

# PAIGE CARTER

*Deputy Sheriff*

## *Make It a Double* *Season 6, Episode 7*

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*by:*

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“Either you want in, or you don’t.” Joel turned to Troy. “Go again. Open it wider.”

“Joel,” Vince protested. “I think they’ve had enough. The flow is fast enough. If you open the valve, they might choke.”

“If they want in, they have to prove they’re worthy,” Joel insisted. “Just like we did. This is a brotherhood; they want to join the most coveted fraternity on campus. Which means they have to prove their dedication. They need to show how loyal they are to our organization. They must show they’ll do anything for their new family. Keep going.”

Joel started chanting, “Gamma, Gamma, Gamma...” The rest of the group joined in.

Troy studied each of the two guys, shook his head, and shut off the valve. “I’m not doing this.”

“Put that hose back in your mouth,” Joel told Tyler and Jonas. “Either you finish, or you’re out.”

Tyler glanced at Jonas, who looked a little dazed but complied. Tyler swallowed and slid the hose back into his mouth. He barely got it situated when Joel twisted the valve, and the alcohol filled the tube and flowed freely into his mouth again.

Jonas tried to swallow, but he felt like he was drowning. He couldn’t think and his heart was beating like an eighties rock band was performing a concert inside his chest. He started to gag, then suddenly began to choke. He couldn’t catch his breath and he felt so cold. He gasped, tried to inhale but failed and collapsed, knocking his forehead on the surface of the ancient table.

“Joel, stop!” Troy insisted.

The fraternity brothers grew silent.

“He’s faking,” Joel insisted. “He dumped more Everclear into the funnel.”

“He’s not,” Vince demanded. “Stop. If you don’t, I’m leaving. And I’ll go find campus security.”

Joel cursed and moved forward, crowding Vince until he backed up against a nearby wall.

“Uh, guys—” Doug stepped in. “His lips are turning blue. What do we do?”

“He needs help,” Troy panicked, shoved the tube away, and began to shake Jonas. The long piece of rubber disconnected from the metal keg and slid across the marble; A golden stream of beer flowed over the white floor, leaving a river of liquid and bubbles in its wake.

“I told you not to use Everclear,” Vince barked. “The beer was enough, adding hard liquor into the mix was too much, Joel.”

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“Shut up.” Joel and Troy yanked Jonas from the chair and set him on the floor. “Go get Jeff.”

“Good idea.” Doug jumped up and ran from the room.

“This better be important,” Jeff grumbled on his way down the stairs. “I’m studying. I told you I don’t have time for this nonsense tonight. This test is a third of my grade.”

“He’s in trouble,” Vince insisted. “You work at the hospital and you’re pre-med. We need your help.”

“What do we do?” Troy ran a hand through his hair. He was terrified. He glanced to the side and realized Tyler was also extremely ill and currently projectile vomiting as he gripped his stomach and leaned over the large sink. The guy looked like he was about to pass out.

“Someone needs to get him to the hospital,” Jeff pointed to Tyler. “Hurry, load him in the communal van and drop him at the door of the emergency room.” He moved to Jonas, who was now lying motionless on the floor. Within seconds, Jeff knew his friends had gone too far.

“What about him?” Joel demanded.

“He’s gone.” Jeff stood and wiped his hand on his jeans.

“What do you mean, gone?” Doug stared at the lifeless form.

“You don’t mean he’s dead?” Troy asked, shocked.

“Yes,” Jeff took a step back. “He’s dead. I told you this was stupid. We need to call the police.”

“No,” Joel said defiantly. “We get rid of the body, make it look like an accident. If we call the cops, they’re going to shut the Frat house down. I don’t have anywhere else to go — do you?” He focused on Jeff, knowing he was barely making it with all the extra medical courses he was jamming into his already tight schedule.

“Unless you want a second body on your hands, I suggest you get that guy to the hospital,” Jeff motioned toward Tyler.

“I’ll take him.” Doug wrapped an arm around Tyler’s waist and slowly maneuvered him out the door toward a vacant van. Once Tyler was stretched out on the back seat, Doug floored it, eager to get to the emergency room before it was too late.

“Call the police,” Jeff turned toward the stairs. “You need to report this.”

“I’ll call,” Troy decided. “We can just say it was an accident.”

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Jeff reached the top of the stairs, stepped into his room, and closed the door securely behind him. He didn't need this tonight. At least they were being sensible. It might get complicated, but they had to report it. He settled back at his desk, grateful they decided to do the responsible thing this time — with Joel involved, that was always a Crapshoot.

“You're an idiot,” Joel grumbled. “You think they'll believe he accidentally inhaled half a keg of beer and mixed it with the hard stuff all by himself? Who gave it to him? He's underage.”

“Well, Tyler is also suffering,” Vince considered. “We can tell them Tyler and Jonas were having a competition. We'll just stay out of it—claim we didn't take part. None of us are drunk. We can't get into trouble if Jonas did this to himself.”

“Like they'll believe that,” Joel scoffed. “We need to get him into my car and find a place to leave him.”

“I will not do this,” Troy insisted.

“Me either,” Vince agreed. “I think we should call the police”

“I think you're all idiots,” Joel grumbled. Before they knew what he was going to do, Joel had snatched both of their cell phones off the desk and shoved them into his pocket. “Just get out of my way, I'll take care of it myself.”

Troy looked at Vince. They both glanced at the body, focused on Joel, then headed for the front door.

“Where are you going?” Joel rushed after them.

“To find campus security,” Vince replied over his shoulder.

“If you take one more step,” Joel threatened. “You're no longer a Gamma.”

“You don't scare me.” Vince shoved open the gate. The two of them disappeared down the sidewalk.

Twenty minutes later, they returned, alone. “Where's the body?” Tony demanded.

“Where's security?” Joel countered.

“We couldn't find them,” Vince admitted. “We came back to call the cops.”

“Go ahead, call,” Joel laughed. “When they get here and you can't produce a victim, then what?”

“Where is he?” Troy insisted.

“He got better,” Joel shrugged. “He woke up and went home.”

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“I don’t know what you’ve done,” Troy frowned. “But you need to call the cops, Joel.”

“Just stay out of my way,” Joel barked. “Go upstairs and keep your mouths shut.”

“Give me my phone,” Troy demanded.

“Yeah,” Vince glared. “Mine, too.”

“You’ll get them back tomorrow,” Joel glared at them.

They both hesitated, but ultimately rushed up the stairs.

“I think this looks good.” Lars pulled to the side of the road.

“Now what?” Joel asked, over an hour later, grateful he’d enlisted Lars’ help. His secret friend was resourceful, and Joel could always count on him to help when he found himself in a jam — unlike his fraternity brothers that were supposed to have his back. He glanced at the pack he tossed on the back seat. It contained all the cell phones he could find inside the frat house. His college friends talked a good game, but when it came down to it, none of them were willing to get their hands dirty. He also knew he couldn’t trust them to keep quiet.

But Lars would. He might have grown up on the wrong side of the tracks, and Joel’s parents insisted Lars was trouble, they even insisted Joel had to avoid the local bad boy completely or suffer the consequences — but Lars was the only person Joel knew he could rely on. He climbed from the vehicle and moved to stand on the edge of the steep cliff, knowing what they had to do. It was after one in the morning and completely dark but, from what he could see, the overhang was steep and jagged — and perfect.

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“Show me en route,” Paige said over the radio.

“Margie, I will also be en route,” Jericho advised.

“Copy,” Margie acknowledged. “Sgt. Alva is on scene with Clayton. Search and Rescue is standing by.”

“Thanks,” Paige answered. “The roads are snow packed from that storm last night. It might take a little longer to get up the canyon.”

