they were running out of time. Nurse Raikin had not returned to the clinic for her shift this morning. That meant they might already be too late. She grabbed another file and slammed it open. As she speed read its contents, her mind wandered to her other problem. Who in this town was harassing her now? She’d given the newest addition to Jericho when she’d arrived at the station. Her boss had scowled, studied the message, then stared out the window.

“I still think it’s a jealous woman,” he insisted. “Are you sure you haven’t pissed anyone off lately? Stepped on anyone’s toes? Gone out with a guy that was being pursued by someone else?”

“Jericho,” Paige said in exasperation. “I have not had a date since I arrived in Manti. There, now you know. Are you happy?”



## Newborn Harvest

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“Why would I be happy that you haven’t had a date?” he asked seriously.

She had snagged the bag off his desk and stomped out of his office in frustration. *Men! Sometimes they really were clueless.*

She was so caught up in thoughts of Jericho, the notes, jealous women and her sexy neighbor...*why in the world was she thinking about Dax?* That she almost missed it. There was a notation at the bottom of the file. She flipped back the page and started to read from the beginning of the paragraph. *Okay*, she said to herself. There is definitely something here. Who exactly is Charles Aimes? She moved to her computer and started running the name through her various systems. She was so focused on her task she nearly jumped out of her chair when Gage hovered over her and called her name.

“Jumpy much?” he grinned.

“Gage Clayton,” she warned.

“Hey, I just need you to look at something. Don’t bite my head off.”

“What?” she asked impatiently. She was onto something here, but she just couldn’t put her finger on it.

“I’m looking at the books, you know from the mortuary and I might have found something.”

“Okay,” she pushed away from the computer to study her friend. “What?”

“I’m not sure,” he admitted. “I mean, I file a 10-40 EZ every year. And someone else fills it out for me. I’m not exactly tax savvy. I have no idea what I’m doing here. I thought maybe...well you know, this is kind of the FBI’s specialty.”

She grabbed the ledger and began to study it. *Bingo!* She looked up at Gage and grinned.

“You did find something,” he said, relieved.

She moved back to her computer and within minutes she had what she needed.

“Who is Charles and Iona Aimes?” Gage asked.

“That is exactly what I would like to know,” Paige stood. She showed Gage what she had. “I’m betting they purchased a baby, though.”

Gage frowned. “Why would the baby brokers give the mortuary any information that could tie them to their clients?”

## Newborn Harvest

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“I didn’t get that at first, either.” Paige stood and motioned for Gage to follow. She stepped into Jericho’s office and took a seat.

“Can I help you?” Jericho asked, not looking up from the file he was studying.

“Have you ever heard of a Charles and Iona Aimes?” Paige asked.

Jericho looked up and frowned. *Charles and Iona Aimes*. Why did that sound familiar? He pressed a button on his phone and called for Margie. Within seconds his assistant was standing in his doorway. “Do you know who Charles and Iona Aimes are?”

“Sure,” she nodded. “So do you.”

“Yeah,” he too nodded. “But for some reason I just can’t put my finger on it.”

Margie held up a finger, disappeared then returned with a folder. She crossed the room and dropped the large manila file on her boss’s desk. “I bet it only takes you half a second.”

“Right,” Jericho sat back in his chair and studied his deputies. “Why did you want to know about Charles and Iona?”

“Because I think they bought a baby,” Paige blurted.

Margie and Jericho both frowned.

“Who are they, boss?” Gage asked.

“That’s right,” he motioned for Gage to take a seat. “That happened before you came back. You were still playing for the NFL at the time.”

“They’re criminals,” Margie said as she too entered the office and took a seat. “They live in,” she frowned. “Grand Junction wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” Jericho closed the file and set it on the edge of his desk. “They have a home in Grand Junction with easy access to I-70. It was a straight shot here and not all that far away. Four... five hours tops.”

“What was their crime?” Paige asked anxiously. If the brokers were selling to criminals, what kind of people were raising Trevor Powell?

“They went to federal prison for felony fraud and assault and battery,” Jericho said still deep in thought. “They conned a lot of people out of their retirement and the battery charge involved Mrs. Katerina Hunt. They showed up at her house and demanded she clean out her savings account. Tried to tell her she promised it to them. Kat refused, she might be old, but she’s not stupid. Iona lost her temper and shoved Kat across the room. Katerina collided with the wall and fell to the ground. Charles immediately moved forward and forcefully stepped on

## Newborn Harvest

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her fingers in an effort to gain her cooperation. That's how I found them. The charges would make them ineligible to adopt."

"But why would they want to?" Margie asked. "Those two didn't seem like the type of couple that desperately wanted a child."

"Maybe something happened in prison that made them decide to settle down and have a family," Gage suggested.

"Maybe," Jericho said drawing out the word. "Why do we think they purchased one of the babies?"