“I copy,” Alva answered. “I’ll give you the details once you arrive.”

Paige pulled in behind Sergeant Alva’s patrol car. The instant she stepped from the vehicle, the icy wind slapped her in the face and swirled around her. She was grateful for the warm boots

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and the leather coat. That conjured memories of Dax, but she pushed them away. Thinking about her husband — or his two cohorts still stuck in Iraq — would only be a distraction. She spotted Gage standing next to Sgt. Alva and headed that way. “What do we have?”

“The couple over there,” Gage pointed to his vehicle. “They wanted to take advantage of the fresh snow. They were out cross-country skiing and stopped on this trail to take a quick break. They were admiring the view when they spotted the body.”

“I only see ski prints,” Paige observed.

“I’ve walked the entire area,” Gage moved up next to her. “I couldn’t find a single set of footprints, only the prints left by that couple and their skis.”

“Which means he went over that cliff before the storm hit,” Paige sighed. “It also means any evidence that might have been left is now gone. No tracks, no footprints, nothing. I could dig around in that snow all day and still come up empty.”

Gage frowned. “What does that mean?”

“I believe it means Paige questions the obvious,” Jericho stepped up behind them.

“If it’s obvious, why would she question it?” Gage wondered.

“He means I’m not convinced this was an accidental fall,” Paige clarified.

“I contacted Benny,” Jericho advised. “He’s going to head up once he finishes the report on the Benson autopsy.”

“It looks like that guy was hiking and just fell,” Gage insisted. “Maybe he tripped.”

“Nope.” Paige turned and moved to the edge, next to the rappelling ropes. “Can you get me down there, Alva?”

“Sure,” he shrugged. “If you want. But the guys are just waiting for your signal to bring him up. With the weather, I don’t see a reason for you to make that trip. You do realize what goes down has to come back up, right?”

Paige moved closer to the edge and glanced down. She wasn’t buying accidental fall on this one. “Where’s his vehicle?”

“I couldn’t find one,” Gage admitted.

“Then how did he get here?” Paige continued to study what she could see of the lifeless form. “This was no accident, Gage.”

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“I was afraid you were going to stay that,” Gage sighed. “But, for the record, I also had unanswered questions.”

“What is he wearing?” Paige turned to focus on the sergeant.

“Snow Canyon Hoodie, cargo shorts, and sneakers.” Alva glanced at his notes. “Also, a light jacket over the sweatshirt.”

“He wasn’t hiking,” Paige insisted. “Look at that couple over there,” Paige pointed. “They went for a morning ski trip, and they have at least four layers, including ski pants, warm boots, a wool hat, an insulated coat, goggles, gloves, gaiters, a face shield —”

“Alright,” Gage grumbled. “I get the idea. But we also know that guy came out here before the storm hit. He wouldn’t be wearing all the fancy gear if this happened yesterday or even the day before.”

“Alva?” Jericho turned to the sergeant.

“A day, tops,” Alva gave Gage a sympathetic look. “Based on decomp, I’d say he went over that ledge sometime last night or early this morning before the storm blew in. With the dip in temps, Benny will have to determine time of death.”

“Do we know what time that storm hit?” Paige wondered.

“Around four, I think,” Gage glanced up the road. “Sounds like Benny’s here.”

“Say the word and my people will hoist the body up the mountain,” Alva turned to Jericho.

“Paige?”

“I need just a minute, then you can do your thing,” Paige decided. Once they loaded the remains onto the stokes, slowly raised him to the top, and loaded him into the waiting ME vehicle, Paige took a minute to study the body of a kid that died way too young.

“Any ideas?” Jericho moved up next to her.

“I guess we’ll need to start at the college,” Paige decided. “He didn’t have any identification, other than the college hoodie. Our first step is to identify him. Then we can try to determine what happened. Plus, Benny will help with that.”

“You still think this was a body dump?” Jericho wondered.

“Don’t you?” Paige focused on her boss.

“I’m not typically a betting man,” Jericho motioned toward the vehicles. “But I’d bet the farm that’s exactly what happened. The question is why.”

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“And who,” Paige kicked the tire to knock the snow off her boot.

“Any word from your other half?”

“Nothing new,” Paige sighed. “Sean is improving. Zeus is building explosive devices and Dax is generating a plan to storm the castle. I just hope they don’t all end up dead in the process.”

“Trust them,” Jericho softened. “They know what they’re doing. I’m sure they’ll be fine.”

“Uh-huh,” Paige pulled open her door. “There’s nothing more we can do here. If there was evidence, it was destroyed in that storm.”

“We can only do what we can do,” Jericho turned and headed for his own vehicle.

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Paige stepped into her house and immediately headed upstairs to change. She slid into a comfortable sweatshirt, lounge pants, and her favorite thick, fluffy socks. She laughed when her stomach let out a loud growl. She hadn’t had time to stop and eat today. Hopefully she’d find something edible in the fridge.

Moments later, she had some kind of rice and vegetable concoction in the microwave and a steaming cup of coffee in her hand. She settled in at the table to sip her favorite drink and think. It took all day, but she finally identified her victim. Jonas Medford was a freshman at Snow College. Benny had finished his preliminary assessment. Jonas did not suffer a fatal fall down the side of a mountain. He would have to wait for the lab results, but he believed the kid died from alcohol poisoning. He said Jonas had a heart attack and suffered asphyxiation — all consistent with drinking too much alcohol in a short period of time.

“Now I just have to figure out why?” Paige retrieved her dinner from the microwave and considered. If he was attending Snow College, it could have been a drunken party gone wrong. The kids throwing the party might have found him in a room, or on the back patio and panicked. Didn’t excuse what they did but they were just kids. She sighed and wished Dax was here. It always helped to talk through a case with her husband.

She pulled out a notepad and began jotting down the steps she would need to take to resolve this. First, she’d head to the college first thing and see if she could get a list of Jonas’ courses, housing information and names of his roommates. Then, she’d start running backgrounds...

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“I think we’ve learned everything we can from the outside of that structure,” Dax announced.

“The explosives are ready,” Zeus advised. “Now we just need the invalid over there to recover enough to put this plan in motion.”

“I keep telling you I’m good to go.” Sean pushed himself into a sitting position and sipped his coffee.

“I think he’s good enough to manage his small but essential part in this,” Zeus studied Sean.

“I think he needs another day — maybe two,” Dax disagreed.

“I’m fine,” Sean insisted. “We should head in tonight once it gets dark.”

“You should eat your fake eggs,” Dax suggested. “Once you get stronger, we’ll talk about it.”

“Tonight,” Sean insisted. “I’m calling Nathan.”

“We’re half a day ahead of the good general,” Dax warned. “I doubt he’ll appreciate you bothering him at this hour. He probably just went to bed.”

“I thought Paige said he was still in Manti,” Sean corrected. “It’s only what? Nine out there?”

“About that,” Dax shrugged. “I was just about to call Paige. I’ll let her know we’re thinking about proceeding with the plan tonight and she can notify Porter.”

“We are going tonight,” Sean insisted. “We need to get Webb out of there before they realize who he is and why he’s here.”

“They might already know,” Zeus warned. “And if they do—”

“He could be dead already,” Sean nodded. “I know that. It’s part of the reason I don’t want to wait.”

“You guys finalize the plan,” Dax told them. “I need to call Paige.”

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“Hey, baby,” Dax said when Paige answered the phone.

“Hi,” Paige whispered. “Are you guys okay?”

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“I know you’re worried.” Dax settled onto the ground and leaned against the crumbling wall. He was up on the roof and hearing her voice made him long for home. “I also know telling you it’s time for us to put our plan into action isn’t going to help.”