Paige pulled out the documents in the file she'd been reading and the information she'd found in the ledger Gage had been studying. "Hal made a notation here, in his daily notes about Charles. Then Gage found this entry in the ledger. Services paid in full by Charles and Iona Aimes." She pushed the documents forward so Jericho could read them.

"Do we know who Daniel and Joanne Regan are?" Jericho asked.

"Not yet," Paige frowned. "But we know they lost a baby. I'm assuming they are the biological parents of the child Charles and Iona purchased. We know the mortuary supposedly buried the baby and that Charles and Iona Aimes paid the bill."

"I'm going to send this over to James Tolman," Jericho decided. "I think he can track the information better than we can. Plus, he might be able to get a warrant based on this information. If we had access to Cramer Funeral Homes bank records, this might be a lot easier."

"Let me guess," Gage grumbled. "This is going to be another long, boring night."

"I'm afraid so," Jericho said apologetically. "We need to get through these records and see if we can link our three babies to any other couples. Dinner's on me."

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Several hours later, Dax was dressed in black, hiding in the shadows, watching Paige's mailbox. If he was right and Marnie was the culprit, she'd pay them another visit tonight. His gut was telling him he was right about this. He just didn't know why. When a silver Ford Fusion drove past for the third time, Dax shifted into high gear and waited. He was ready.

Marnie parked her car around the corner and slid from behind the wheel. She was sure snooty Paige Carter wasn't home yet. She hated the way Dax looked at her rival. Paige Carter had been the bane of her existence since high school and she was an even bigger nuisance now. It was one thing for Danny Chavez to choose Paige over Marnie in the ninth grade. It was

## Newborn Harvest

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something entirely different for Dax Hamilton... sexy, hot, mysterious... Dax Hamilton to choose Paige Carter instead of her. Marnie wasn't having it. If she could just get the irritating cop out of town, the door would be wide open for her fantasy love affair to begin. She glanced over her shoulder, sure nobody was watching, then slowly cut across Dax's property. The instant she reached the ancient old mailbox, she pulled the lid open, prepared to deliver her next note. She let out a blood-curdling scream when strong hands grasp her shoulders and forced her to the ground.

"Don't move," Dax ordered as he pulled his cell phone from his pocket.

"Hello," Dean answered. "Is something wrong?"

"I need to make a report," Dax answered. "Get over here, now." He hung up. There was no way he was going to answer questions over the phone. He needed to keep an eye on the Note Fairy.

Within minutes Dean pulled up to the curb in front of Dax's house. He frowned when he realized the house was dark. He was about to get out of the car and investigate when he spotted Hamilton next door. This was getting more mysterious by the second. He put his car in gear and drove the ten feet that separated them. The instant he stepped from the car, Marnie Breslow started in on him. She was humiliated. She'd been attacked. She...Dean didn't listen to the rest. He did his best to block her out as he approached Dax and raised his eyebrows.

"Did Paige tell you someone has been leaving threatening notes in her mailbox?" Dax asked.

"No," Dean focused his attention on Marnie. "But Jericho did. You sure it was Marnie?"

"I'm positive," Dax handed Dean the note he'd retrieved from Marnie's hand. "Caught her placing this in the box before I called."

Dean opened the note and began to shake his head. "Marnie Breslow. You are one stupid broad. You have the right to remain silent. I'd appreciate it if you exercised that right until we get to the station." He leaned down and snapped on his cuffs then put pressure on her arm until she stood up. Before he climbed into his patrol car, he pulled out an evidence bag and dropped the note inside. At least one mystery had been solved tonight. "How did she get here?"

"Her cars around the corner," Dax called over his shoulder as he strolled across his front lawn. "Oh, and she trespassed. I'd like to press charges." He smiled as he settled into his chaise lounge. It was a nice night to wait on the front porch and watch the stars. Maybe his sexy cop would get home at a reasonable hour and thank him for catching her latest nuisance.

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## Newborn Harvest

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Paige glanced up as Dean pushed through the door. He had a very angry woman in cuffs. She grinned. “Rough night?”

Dean dropped the evidence bag on Paige’s desk as he maneuvered Marnie to the back and into a cell. Paige glanced down and frowned. Inside was a note identical to the others she had received. It was even addressed to her.

*Paige Carter...  
You were warned.  
Now bad things are coming!  
Beware.  
You made your choice,  
Now you have to live with it.*

Paige was out of her chair and through the door leading to the back cells within seconds. She nearly collided with Dean, who was on his way out. “Who is she?”

“You don’t know?” Dean asked, even more confused.

Paige just glared.

“Marnie Breslow,” Dean said casually as he moved past her. “Her daddy owns Breslow Hardware.”

Paige followed him back into the office area. She needed answers.