“When?” Paige tried to push away the worry. “And what time? I want Nathan ready just in case—” she didn’t know how to finish that statement.

“Tonight,” Dax admitted. “Once it gets dark, well move in. Then we’ll evaluate the target and execute the plan as soon as it’s safe.”

“That would be never,” Paige argued. “Which means you might as well come home now.”

Dax smiled. “I promise we will be safe and I’ll be home soon.”

“Not soon enough,” she whispered. “I’m going to try to be supportive, but just be careful.”

“I will,” Dax assured her. “Now, tell me about your day. Any new cases?”

She started to skim over the college mystery, but Dax stopped her and insisted he wanted to know the details. They talked for over an hour before he reluctantly told her he should go help Zee walk through the plan one last time. Paige reluctantly said goodbye, then just sat there staring into the fire, terrified she’d never see her husband again. An hour later, Paige was still sitting there, frightened, stressed, and eager to have this mission over. That’s when it hit her. This was the life her mom lived with Dillan Carter.

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“Paige,” Jericho stepped from his office and focused on his deputy. “I need you to come with me.” He didn’t wait for an answer, just headed for the door.

Paige followed and silently climbed into his passenger’s seat. She absently buckled the seatbelt and then just stared out the window.

Jericho suddenly swerved to the right and pulled into a nearly empty parking lot. “Spill it.”

“What?” Paige glanced over. “Oh, right. Dax and the guys are putting their plan in motion. Well, they’re probably doing the final run through right now. They’ll execute the plan as soon as it gets dark. They’re ten hours ahead of us so—”

“He’s going to be fine,” Jericho assured her without hesitation. “I know it’s difficult, with him there and you here, but he knows what he’s doing. The sooner he rescues the British operative, the sooner he can come home.”

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“I wish that were true,” Paige sighed. “We both know this is only the first step. Dax wants to come home, I can tell. He wants that as much as I do, but they won’t leave a man behind. Sean and this Webb guy, they went over originally to rescue someone else. They won’t abandon him — none of them will. This is only the first step. And finding the missing scientist — well, Sean’s been looking for him for months.”

“Which means he probably has a few leads,” Jericho decided. “Sean’s tenacious, and he’s an excellent investigator. He probably had a few ideas where to find the guy when his partner went missing. They’ll just pick that up and move forward. Dax will be home soon.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Paige focused out the large windshield. “Where are we going?”

“To the college.” Jericho pulled out of the lot and returned to the highway.

“I thought I was helping Gage this morning.”

“Clayton got called over to the high school,” Jericho advised. “I told him we could handle things at the college this morning.”

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“Okay.” Paige stepped up to the apartment door. “The admission office said he lived here with two guys; Tyler Booth and Keith Snow.”

Jericho reached up and pounded three times on the door with his fist. He was about to pound again when the door flew open.

“What?” a guy in loose fitting pajama bottoms demanded.

“We’re looking for Tyler Booth or Keith Snow,” Paige answered.

“Tyler’s still in the hospital,” he glanced at Jericho and frowned. “I’m Keith. What do you need?”

“Why is Tyler in the hospital?” Paige wondered.

Keith frowned. “I thought you were the police.”

“Why is Tyler in the hospital?” Jericho demanded.

“That whole alcohol thing,” Keith frowned.

“Can we come in?” Paige wondered. “We have a few questions.”

“I’m kind of busy,” Keith started to close the door.

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“We won’t take long,” Jericho reached out and pushed the door open even further.

“Do I have a choice?” Keith glared.

“Not really.” Paige stepped inside the small apartment. She settled onto the couch and pulled out a notepad. Jericho sat down next to her. “We need you to tell us about this alcohol thing.”

“I already told campus police everything I know,” Keith objected.

“And that’s a good start,” Jericho pushed. “But now we need you to tell us.”

“Can’t you just read their report?” Keith protested.

“We will,” Paige assured him. “But we need to hear it directly from you.”

“Fine,” Keith dropped into a chair across from them. “Tyler and Jonas moved in, but they wanted a bigger place. Said this space isn’t conducive to studying or some nonsense. I didn’t care. If they move, that’s more space for me.”

“Where did they plan to go?” Paige wondered.

“Epsa Gamma something,” Keith shrugged.

“Is that some fraternity organization?” Jericho wondered.

“Yeah,” Keith hesitated. “Technically, the college discourages fraternities and sororities, but they claim they don’t do the whole hazing thing.”

“But they do?” Paige realized. Is that how Jonas ended up at the bottom of a cliff?

“Well,” Keith shrugged. “Tyler is in the hospital and Jonas hasn’t come home.”

“Was he reported missing?” Paige knew he wasn’t, or she would have seen him in the system.

“Naw,” Keith settled back, more comfortable now. “I told them Tyler and Jonas left together but that campus security guy said people go home all the time. He said we have to wait and see if he shows up next week. If not, they’ll do a report or something.”

Paige glanced at Jericho. They’d need to stop at the security office and see if they looked into this at all.

“Tell us about Tyler,” Jericho switched gears.

“I don’t know much,” Keith admitted. “The campus guys showed up and said some guy dropped Tyler off at the emergency room. He was pretty sick because he drank too much. They

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said his levels were dangerously high, and he got there just in time. The guy, the one that came here, he wanted to know if I dropped him off. I didn't. I was at work. I asked them if the guy also dropped Jonas off, but they said no. That's when I told him Jonas left with Tyler. They were going to that big house at the end of College Avenue. I think something happened there but Tyler won't talk about it."

"Do you know who lives there?" Jericho asked. "In that big house?"

"No," Keith shrugged. "I'm just a freshman. I heard it's unusual for those guys to let someone join mid-year. We're just a two-year college. But if you get into Gamma here, I guess it's an automatic entrance into Gamma at the University of Utah — or, I guess anyway. That's why Tyler and Jonas wanted to join. Mostly for later, plus they'd have better space next year."

"Makes sense," Paige nodded. "So, they went over to the frat-house. What night was that?"

"Uh, the night before last," Keith considered. "Yeah, two nights ago."

"We appreciate your help," Jericho stood. "If you think of anything that might help, Paige will give you her card."

Paige stood and handed him a business card. "I hope Tyler recovers soon."

"I think he's going home once he gets released," Keith told them. "I went by last night, but like I said, he won't talk about what happened. Not to me, anyway."

Paige silently followed Jericho back outside. They continued to across the parking lot and climb into Jericho's vehicle.

"Hazing gone wrong?" Paige wondered.

"Probably," Jericho started the engine. "How do you feel about dropping by that big house at the end of College Avenue?"

"I've always wanted to see what happens inside a frat house," Paige buckled her seatbelt.

Jericho studied her for several seconds. "You went to college. Are you telling me you never went to a wild kegger?"

"I'm telling you I never went to a wild kegger at a fraternity house," Paige settled back. "Or a sorority, for that matter."

"Why?" Jericho pulled onto the road.

"I went to college to make a better life for myself." Paige stared out the window but she wasn't really seeing her surroundings. She was lost in thoughts of the past. "Mom was gone, and I was on my own. I didn't have a parent to fall back on if I failed. For me, college was a means to

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an end. So, I got lost in the studies and I excelled. I guess that's what makes me good at what I do. I wanted to learn — as much as I could, as quickly as I could.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Jericho considered. “Sometimes I think you missed out on just being a kid.”

“Maybe,” Paige looked back at him. “But I choose to believe that's overrated.”

Jericho didn't answer. He was too focused on Paige's life — current and past. She had to grow up way too quickly. Then, she hid behind her studies, got hired by the FBI and ultimately moved to Manti. Not too traumatic on the surface. But she lost her father when she was a child, her mother was murdered when she was a teenager and now her husband was halfway around the world in a hostile country, risking his own life to rescue a stranger. It didn't sit well, but he wasn't sure he could change it. He could have a talk with that husband of hers when he returned home.