“What is all that racket?” Jericho demanded as he stepped from his office.

“Marnie Breslow,” Dean answered as he plopped into his chair. “Dax caught her delivering another note to Paige. He detained her until I got there to arrest her. He also wanted to press charges of his own for trespassing. Seems she parked her car around the corner and crossed over his yard to get to Paige’s mailbox.”

Jericho focused on Paige and grinned. “Jealous woman. Told you.” He stood in his doorway grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

Paige jerked around and marched back to Marnie’s cell. “Why?” she demanded.

Marnie just glared.

“Why?” Paige said again.

“You can’t have him,” Marnie pouted. “It’s not fair. I saw him first and it’s not fair that you ride into town and snatch him away from me.”

## Newborn Harvest

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“Who?” Paige asked, wondering if the woman had lost her marbles since they graduated high school. They had always hated each other. Marnie claimed that Paige had stolen Danny Chavez away from her. Paige hadn’t even liked Danny Chavez.

“You know who!” Marnie screamed. “Dax Hamilton. He’s mine!”

Paige gave her high school foe an incredulous look. Had Dax been dating Marnie before Paige moved home? That thought was abruptly pushed to the back of her mind when she heard Jericho burst into laughter behind her. She glared at him, threw her hands in the air and marched back to her desk. She had work. They had babies to find.

Jericho was still laughing as he returned to his desk. Hadn’t he told Paige those notes were the result of jealousy? Maybe next time Chaya’s daughter would give him a little credit. He had been doing this a long time. He frowned. Not long enough to catch Chaya’s killer, apparently. So far, he was hitting a big fat zero on that front. But that didn’t mean he was going to stop digging. He was still frowning as he pulled out the next file and started reading.

The group had been at it for hours when Paige finally jumped to her feet and waved a file in the air. “I found it!”

Gage glanced up from the ledger he’d been working on. “I might have something too,” he announced. “It looks like more of the same, additional payments and names listed next to them.”

Jericho stepped from his office just as the phone rang. Margie answered it and handed the receiver to her boss. “James said he has something for you to look into.”

Jericho took the phone, listened for several minutes then put the DA on speaker. “Okay, James you are now on speaker. You found how many transactions?”

“Seven,” he repeated. “I have seven solid transactions between couples who do not live in the area but have paid for funeral services at Cramer’s Funeral Home.”

“Seven,” Paige dropped back into her seat. “We have seven families...seven parents who had their babies stolen right out from underneath them?”

“We don’t know that...yet,” James added.

“You two said you found something. Paige you start, then Gage you fill us in on your transactions.” Jericho demanded.

“I have another notation in the Cramer files. He must be OCD because he has daily notes going back years. The notation refers to an Emmitt and Clarita Norwood. It’s identical to the one we found on Charles Aimes. I also have one here for a Seth and Jocelyn Lovelace.”

“Those are two of the names I have as well, two of the seven,” James confirmed.

## Newborn Harvest

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“I have something here,” Gage added. “I’m not sure exactly what but there are entries in the books from a Lynk and Elza Quinn...those are recent. I also have Seth and Jocelyn Lovelace but so far I haven’t come across Norwood.”

“I also have the Quinn’s on my list,” James confirmed again.

“Okay,” Jericho took control. “Now we just have to locate those families as well as the other three and we can start getting warrants.”

“Other four,” James corrected. “I didn’t count the Aimes because we already had their info.”

“Eight families torn apart,” Gage said softly. “So much pain and suffering for greed.”

“Fax me over everything you’ve got,” James ordered. “I’ll have search warrants ready before noon tomorrow.”

“We could ask the FBI to help,” Paige said hesitantly. She didn’t like calling in the feds every time they had a case but they were going to need the manpower. “I mean we are talking multiple states, at least two that we know of.”

“Not yet,” James decided. “Let me see what we can do. I’d rather get help from the locals. I don’t have anything against the FBI, but they always want to take these things and go federal. I think our state laws have a better chance of nailing these guys for good. I’d like the feds to get in line on this one. I plan to throw the book at these guys.”

“I agree,” Jericho gave Paige a sympathetic look as he disconnected the call.

“I need you to know, that’s not my fallback. I just thought...you know selling babies over state lines and all...I thought we didn’t really have a choice. Isn’t there some rule or something that says you have to call in the feds? It’s not like you’re going to be able to hide it with agent Sean Wilkins involved.”

“I’m going to let James figure that one out,” Jericho decided. “Let’s gather up what we have and see if we can find the other four couples, then we all need to get some rest.” He turned to his assistant. “Margie, you should have gone home hours ago.”

“I think I found one of the addresses. The Quinn’s. They live in Park City.” She pulled several pages from her printer and handed them to Jericho. “I’ll stay, while you look for the other four families, I’ll see what I can do to track the ones we have.”