“Let's go harass some frat boys,” Paige said once Jericho pulled into the long driveway. “Nice digs. My college experience looked more like Keith's than this place. Has to be nice.”

“What's that?” Jericho joined her and they headed for the front door.

“Money,” Paige shrugged. “These kids, they have privacy, a quiet place to study, a kitchen to make their own meals, I'm just saying it would have changed the experience a bit — for the better. I can see why Tyler and Jonas wanted to move here.”

“Your own kitchen means cooking your own meals,” Jericho corrected. “I doubt these guys bother. I get the quiet and the independence, but that also means temptation and no supervision.”

“Which is why Tyler ended up in the hospital,” Paige glanced up when the front door flew open and a kid around nineteen, maybe twenty, stepped onto the front porch.

“Can I help you?” he asked reluctantly.

“Deputy Carter,” Paige held out a hand. “And this is Sheriff Walters. Do you live here?”

“I do,” the kid frowned and glanced at his watch. “I'm actually going to be late for a test. What is this about?”

“What's your name?” Jericho moved forward.

“Oh,” he shifted his books. “David. David Klein.”

“You're not on the list,” Paige glanced up. “The admin office over at the college gave us a list. You're not on it.”

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“I—” he sighed. “I’m in Greg’s room. Greg Baker. He’s my cousin. He went home, and I moved over, his family had paid for the entire year and I was grateful for the change.”

“But nobody told the college,” Paige pushed.

“I don’t think we needed to,” David shrugged. “It’s not a closed campus. I could rent that place,” he pointed to a modest home up the road. “It’s a private residence. If I rented it, that’s up to me and I wouldn’t need to notify the college. As long as I pay my tuition and fees, the rest is up to me. I assume it’s the same with this place.”

“Did you make arrangements with the owner, when you switched with your cousin?” Jericho didn’t think it was important but he wanted a clear picture.

“We didn’t switch,” David objected. “Greg’s mom got cancer, and he had to drop out to help his dad with his brothers. I worked it out with the other guys that live here. I don’t know if they spoke with the owners. Can I go? I can’t miss this test.”

“Not yet,” Paige moved to block his path. “I need to speak with you about Tyler Booth and Jonas Medford.”

“I don’t know them,” David glanced at his watch again.

“They were here two nights ago,” Paige was watching the kid carefully, but there was no sign he was hiding anything.

“I wasn’t,” David relaxed. “I just got back today. I went home, my brother just got back from his mission and we did a big family thing. Now can I go?”

“Where is home?” Jericho asked.

“Ogden,” David smiled. “Too far to drive home, but close enough to make it manageable.”

“I’ll need the information for your parents, your brother, anyone that can verify you were in Ogden two nights ago and not here, with your housemates,” Paige demanded. “Once I have that, you’re free to go.”

David pulled out a sheet of paper and jotted down a few names and numbers. Once he handed it to Paige, he pushed past her and practically ran toward the school.

“We’ll call,” Jericho motioned to the list. “But he’s not in this.”

“Let’s see who else is home,” they ascended the stairs and once again, Jericho pounded on the door. Nobody answered. He pounded again. Still nothing.

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“They are college kids,” Paige shrugged. “We might have to come back tonight. Some of them could have night classes but most will stick to a daytime schedule to leave their nights free and open.”

“Is that a voice of experience?” Jericho wondered.

“Sort of,” Paige shrugged. “Let’s head over to the security office. I want to see the report.”

There wasn’t much to it. Paige glanced at Jericho, got his nod to proceed and sat down in the chair across from the guy currently on duty. He also happened to be the one that took the initial report. “Officer Shaw, I get the attitude about the alcohol — with Tyler. He drank too much and ended up in the hospital.”

“You have no idea how many kids drink too much and end up sick,” Shaw shrugged that off immediately.

“I’m more concerned about the missing persons report you never filed,” Paige continued.

“Kids come and go,” Shaw shrugged again, unconcerned. “I’m sure that kid just went home, decided to spend a little time with his family and he’ll be back. Probably in the next couple days, if not next week.”

“That’s going to be difficult,” Jericho dropped a crime scene photo on the guys desk, tired of the man’s attitude.

“Whoa,” he jumped back. “What is that?”

“That’s the body of Jonas Medford,” Paige said without emotion. “Your missing kid that you never put into the system. The kid that won’t be returning tomorrow or next week or next month. The kid that was reported missing, but you couldn’t be bothered to follow up.”

“Now wait a minute,” Shaw glared at Paige.

“And, because you didn’t do your job,” Jericho added. “We’ve wasted an entire day tracking down the information that should have been on the missing persons entry in the system.”

“We’ve got protocol,” Shaw scrambled. “He has to be missing—”

“Don’t give me some nonsense about waiting twenty-four hours before taking the report,” Paige cut him off. “It’s been a lot longer than that and he’s still not in the system. I checked. Plus, you add in the fact that he was with Tyler Booth when he disappeared...”

“And Tyler Booth is currently in the hospital fighting for his life after drinking too much,” Jericho added.



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“And you should have taken that report immediately,” Paige finished. “You should have called us in to help. At the very least, you should have put out a bulletin, got Jonas’ picture out on social media. Basically, you should have done something.”

“I assumed it was just another kid that got homesick,” Shaw settled back. “How can I help now?”

Paige passed him the list of names she had for the guys living in that large house. “You can get me everything on these guys, including class schedules. I also need to know if Jonas or Tyler have ever been in trouble.”

“I can tell you most of these guys are good kids,” he pointed to the list. “Joel Bunton is your one glaring exception. He’s got an attitude and — I don’t know how to explain it. He’s arrogant. He also thinks he’s better than everyone and the rules don’t apply to him. His dad’s some bigwig financial advisor or some nonsense. I’ll have to dig further, never had a reason to follow up before, but there’s a rumor that Joel got kicked out of BYU, tried to transfer to USU but was denied on account of his expulsion in Provo. I can see what I can get but you might have more luck—”

“I’ll look into it,” Paige decided. “Just give me what you have and I’ll get back to you if I need your assistance.”

“We have some other things we need to do,” Jericho stepped in. “We’ll be back later tonight, can you make sure the packet is available after hours?”

“I’ll take care of it,” Shaw promised.

“One more thing,” Paige stood. “I need you to keep the death of Jonas Medford to yourself for now. People are more likely to talk if they think the guys is missing. Once they know it’s more serious than that, they tend to shut down and they’re more cautious about what they say.”

“No problem,” Shaw nodded. “I will need to tell my boss, but I’ll let him know how you want to work this.”

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Two hours later, Paige stood next to Jericho’s vehicle. “I don’t feel like we’re any closer to getting answers.”

“It’s a slow process,” Jericho climbed behind the wheel. “Let’s get you home. Take the rest of the night off. I’m sending Dean and Havilland back out here tonight. I think they might blend in a little better with those frat boys.”

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“But—”

“Go home, Paige,” Jericho ordered. “I’ll get you back to the office then you’re off the clock. Focus on that husband of yours, do what you need to do to confirm he’s okay, then come back tomorrow refreshed and ready to work whatever leads the boys uncover at the party house.”

Paige wanted to argue, but she also wanted to go home and corner Carmen, find out if she had any updates. “Alright,” she finally relented. “Too bad those guys are football maniacs. Gage could probably get a confession in a matter of minutes.”

“I looked,” Jericho smiled. “As did you. One is pre-med, the others are just getting their generals out of the way before they transfer. We’ll figure this out. Call Benny, see if he has an update.”

He did. Benny’s autopsy confirmed his original assessment. Jonas died of alcohol poisoning. Benny said the kids core temperature dropped so low it led to cardiac arrest. He couldn’t tell if that was the primary cause of death or if it was asphyxiation. At some point, Jonas vomited, probably choked and inhaled the vomit into his lungs blocking his ability to breathe.

Benny suspected that Jonas either passed out and fell to the floor, or someone laid him on the floor after he passed out. This worsened his condition, and that’s where he likely died. There was settling that told him they left Jonas on his back for some time before they moved him and eventually rolled him over the edge of the cliff to make it look like an accident.

“Stupid kids,” Paige said once she disconnected. “They just made things worse for themselves.”

“Yeah,” Jericho sighed. “Yes, they did.” Before he had a chance to respond further, Margie called. Jonas was an orphan. His parents were murdered when he was fourteen. He spent the next four years in a series of foster homes before he aged out of the system. Margie couldn’t find any living relative, neither could the state.

“He was trying to make a better life for himself,” Paige stared out the front window. “His death feels more tragic now that I know his history. Why is that? The facts haven’t changed.”

“Empathy,” Jericho reached out and gave her knee a gentle pat. “We’ll figure this out, Paige. That boy, he probably felt alone and a little lost. He enrolled in college, made a friend, and ended up at the wrong house. The system failed him, life failed him, we won’t make that mistake.”

Paige nodded but remained silent.

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“I can do more than drive the stupid car,” Sean objected.

“Okay,” Dax shrugged. “But I still need you to drive the stupid car.” He turned to Zeus. “You ready?”

“Good to go,” Zeus dropped the last pack onto the back seat then climbed in next to it. “We have a plan and it’s a good plan. Sean, stop whining and let’s get this done.”

Sean climbed behind the wheel and Dax slid into the passenger’s seat. “Head out.”

They pulled off the road and maneuvered the vehicle behind a large crop of date palms, in the dark, the crumbling structure to the left of their location easily hid the vehicle. It gave them a clear view of their target but obstructed the road leading into the village.

“There’s more activity tonight,” Zeus frowned.

“We’re switching to Plan B,” Dax decided.

“If there are more people, you need me,” Sean insisted.

“I need you out here, ready to swoop in and snatch us out of the jaws of hell,” Dax disagreed. “Sean, I’m willing to get your man out, but you need to start acting like a team player. We stick with the plan. If we can make it, we’ll exit from that far door. That’s not a given, so stay alert and scan the entire complex for us. This could get ugly.”

“And watch your back,” Zeus warned. “You have this attitude that you’re safe and secure up here. You’re not. These guys know the area and they patrol these abandoned homes, especially when they’re housing prisoners in a nearby residence. Keep an eye out for us, but you need to constantly scan your own back door.”

“I have been operating in this country for months,” Sean grumbled. “I know how they operate.” He frowned when he spotted a child exit the house with a large bag. The kid climbed onto a donkey and headed away from the target.

“What?” Dax turned to see what Sean was watching.

“They just sent that kid out,” Sean pointed to the boy.

“I saw him leave,” Zeus nodded. “Could be other kids inside.”

“No,” Sean disagreed. “They’re using him. That bag, it’s to collect the ransom. They’re selling a prisoner tonight.”

“Then we need to move,” Zeus flung his bag over his shoulder.

“Watch for us,” Dax focused on Sean. “We’re depending on you. Let’s go.”

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Dax and Zeus made their way down the dirt road, using the trees, abandoned vehicles and empty propane tanks for cover. Dax held up a hand and then froze in place, watching and waiting before they made entry into the structure.

“Let’s just blow the door and take them by surprise,” Zeus whispered.

“If we blow the door,” Dax considered. “They’ll only be surprised for a minute, then they’ll come at us, guns blazing, before we can find and rescue our target.”

“True enough,” Zeus agreed. “What do you suggest?”

“They have a couple tanks piled next to the door,” Dax offered.

“We use those to breach the door and go in a little more subtle like,” Zeus nodded.

“I need you to cover me, but keep that device handy just in case,” Dax added. “I’ll deal with the door.”

Zeus slid the makeshift bomb into his pocket and gripped his gun. They went in hot, expecting trouble. When they stepped inside an empty room, they both frowned, knowing it had to be a trick.

Dax dropped the tank and moved forward, cautious and alert. He was expecting trouble when the man jumped from behind a chair and began firing. He and Zee lunged for cover. Dax watched and waited, choosing just the right moment to act. When the gunman sprayed the room to the right, he shifted and balanced on one knee. Taking aim, he fired and struck the man in the chest. The gunfire stopped, and the man fell to the ground.

“One down, but with all that racket,” Zeus watched the door that led to a hallway.

“We’re walking into a fatal funnel, and they know we’re coming,” Dax nodded. “Maybe now’s a good time for a minor explosion.”

Zeus grinned. “Or a slightly larger one.” He reached into his bag and pulled out a square object with cord hanging out one side. “I say we dodge back in there, I toss this thing as far as I can then we hunker down and wait. The second that thing explodes; we need to book it down that hallway. We’re not going to have much time before they recover and start shooting.”

“I agree,” Dax nodded. “We take cover in this room, but we stand on either side of the door so we can get to the end before they know we’re coming. I’ll go first, you better be right behind me with another device, just in case.”

The plan worked well. They were halfway down the hall when they saw the barrel of a gun emerge from the end of the hall. Zeus tossed another device, and yanked Dax through a door he

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hadn't seen before. Dax pulled his gun and cleared the room. He spotted a small lump huddled in the corner. Cautiously the two of them approached, guns drawn, ready for another attack.

"Can you help me?" the man finally asked. He moved his arms away from his body to show he wasn't dangerous.

"Who are you?" Zeus asked.

"Lucas Brown," he croaked. "I'm a journalist."

"From Australia," Dax added, amazed they found a guy that had been missing for months.

"Yes," Lucas tried to sit up.

"We're looking for someone," Zeus handed the man a bottle of water. "Have you seen another prisoner in this building?"

"Yes," Lucas took the water and sipped. "He's being held at the end of the hall to the left. There are two rooms. The man you are looking for is in the second room."

"We need to leave you here," Dax warned. "Once we get the man we came for, we'll be back. Can you hang tight for just a little longer?"

"I'll be fine," Lucas held up the water. "I haven't had anything this good for a long time."

"Heads up," Zeus moved to the door. "Incoming."

Dax glanced around the room. "You need to move, get behind those bags over there."

"I don't think—"

"Move," Dax joined Zeus at the door. "Looks like at least three of them. You go high, I'll go low." He dropped onto one knee and began firing. Zeus remained standing, but joined him. It didn't take long before all three of the men were neutralized.

"Looks like you still have it," Zeus observed. "I can't wait to tell Hawk he's no longer needed."

"Hawk will always be needed," Dax stood. "And it's not that hard. Precision will always rule over spray and pray. Let's go."

They encountered one more guy before they reached the door the reporter identified. Dax slid it open with Zeus ready to react if they were ambushed. The room was dark, but they could make out a single figure on the other side of the room.

"Stop," Webb wheezed. "They've rigged that line to explosives. You take one more step and we're all dead."

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Zeus followed the line to the side of the room and within seconds the device was inoperable and harmless. “Go! I’ll keep watch.”

“You help him,” Dax disagreed. “Just in case they have something else rigged to go off the instant you cut that line. I’ve got this.” He shifted his position and fired another round through the door. “Hurry, I think they’ve called for reinforcements.”

Zeus disarmed a second device then freed Webb and helped him to his feet. “You think you can manage on your own?”