“Thanks,” Jericho gave her an affectionate pat on the shoulder.

## Newborn Harvest

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“I’ll keep looking through the ledgers,” Gage decided. “Now that I know what I’m looking for, they are pretty easy to spot.” He looked from Jericho to Paige. “I’m just wondering, how does James know there are eight kids? We have all the documents.”

“He has Hal Cramer,” Jericho provided. “Apparently Hal is being more than a little cooperative. He cut a deal. He’ll give James anything he wants and James agreed not to go after him as an accomplice. He’s still looking at charges with regard to the burial stuff, though. He won’t walk on this. Anyway, Hal logged into his bank records so James didn’t have to wait for a warrant. They are going through the transactions and Hal is explaining which ones pertain to the kids.”

“How did you know that?” Gage asked.

“He told me the last time I called him,” Jericho explained. “Now, let’s see if we can find the rest of the information, send it over to James and get a few hours’ sleep before we start arresting people tomorrow afternoon.”

“You sound pretty confident,” Paige observed.

“I am,” Jericho nodded. “This case is coming together. And, with Hal assisting and Judge Potter madder than I’ve ever seen him, we’re well on our way to ending this thing.”

“We still have to find Raiskin,” Paige frowned. “I want that woman to fry.”

Jericho grinned as he returned to his office.

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Paige glanced at her mailbox as she pulled into her driveway. She still couldn’t believe that Marnie Breslow was behind the threats. Jericho had spoken to James and insisted she spend a night in jail. He thought it would be a good lesson for her. James agreed. He said he was too busy to deal with a bail hearing and so was the judge. The Breslow’s were just going to have to wait. Marnie would be released in the morning.

She climbed from her car and took a minute to study Dax’s home. It was nearly finished, now. The rehab was coming along ahead of schedule. She wondered if he’d stay in town or sell and move on to the next project. Her stomach formed a slight knot at the idea he may leave forever. She gave herself a mental shake and headed for her front door. If Dax moved, he moved. She’d miss her friend and their breakfast chats, but that was it. There was nothing more between them and it was going to stay that way.

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## Newborn Harvest

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Paige left home early the following morning. So early, she didn't even see Dax up and about. She couldn't sleep anyway and she had work to do. If James Tolman came through for them, she'd be serving warrants this afternoon. She stepped into the office and flipped on the overheads. It felt like home to her in a way that Virginia never had. An overwhelming feeling hit her as she made her way to her desk. She was right where she needed to be. She belonged, and she was never leaving.

It was only a few minutes later when Sheriff Walters walked through the front door, paused to acknowledge her and made his way to his office. Paige focused on the large map. She thought she might be onto something. After plotting out the victim's homes and the clinic, she was starting to see a pattern.

Jericho stepped from his office and approached Paige again. "Nurse Raiskin has been apprehended. Dean's on his way to Nephi to pick her up. I called Gage and Margie. They should be here any minute. Tolman's on his way. He wants to have a meeting with all of us and the DA's office to formulate a tactical plan."

"Why did you send Dean?" she frowned. "I was right here. I could have headed out."

"Dean had just left his house and was headed in," Jericho laughed. "I gave him very specific instructions to make it quick. I want to speak to that woman before we get too far ahead of ourselves."

"But again," Paige pressed. "I was right here."

"I guess Dean hasn't shared his family hobby with you, yet?" Jericho asked.

Paige stopped. Gage had said something about that before. "Hasn't come up yet."

"Racing," Jericho sat in the chair across from her desk again. "Regional champs. I told Dean I wanted pedal to the metal. If anyone hassles him, he's to call me. We need to talk to Olivia Raiskin as soon as possible. Dean can make that happen. And he can do it safely."

Paige grinned. "Now Sheriff Walters... I think you just abused your authority. What would the public say if they knew you encouraged one of your deputies to break the law that way and use I-15 as a racetrack?"

"I suspect they would say, good for me. Stealing babies is appalling. I don't think anyone would complain." He pushed his chair forward to study what Paige was working on. "You know..."

"That's what I was thinking, too." Paige smiled. "How long before Margie gets here? I want to know who owns this home." She pointed to an X she had drawn on the map. "It's right in the middle of the perimeter I've defined."

## Newborn Harvest

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“Some hot shot Hollywood producer built that one a few years back,” Jericho said moving around to the other side of her desk. “Can’t think of his name, but he spent one weekend up there and announced he was going to die of boredom. He sold it to some corporation last year. What was the name of that company?” he mumbled as he took over Paige’s computer. “That’s right, Juniper Station Inc. I remembered hearing a business purchased the property and wondered how they were going to use it.”

“It would be the perfect holding area for children. You didn’t even know someone was living up there...and you seem to know everything about this town.” Paige pointed out.

Jericho laughed. “*If* someone is living up there. And not everything. I didn’t know you stole Hamilton away from Marnie Breslow.” They both looked up when the door opened and two men stepped in. Jericho stood and moved to greet them.

Paige scowled and glanced to the back of the room. Marnie was being awfully quiet this morning. Maybe she’d already been set free.

Stan stepped into the police station with his boss, James Tolman. His steps faltered momentarily when he spotted Paige. He knew there was no chance Daniel had given up his plot to make her life miserable. He just hoped nobody ever learned he was part of it...even for a short time. And he hoped his former blackmailer had toned down his scare tactics. He hadn’t been kidding, if Daniel’s name crossed his desk, Stan was going to make sure he was prosecuted to the fullest. He silently followed James into a large room and quietly settled into one of the comfortable chairs to wait.

Paige entered the conference room with her arms full. She had large maps, files and all her notes handy. This was going to be a strategizing meeting and Paige would have to convince the District Attorney that she was right. Jericho would back her, she was sure of it. Their first target needed to be that house owned by Juniper Station. Paige relaxed a little when Gage slid into the room and took the chair next to hers.

“What’s all that?” he whispered.

Paige gave him a short, whispered response then waited for a reaction.

“Makes sense,” Gage said as he continued to study the map. Paige’s logic was sound. It did make sense. He pulled out his notepad and flipped through one page at a time until he found what he was searching for. He might get a chance to back Paige up on this one.

“I’m going to begin,” Tolman said, standing. “I know that Deputy Bridges is on his way back with Olivia Raiskin but I don’t want to wait for her return before we talk this out.”

Paige was shocked, Dean was already on his way home?

## Newborn Harvest

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“I have spoken at length with Hal Cramer. He has been more than helpful in bridging the gaps for us. As I’m sure Jericho explained, I have offered him a deal and he jumped at the chance to take it.” Tolman tapped his tablet several times then continued. “This morning, with the help of Stan here, I was finally able to get the names of the couple we believe are behind all of this. Unfortunately, Mr. Cramer did not have their last name. He dealt with them only by phone. They would provide him with the name of his next client, nothing further. The clients would then contact him and make arrangements for payment. Everything was finalized prior to the supposed death. He did initially deal with Olivia Raiskins. She is the one that got him involved in the first place, which means we are on the right track. We just have to tie it all together somehow.”

“But you do have first names?” Jericho asked, motioning for Margie to step into the room.

“I do,” Tolman affirmed. “Spencer and Lucy. I believe they are married, or at least have a long term relationship of some sort.”

Paige tried to listen as Jericho whispered instructions to Margie but she couldn’t hear a word he said. She was hoping he’d send Margie out to see if there was a Spencer or Lucy associated with Juniper Station. She began to stand but Jericho immediately motioned for her to sit.

“Is there something you two would like to share with the group?” Tolman asked.

“Go ahead, Paige,” Jericho replied.

“I’m just wondering if Juniper Station Incorporated employs a Spencer or Lucy.” Paige shrugged. “I was hoping the sheriff would ask Margie to check the records.”

“She’s looking into it as we speak,” Jericho assured the room.

“What is Juniper Station Incorporated?” Stan asked.

“Why don’t we jump in here, James?” Jericho suggested.

“Go ahead,” Tolman took a seat to the side of the room.

“Paige, you’re up.” Jericho also settled into a chair.

Paige went through the map, her markings and why she was using a quarter-mile radius as her target zone. Then she explained that the house nearly at the center of all the activity was a home owned by Juniper Station Inc.

Gage made a motion to get Paige’s attention.

“Go ahead, Gage,” she said not knowing what he was going to add.

## Newborn Harvest

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“Two nights ago, I got a call in that area,” he began. “Nancy Dawes said her babies were going nuts over some racket up there on the hill.”

“And?” Tolman pressed.

“And I went up there to check it out. There wasn’t much to see, but it was obvious someone was living in the home. That surprised me, I mean we normally know when the summer folk come to town. But I hadn’t heard any talk of someone moving into the mansion on the hill.”

“That place is hardly a mansion,” Tolman put in.

“Okay, the big house on the hill then,” Gage continued. “Anyway, the place looked dark but there was a car in the driveway and I looked around, tried the doors and didn’t find anything suspicious.”

“By suspicious you mean...” Tolman asked.

“Oh, well we just had those kids breaking into places and vandalizing stuff. I didn’t see any signs of a break-in, no damage or anything that looked out of place so I just assumed the new owners had finally come to town,” Gage clarified.

“No crying babies inside?” Stan asked.

“Not that night,” Gage shook his head. “And I didn’t look inside the car to see if there was a car seat or anything but I did write down the plate and the description of the car.” He turned to Jericho. “Do you want me to take this to Margie and have her run the vehicle for us? Maybe we’ll get lucky and it belongs to a Spencer or a Lucy.”