“I’m good,” he half stumbled, half walked toward the door. “There’s another man.”

“The reporter, we know,” Dax nodded and motioned for Zeus and Webb to follow. They made it to the room, retrieved Lucas and headed for the exit. Once again, they encountered gun fire.

“This time it’s my turn,” Zeus pulled several devices from his pack. He went to work rigging them to go off within seconds of each other.

Dax watched and realized what Zeus was doing. “New plan. We’re leaving through that other exit. Can you steady each other and make your way to the other side of the structure? We’ll be right behind you.”

“You go with them, I got this,” Zeus tipped his head to the side, motioning down the hall.

“I never leave a man behind,” Dax focused on Zeus. “Do this already, we need to get out of here.”

Zeus lit the fuse and they bolted down the hall. They caught up with the two prisoners, gripped their elbows, and rushed them through the door. They only made it a few feet when the entire wall exploded.

They fell to the ground, Dax and Zeus protecting Lucas and Webb. Dax looked up and spotted Sean with the vehicle. “Move,” he ordered, pushing Webb toward the open door. The four of them scrambled in and Sean sped away.

One vehicle followed them, but they lost it by maneuvering over rarely used pathways and darting between palm trees. They continued to evade for another twenty minutes before Sean pulled onto the highway headed toward Kuwait.

“Where are you going?” Webb demanded.

“Both of you need medical assistance,” Zeus said flatly. “You need a doctor to evaluate your injuries.”

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“We need to find somewhere to hide,” Webb disagreed. “Then we need to complete our mission. A man is still missing.”

“Our mission is complete,” Zeus informed him. “We came here to find you. We found you. I’m not going to make my wife a widow just so you can find a scientist that wandered into hostile territory.”

Webb went off on Zeus, who argued back.

“What is it?” Dax asked Lucas.

“I know where he is,” Lucas whispered.

“The scientist?” Dax asked for clarification.

“Yeah,” Lucas admitted. “They were forcing him to use drone parts left by the US to make a workable device they could use to find more prisoners.”

“So,” Dax glanced at Zeus who was now silently listening. “He’s still alive.”

“Yes,” Lucas nodded. “I’m sure of it. He was procrastinating, hoping to find a way to escape before he completed a drone.”

“Do you know where he is?” Sean wondered.

“Radari,” Lucas glanced around. “Do you know what that is?”

“Yeah,” Zeus sighed. “If we’re going after the scientist, we’re headed in the wrong direction.”

“I need to call Porter,” Dax decided. “Find somewhere to hunker down tonight and we’ll decide how to proceed after I talk to the general.”

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Paige moved to the counter and poured herself a steaming mug of coffee. She just finished doctoring it when Nathan stepped into the room.

“I assume that obstinate husband of yours told you he’s coming home,” Nathan poured his own cup of coffee.

Paige glanced at him then moved to settled in at the table.

“What?” Nathan sat down next to her.

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“I’m trying to decide how to respond to that,” Paige sat back.

“Meaning?” Nathan frowned.

Paige sipped her coffee and watched Nathan process what she hadn’t said.

“That pigheaded, insubordinate, defiant—”

“You would have done the same thing and you know it,” Paige grinned. “All those adjectives were redundant. All you had to say was soldier. It would have covered pretty much all of that. I need you to have their back — just in case.”

“I told him to come home,” Nathan insisted.

“I know,” Paige reached out and took his hand. “And I also know you did that because it was Dax and Zeus. You’re trying to protect us — me and Carmen, but also the guys — and I love you for that. However, we both know they need to rescue that scientist. They needed to do that anyway, add in the new information about the drone, and it’s even more important. If the kidnappers have access to that kind of technology, there’s no way to guess how they will use it.”

“Are you going to be okay?” Nathan studied her. “I know you’ve been stressed about this one.”

“I miss him,” Paige admitted. “I’m worried about him. It’s dangerous over there. What he’s doing makes it even more dangerous and I don’t trust our government officials to help if anything goes wrong.”

“You can trust me,” Nathan assured her.

“And I do,” Paige smiled. “Which is why I need you to promise me you’ll keep him safe and bring him home as soon as you can.”

“I promise,” Nathan pulled her in for a hug.

“I don’t know how Mom did this,” Paige whispered. “And Sophie. They’re so much stronger than I am.”

“I think they might disagree with you on that,” Nathan kissed the top of her head. “Don’t you need to get to work?”

“I do,” Paige stood. “I’ll talk to you tonight.”

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“Paige,” Havilland called. “We’re in here.”



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Paige stepped into the conference room and glanced around. “Did you learn anything from the party brigade?”

“I learned they’re all a bunch of liars,” Havi said flatly.

“I learned they’re bad liars,” Dean added.

“The boys were just about to fill us in,” Jericho advised. “Come on in and take a seat.”

“Basically,” Dean began. “We both got the same fake, rehearsed speech from each of the tenants.”

“They don’t really know Tyler or Jonas,” Havilland added. “They remember them stopping by the house — only briefly, of course.”

“Uh-huh,” Paige wasn’t buying it.

“They asked about a room,” Dean continued. “The group told them there was no room at the inn and then Tyler and Jonas left.”

“Nobody knows where they went or how they got drunk,” Havilland provided. “And they certainly don’t know where Jonas could be.”

“But?” Jericho asked.

“I spoke to Joel Bunton and Doug Chilcott,” Havilland answered. “They’re both lying. Doug comes across as scared and intimidated by the others. Joel strikes me as the leader of that group, and I think he’s calling the shots.”

“I spoke with Troy Dewey and Vince Rowley,” Dean added. “I get the impression they’re both in this up to their necks, but they’re worried about the consequences, and someone is directing them. Their stories were fake. They rehearsed what to say and those guys are sticking to the script.”

“What about Jeff Arnold?” Paige wondered.

“He wasn’t there,” Havi advised. “The others said he’s pre-med, and he had labs last night. I get the impression he’s rarely there, and he takes his studying seriously.”

“Then he may not be involved in this,” Paige considered.

“So, what’s our next move?” Dean asked.

“You’re going home,” Jericho answered. “Both of you. Clayton should be here any minute. Paige, I want the two of you to pick this back up and work it today.”

“I can help,” Havilland offered.

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“Go home,” Jericho repeated. “Paige can work this today and she’ll pass it back off to you tonight if she needs to. I want you to interview this Jeff kid and see what he knows.”

“Right,” Paige agreed. “I want to check into a few things during the day, so I doubt I’ll make it back out to the college before end of shift. If you two could track down Jeff Arnold, that would really help.”

“Alright,” Dean stood. “Susie transcribed some of the interviews and Margie said she was almost finished with the rest. Just let us know what you need and we’ll handle it.”

Once they were gone, Jericho turned to Paige. “Any word from your other half?”

“The mission went well,” Paige smiled. “In fact, they got a two-for. Remember that journalist from Australia that disappeared a few months back?”

“They found him?” Jericho raised an eyebrow.

“And rescued him,” Paige admitted. “He’s on his way to Kuwait with the British agent Sean was working with. Dax tried to talk Sean into joining them, but he refused. That man is stubborn.”

“Must be a fed thing,” Jericho mumbled. “So, the boys are on their way home?”

Paige frowned. “Not yet. They have one more mission, then Dax will come home.”

“The original mission?” Jericho realized.

“Right,” Paige stood. “I’m going to see where Gage is. Then I have a couple places I want to hit this morning. I’ll try to drop back and brief you later this afternoon.”

Jericho took the hint. Paige didn’t want to talk about the danger Dax was still facing. He could understand that.

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“We’ve got Vince Rowley cold,” Paige hopped into Gage’s passenger seat and pulled the door shut. “I think if we bring him in, lean on him hard, he’ll break.”

“Maybe,” Gage started the engine. “But what if he doesn’t? We only have one shot at this. If he has a well-rehearsed story, we’re done. We have nothing else to throw at him.”

“What do you suggest?” Paige wondered.

“I don’t know,” Gage considered. “Just because Vince rented the keg, doesn’t mean we can link him to a crime. The rental was legal.”

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“But giving that alcohol to a couple underage kids wasn’t,” Paige disagreed.

“Unfortunately, we can’t prove he gave it to those guys.” Gage argued.

“I want to argue, but I can’t because you’re right,” Paige admitted. “So, what’s our next move? How do we get more? I went over that scene up the canyon thoroughly. There’s nothing there. The storm destroyed anything they may have left. None of my usual tricks will help us this time.”

“What about the hospital?” Gage turned to face Paige. “Somebody took Tyler to the emergency room. They have cameras everywhere. Let’s go watch the footage and see if we can identify anyone.”

“Campus police already did that,” Paige dismissed the idea. “They said you couldn’t make anyone out. They thought it was David, Tyler’s current roommate, but it wasn’t. He has a solid alibi.”

“We should review the video for ourselves,” Gage put the vehicle in gear. “What do we have to lose?”

“Time,” Paige grumbled.

“When does Dax get back?” Gage wondered. “You’re grumpy and uncooperative when he’s gone.”

“I’m not grumpy,” Paige objected.

“You are off your game,” Gage warned. “Because if Dax was here, you’d never trust the opinion of some campus cop. You’d insist on watching the video yourself. Do you want to talk about it?”

“Can’t,” Paige focused out the window. *Was Gage right?*

“Won’t,” Gage corrected, “But the offer still stands.”

“He’s working on something dangerous,” Paige stared out the side window. “They’ll probably go in, deal with things tonight. Or after sunset where they are right now. I guess I’m just on edge and I’m worried. You’re right, I’m off my game. I’m cutting corners and I’m not concentrating. I’m missing things. We should go to the hospital and watch the video.”

“What you do — we do, is dangerous too,” Gage reminded her. “Dax trusts you to do your job. You need to trust him to do his job. And, hopefully, once this dangerous thing is over tonight — or whenever — he can come home.”

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“I feel like I keep having the same conversation again and again,” Paige admitted. “I want to support him. I want to trust that everything will be fine. Then, he goes off to do something dangerous and I start worrying again.”

“You love him,” Gage shrugged. “We should probably stop and check in with Jericho before we head to the hospital.”

“I guess it is that simple,” Paige turned to face Gage. “Let’s go in and update the boss then we’ll stop at the hospital and watch the video. I also have my secret weapon.”

“Carmen,” Gage smiled. “Alright, let’s go corner the boss.”

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“Let’s just go with the same plan,” Dax studied the building. “Sean, you stay here out of sight and watch for us to exit.”

“We’ll head in,” Zeus added. “Clear the place one room at a time, rescue the fair maiden, and get out of Dodge.”

“And this time,” Dax turned to Sean. “We are getting out of Dodge.”

“You won’t get any argument from me,” Sean agreed, more than ready to go home.

Just like before, Dax rammed the door and started to step inside. Zeus saw the muzzle of the gun just in time. He tackled Dax and tossed in one of his explosive devices. The room erupted. Before the dust even settled, the two of them rushed inside, crossed the room, and stood guard in the doorway.

“Which direction?” Zeus asked, glancing from one side to the other.

Dax hesitated but went with his gut. They rushed down the hall and darted into the first room they came to. Seconds later, they were confident it was empty and they moved to the next room. They continued to clear the building one room at a time. When they finally reached the room that contained the scientist, this time he was being guarded by two men. Dax took out one, Zeus dealt with the other.

Zeus took a step forward, but this time Dax tackled him. The bullet flew by, barely missing Zeus and sliced through Dax’s upper arm. Annoyed that it came so close to hitting its mark, Dax fired in rapid succession, hitting his target again and again and again.

“That’s enough,” Zeus pushed into a sitting position. “How bad?”

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“It’s just a flesh wound,” Dax stood. “Let’s get him out of this hell hole so we can go home.”

“The Black Knight sort of flesh wound, or he just winged you and you’ll be fine sort of flesh wound,” Zeus pushed.

“I don’t think we need to rehash Monty Python at the moment,” Dax glanced toward the corner that contained their prisoner. “Is it safe to unhook him or do you need to do a more thorough assessment?”

“Since they were more prepared, I think I should assess,” Zeus decided. “I’ll deal with him; you wrap that wound so you don’t bleed to death before we find shelter. I’ll stitch you up once we’re clear.”

They freed Elijah Turner and made their way out the back, thankful to be alive when Sean brought the vehicle to a sliding stop. They all jumped in and sped away. Finally, the mission was complete and they could head back to Kuwait and hop a plane home.

“I hope the good general came through for us,” Zeus snatched up the first aid kit and began wrapping gauze around Dax’s arm. “All I want right now is to go home.”

“Let’s head to that abandoned home we found,” Dax gritted his teeth and glared at Zeus. “I’ll call and confirm our ride’s ready. Pass me the phone.”

“Hello,” Nathan snatched up the phone.

“It’s done,” Dax said in greeting. “Tell me you have a plan.”

“I have a plan,” Nathan said without hesitation.

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“Alright,” Jericho focused on Havilland. “You’re absolutely sure that’s Doug Chilcott?” he passed the still shot Gage brought back from the hospital.

“Positive,” Havilland nodded. “And I also recognize that van. See the sticker in the back, it’s the vehicle that was parked in the driveway, out next to the large storage shed on the night we interviewed these guys. I also think Doug will crack as soon as we confront him with the evidence. When I talked to him before, I could tell he wanted to come clean but he was afraid.”

“Of you or someone else?” Jericho wondered.

“That, I couldn’t begin to guess,” Havilland shrugged.

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“I think we should head out to the house,” Jericho decided.

“We?” Paige wondered.

“I want a show of force,” Jericho stood. “All of us. Gage, you too. We’ll converge on the house, separate the suspects, interview them all at once, and see if we can break at least one of them.”

They arrived at the house and Paige reached out to ring the bell, but Jericho did his usual pounding. The door immediately flew open.

“What now?” Joel demanded.

“I’ll deal with you,” Jericho decided. “The rest of you head in, select one occupant and start your interview. I want them secured in separate rooms. We’re not leaving until we get answers.”

“You can’t—” Joel began, worried one of his friends would give in and reveal their secret.

“You have the right to remain silent,” Jericho advised Joel. “Feel free to exercise that right.”

“I’ll talk if I want to talk,” Joel grumbled.

Havilland stepped into the house and located Doug. “I’ve got this one.”

“I’ll speak with Vince,” Gage motioned for the guy to follow him into the kitchen.

Paige glanced around and spotted a tall guy she hadn’t seen before. “What’s your name?”

“Jeff Arnold,” he glanced around. “What’s going on here?”

“So, you’re the elusive tenant,” Paige nodded. “I’ll take you. Let’s go in here.”

They stepped into a room that looked like a library. “First, let’s get the legal stuff out of the way.” She read him Miranda then got his personal information. “Now for the hard part.”

“I don’t understand,” Jeff sat back and studied Paige. “They called the police and Tyler is going to be fine. I heard he’s going home for a while, but he shouldn’t have any permanent damage. Why the show of force and intimidation? We’ve been cooperating.”

Paige frowned. “Have you talked to your friends out there?”

“Not for a few days, why?” Jeff stared at the door.

“I’m going to record this,” Paige flipped on the recorder. “The first thing I need to know is your connection to Jonas Medford and Tyler Booth.”