“Good idea,” Jericho stood. “I think Paige’s theory is the best one we have right now and it seems plausible to me. If we can tie anyone named Spencer or Lucy to that large rock home or the car Gage spotted there, can we get a warrant?”

Tolman chewed on the tip of his pen and considered. He finally shook his head no. “Not enough.” He held up his hand. “But, when Bridges gets back with this Olivia Raiskin I plan to ask her about the Juniper Station property. If she points a finger in that direction, I think I can convince Potter to go for it.”

The door swung open and Dean stepped in. He took one step and froze, wondering what the meeting was and why they were all staring at him.

“Olivia Raiskin?” Jericho asked.

“She’s in back,” Dean relaxed. “She’s not happy and the Nephi guys said she had her car packed to the hilt. It was probably what got her nabbed. She was drawing so much attention to

## Newborn Harvest

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herself that car was asking to be run. Once they punched in the plate...bam, she was on her way back to Manti. Oh, by the way..." he called to Tolman who was heading for the back room that contained their two holding cells. "She uh...might complain about my driving. But I assure you, I had everything under control at all times, no matter what that woman says."

Gage tried to hide his grin, but when he saw Jericho giving him that stern fatherly glare, he immediately sobered. Paige bit her tongue so the sarcastic remark she'd been about to give didn't slip out. Dean just shrugged and dropped into the chair next to Gage.

"So," he said. "What did I miss?" The group picked up the conversation about Juniper Station and the occupants now residing there.

A short time later, Tolman stepped back into the room. "I need a minute to call Judge Potter and see if he thinks this will cover it or if we need more. But, Olivia did confirm she was working for Spencer and Lucy. She is currently refusing to give us a last name because she wants something in return. I'm not inclined to acquiesce."

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It was nearly twenty minutes later when Judge Potter finally approved the warrant. Paige stared at the house sitting on top of the hill and frowned. Good thing they didn't have a lot of earthquakes in these parts. The place was large and she could see a Hollywood type constructing it. And she had to admit the view would be magnificent but she just couldn't get past the fact it was built on top of a hill, with a cliff.

She parked her vehicle down the road to the east of her target, in front of a neighbor's home and waited. Jericho and Tolman were going to approach the house and see if the couple would open the door. Dean was watching the back and Gage was positioned to the west. Paige spotted the vehicle Gage had noticed on his previous visit and had an idea. She slid from her vehicle and made her way across the street and down the sidewalk, careful to remain hidden in the shadows. She practically tip-toed up the driveway and slid the spike strips under each tire, then quickly made her way back to her car. She was just closing the door when Sheriff Walter's vehicle pulled in front of the house and parked.

The search was so uneventful, Paige was actually disappointed. She'd expected a fuss, maybe a chase or at least a foot pursuit. Some kind of dramatic ending to such a cold-hearted and callous crime. That's not what they got. Spencer and Lucy Fonseca welcomed Sheriff Walters and District Attorney Tolman into their home, offered them tea, then calmly called their attorney and asked him to meet them at the police station. James Tolman escorted them to Gage's patrol car then he and Stan followed the marked unit out of the neighborhood.

## Newborn Harvest

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Jericho oversaw the search of the home. Paige and Dean tore apart every corner, every closet, every last drawer and couch cushion inside the residence and still, after several hours, they hadn't discovered a thing. No wonder the couple had been so calm. They knew there wasn't anything inside the home to connect them to the crime. They were going to have to rely on Olivia Raiskins.

The three officers stepped into the building, tired and frustrated. Margie immediately followed Sheriff Walters into his office. Within five minutes the two of them returned to the common area.

"Margie once again proved she's a genius," Jericho grinned. "She found the babies."

"All of them?" Paige asked, jumping to her feet and moving to stand beside Margie's desk. Dean was right behind her.

"All of them," Margie smiled. "Well, all eight that we know of. I sincerely hope that's all of them."

"Do tell, beautiful," Dean winked.

Margie tried to look annoyed but Paige could tell she was flattered. Dean was a charmer. "Okay, like I said last night...the Quinn's live in Park City. Emmitt and Clarita Norwood live in Burley, Idaho. Seth and Jocelyn Lovelace are in Evanston, Wyoming. We all know Charles and Iona returned to Grand Junction after serving their time. Jona and Diana Fontaine are down in St. George. Jasmine and Simon Elliott live in Twin Falls, Idaho. Kathy and Mike Fenn live in Kamas and Thad and Monet Tesar live in Delta, Colorado."

Paige just stared at Margie. "Um, well...I wish I could say that information just helped me but I have no idea who those people are. I mean, I know they are the names we extracted from all of this..." she pointed to the massive piles of paperwork spread out on all available surfaces throughout the area. "But last night I was a little loopy by the time we called it a night. Which begs the question, when in the world did you have time to track down addresses?"

Margie smiled and shrugged. "I'm an early riser. Okay, I have the information on where these people live. What we need to do is match up biological parents with each of these targets. And if we can, it would be nice to know if we are looking for a little girl or a little boy at each address. Maybe a timeline that sheds light on ages as well."

"Okay," Dean nodded as he headed to Gage's desk. "I think we can get that from here. The ledger that Gage was working on. He said that Lynk and Elza Quinn were new additions and didn't have a second name by it or a final payment. I'm going to go out on a limb and say the Hulbert boy was intended for them."

## Newborn Harvest

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“I agree,” Paige said, pulling up a chair so she could look over Dean’s shoulder. “And there...” she pointed to the book. “That’s the entry Dean mentioned before. Lovelace. Um...” Paige squinted to try to read the writing. “Looks like Seth and Jocelyn maybe but he just has initials by that one. Looks like an A and a P. Could that be Amy?”

“I’ll write that down for now,” Margie nodded and made a notation.

“Okay,” Paige flipped through the book until she came to the next highlighted entry. “Next is Sierra and Jade those are the Brosnan’s but I don’t see another name or payment information. But there is a payment that matches up pretty closely that has an EC next to it.”

“Okay, we’ll come back to that one,” Margie decided. “But I think it might be Emmitt and Clarita Norwood. Which would explain why Gage couldn’t find Norwood last night.”

“Let’s go with that for now,” Paige decided. “Okay, next is Charles and Iona and we know they match up with Joanne and Daniel Regan.”

“Got it,” Margie called.

“Then I have a Kathy Fenn with a Dennis Hudson.” Paige ran her fingers through her hair. This should be easier than it was. Hal Cramer wrote down everything. Unfortunately, he wrote down everything and to make things more confusing, he didn’t have a system. He’d use one code one day and something completely different the next.

“Thad and Monet Tesar are next,” Dean provided. “And they match up with a Nico and Lacey...no last name.”

“Simon Elliott and Adam and Elisa Reynolds then I’ve got Fontaine and Sibylle and Vincent Horne. That should be all of them,” Paige said counting the names one more time. “So that had to be Amy. I think we may have actually found Trevor.”

It was over an hour later before the group had everything mapped out. They were sure they had the receiving couples matched with biological parents and a good idea of how old each child was. According to their records, the first two children on their list were taken in August of the previous year. Then each month or sometimes two months later, another child was taken. They were looking for four girls and four boys. The baby thieves actually had a pattern going. They would take two girls then two boys then another two girls. Why they did that, nobody even wanted to speculate. Paige, Dean, and Margie briefed the others on their findings and then they all settled in to wait for the warrants.

James Tolman pushed through the front door of the police station, warrants in hand. “Okay,” he began the instant he stepped into the conference room. “I have coordinated with the locals and we are all going to go in together. They have the new information Margie sent over with gender and approximate ages of the children. We will hit all eight homes in exactly ninety

## Newborn Harvest

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minutes. Paige, I'd like you to go pick up the Powell's and bring them back here. Dean, you head out and shuttle the Brosnan's."

"And then what?" Paige asked. "That's only going to take me about twenty minutes."

"Then myself, you, Sheriff Walters and Chief Beckett are heading to Park City. I have a feeling the Hulbert baby has already been delivered. We'll meet up with the Summit County Sheriff's Office. They will be hitting the Quinn residence and the Fenn residence at the same time. Both Kamas and Park City fall under their jurisdiction. I assured them the three of you will help as needed."

"Of course," Paige stood. "But if they are hitting the targets in ninety minutes won't we be late?"

"I have arranged for a helicopter to transport us to the airport. We should arrive in plenty of time." Tolman assured her.

Paige jumped from her chair and headed out the door.

"Dean, you are going to St. George. As soon as you get the Brosnan's here, turn them over to Margie. Then head up to Ephraim. There's a small plane waiting to fly you down. They will be landing right in St. George. You'll have to get a taxi to the police station if they don't have a patrol car waiting. The rain storms that hit today caused some flooding and things are a little crazy down there right now," Jericho advised.

"On it," Dean said as he hustled out the door.

"Gage will stay here in town to coordinate and handle any problems that arise. You going to be okay alone until he gets back?" Jericho asked Margie.

"I'm fine," Margie snipped. "That boy will walk through that door any minute now. Gunnison isn't that far away and once he turns that woman over to her Parole Officer, Raiskin will start singing like a canary. I'll be sure to relay any new information we get as soon as it comes in."

"Thanks," Jericho turned back to Tolman. "Let me head home and grab a bag then I'll meet you back here. With any luck, we'll all be returning about the same time and can carpool out to the landing zone."