## Make It a Double

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“I don’t have one,” Jeff frowned. He had to be missing something, he just didn’t know what.

“You must have some connection to Tyler,” Paige insisted. “You told me he was in the hospital, but he’s going to be okay.”

“Oh,” Jeff relaxed. “I want to be a doctor.”

“Right,” Paige nodded. “The college said you listed your major as pre-med.”

“Yeah,” Jeff glanced at the door again. She wasn’t asking anything difficult, but he knew his father would tell him to have an attorney here before he talked to them. “I can’t really declare that I’m pre-med until after I transfer to the University of Utah, but I am. I’m taking extra biology courses and I volunteer at the hospital. That’s how I talked to Tyler — during one of my shifts.”

“Okay,” Paige considered. “So, tell me what you meant when you said they called the police.”

“I don’t understand what’s going on here,” Jeff decided. “My dad is a lawyer. He told me never to talk to the police without an attorney in the room. Since you read me the Miranda Warning, I assume there’s been a crime of some kind. I think I want to exercise my right to remain silent until I speak with my attorney — which is also my father.”

Paige was disappointed, but that was his right. She stood and moved to the door. Before opening it, she turned back to Jeff. “I understand why you’re refusing to talk to me. That’s your right, and it’s what your father taught you. But, I need you to stay in this room until I tell you it’s okay to leave.”

“Alright,” Jeff watched the deputy leave the room and close the door. Something wasn’t right here, and he didn’t know what it was. He just hoped, whatever these guys did, it would not stop him from becoming a doctor.

Paige stepped out of the room and spotted Havi. Doug was handcuffed and sitting on the couch. “What’s the plan?” she asked her colleague.

“We’re waiting for Gage,” Havilland advised. “This one admitted to dropping Tyler off at the hospital. Didn’t really have a choice, we had him in brilliant technicolor.”

“Right,” Paige glanced at Doug, who looked white as a ghost. “Is he okay?”

“Sure,” Havilland shrugged. “He’ll be fine.

“And the guy that went with Jericho?” Paige wondered. “Did he get anything from him?”

“Attitude,” Havilland smiled.

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“So, once Gage gets finished with Vince, what does Jericho want to do with these guys?” Paige wondered.

“I don’t know what you discovered about your guy, but Jericho is arresting Joel. I’m arresting Doug here and I suspect Vince will be arrested for the contributing charge. Dean is still talking to Troy Dewey. I’m not sure what the status is on him. None of these guys are cooperating so I suspect they’ll all be charged and Tolman can work it out later.”

“Jeff Arnold has asked for an attorney,” Paige shrugged.

“That was quick,” Havilland glanced at Doug, when he wasn’t paying attention, he continued. “You think that means he’s an instigator?”

“I’m not getting that feeling,” Paige sighed. “His dad is a lawyer. I think it was reflex, ingrained into that kid since birth.”

“Do we bring him in or let him stay?” Havilland wondered.

“I’ll talk to the boss; but, at this point, I think we tell him to have his attorney contact us and arrange a time we can conduct an interview in the next couple days,” Paige decided. “We won’t get much, but we might get enough to lean one direction or the other.”

They both glanced up when Dean and Troy exited a room. Jericho opened the front door. “Let’s get these jokers back to the office. Tolman said to transport them all and he’ll meet us there.”

“My guy requested an attorney,” Paige stepped to the door and whispered. “You want him brought in? I was going to tell him to have daddy lawyer call and schedule an interview.”

“Leave him,” Jericho agreed. “Did you think he was involved?”

“If so,” Paige glanced back. “It was very limited. He knows something, but he also thinks these guys called the police that night.”

“Then he’s either a good liar or he’s not involved,” Jericho decided. “We’ll deal with him later. Let’s get these guys transported.”

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Two hours later, the group gathered around the conference table. Joel Bunton still wasn’t cooperating. He insisted Jonas left on his own and he does not know where he went. They confronted Doug with proof that he dropped Tyler off at the hospital. He realized he couldn’t deny it, so he started to cooperate — to a point. He was minimizing his participation, but admitted he was there, and he was so worried about Tyler he drove him to the emergency room.



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Vince also broke down and admitted he bought the keg. He said he was there, but he claimed he had nothing to do with the actual drinking.

Troy seemed to be the most truthful of the bunch. He admitted this was a hazing to test both Tyler and Jonas before they could join the fraternity. He explained that the college no longer supported the brotherhood, but the house is owned by the Epsilon Gamma Betas. He also said it doesn't matter, because entrance into their group would ensure admittance to any Gamma fraternity across the country.

Troy also confirmed Vince rented the keg, but he said Joel added the extra alcohol through the funnel. Then, he walked them through what happened. His version supported the evidence better than the others. He insisted Jeff wasn't involved. When pressed, he admitted they talked Jeff into coming down and evaluating the two guys. Jeff demanded they take Tyler to the emergency room immediately and Doug offered to take care of it. Jeff also told them Jonas was deceased and insisted they call the police. Tony said he agreed to call the cop before Jeff went back upstairs to study but then he left with Vince and tried to find campus security. When they got back, Jonas was missing. No matter how many times they asked, his story stayed the same. They left Jonas with Joel and when they got back, he was gone.

When they asked him why they didn't call the cops, he said Joel took all their phones. They had no idea what happened to Jonas, and they didn't know what to tell the cops. They originally thought Jonas had died but when he disappeared, and Joel said he left on his own, they didn't know what to do. Plus, there wasn't a body, so they didn't think they could report a death without proof.

"Joel Bunton did not dispose of that body alone," Tolman insisted.

"You watched the interviews," Jericho countered. "Same as I did. I'm not convinced any of those guys helped him push that body of the cliff. Are you?"

"No," Tolman sighed. "Bring in this Jeff guy. See if he'll confirm the story."

"If he brings his dad, the attorney — I doubt we'll get anything from him." Havilland glanced around the room but focused on Paige.

"I agree," Paige began then stopped when Margie stepped into the room.

"Paige, Nathan Porter is on the phone. He says it's an emergency — let me rephrase that. He says it's important but there's nothing to worry about. He just needs to talk to you and you're not answering your phone."

"Go on," Jericho nodded. "Take it. I think we're finished here, anyway. I'm dumping this in Tolman's lap, and he can decide who to charge with what."

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“Thanks,” Tolman frowned.

Paige rushed out of the room and snatched up the phone.

“Hey, kid,” Porter greeted. “The boys are on their way home. In fact, they should arrive at the Ephraim airport within the hour. Can you break away and head over? Sophie and I will meet you there.”

“He’s home?” Paige said in surprise. “I thought— well, I thought it would take longer in Kuwait.”

“I was able to get him on an earlier flight. The boys arrived in Salt Lake about forty minutes ago. They transferred to a smaller plane, and they should be on their way home as we speak. Can you get away?”

“Yes. Yes,” Paige jumped to her feet. “I’m on my way. What about Carmen?”

“She’s riding over with us,” Nathan assured her. “We’ll see you over there.”

Paige hung up the phone and turned to see the group standing just outside the conference room waiting. “He’s home. I need to get to Ephraim, to the airport. Are we finished here?”

“Go,” Jericho ordered. “We’ll take care of anything that’s left. Like I said, this mess belongs to our good friend James Tolman now.”

Paige pulled into the parking lot, slammed on the brakes and rushed inside the airport. She froze when she saw him talking to Nathan. When he looked up and locked eyes with hers, she smiled and ran.

Dax grinned and braced for the collision. Paige flew across the large room, slammed her body against his, and wrapped her arms around him. He grimaced when the stitches in his arm pulled and throbbed, but he didn’t care. He pulled her closer and just held on — home at last.