Paige called Sean the second she was out the door. "Hey you," she said in greeting.

"What can you tell me?" he asked immediately.

"I'm on my way to pick up Amy and Jason and take them back to the station. I'm pretty sure we've located Trevor. The ledger wasn't clear, but it was the only one that matched up. I



## Newborn Harvest

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don't want to get their hopes up too much in case I'm wrong but between you and me...if your case is all tied up, you might want to head to Evanston, Wyoming. The locals will be hitting the target in ninety minutes give or take about three."

"Oh man," Sean let out a relieved breath. "I'm not going to tell Amy or Jason anything at this point."

"Do you think you can get there in time?"

"Oh yeah, I'll be there," he assured her. "The boss is right here and he's giving me the nod. Luckily I'm still in Vegas. If I head to the airport now and get the first flight to Wyoming, I should have time to spare."

"Call me as soon as you know anything, promise me Sean. I need to know we got Trevor back for your family," Paige said quietly. It's important to me and I can't be there myself."

"Where are you going to be?" Sean asked as he gathered up his belongings and darted for the door.

"I'm heading up north, Summit County. We have two babies up there. The one that went missing yesterday. We think he's in Park City and then another little boy that is in Kamas. I'm going to be a little busy dealing with two ops and my boss but call me."

"I promise," Sean said as he climbed into his car. "And Paige?"

"Yeah," Paige said absently as she exited the highway onto to Amy's road.

"Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me. I was just doing my job," Paige grinned. "And now I'm pulling into your sister's house so I'm gonna let you go. Keep in touch. I think it's going to be a good night."

"I agree," Sean said before he disconnected the call.

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It was three in the morning when Paige finally returned to the station. Amy and Jason were long gone. Sean had made it to Wyoming in time to tag along with the locals. They wouldn't let him participate but had allowed him on scene...in the outer perimeter. He'd taken custody of Trevor and flown straight out to Manti. He was now enjoying an unscheduled night off with his family. Paige had promised Amy she'd stop by sometime around lunchtime the following day and visit before Sean had to head back out. She was looking forward to meeting little Trevor

## Newborn Harvest

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Powell. His mother's love and persistence was going to reunite a lot of families over the next couple days.

Most of the children were turned over to protective services where emergency foster parents had taken them temporarily. The authorities in each area would be conducting DNA testing on all the babies to make sure they were returned to their rightful parents. But the records were pretty clear. Paige was confident they had identified the correct baby with the correct biological parents. She was also grateful she wouldn't be the one to breaking the news. Each one would soon learn their baby might still be alive but they would have to let science prove it before they could have their child back. She imagined the news would be bittersweet and a couple days longer wasn't really that long to wait.

Chief Beckett had insisted the Hulbert boy return to Laurel Bluff with him. The child still had the hospital tag attached to his leg. There was no question that bundle of joy belonged to Rachel and Jack Hulbert and Chief Timothy Beckett was going to make sure the family was reunited immediately. He didn't care that it was the middle of the night. He gathered up the car seat, the few incidentals DCFS had provided and headed for the Hulbert residence.

Paige nearly collided with Gage when she stepped into the room. "What are you still doing here?"

"I found another one," he said in frustration. "Olivia Raiskin finally talked. She realized she was going back to prison on the parole violation. By the way, her name is really Olivia Rosenblatt. She did time for dealing prescription drugs out of a hospital pharmacy. At least she really was a nurse, but that was about the only thing that was real about that woman. She is one nasty piece of work. I hope those kids were not in her care for any length of time."

"She said there was another kid? One we didn't locate?" Paige asked, worried. Word was out they had coordinated the bust. If there was another child, the adoptive parents would go into hiding.

"We've got him now," Gage assured her. "The minute I learned of a kid in Jackson, I called the judge. Potter contacted a local judge in the area and a warrant was issued. The locals hit the target an hour ago. The baby was fine and is currently in custody. We are going to have a harder time figuring out who the real parents are though. Olivia didn't know...or most likely wouldn't say. James is going to work at her hard tomorrow and see what he can get. But, I think you and I should take another look through this stuff. I've got the names, but it can wait."

"I agree," Paige grabbed her house keys out of her desk and followed Gage out the door. "Tonight I'm going to go home and drop into bed and not think about babies or warrants or evil nurses until noon."

"Sounds like a plan," Gage said as he climbed into his vehicle and drove away.

## Newborn Harvest

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Paige pulled into her driveway, entered her house and climbed the stairs. She'd sort everything out tomorrow. Tonight, she was going to crash. She just hoped Nathan Porter didn't make his usual call at zero dark thirty. If he did, the good general would just have to leave a message. Waiting was not exactly his strong point but patience is a virtue. At least that's what they say.

That was the last thought Paige had before she dropped into bed. She was fast asleep the instant her head hit the pillow.