

# ~ Infanticipation ~

by Cheyne

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Title: Infanticipation

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Fandom: Law and Order:SVU

Pairing: Olivia/Abbie

Rating: 18

Summary: It's déjà vu all over again.

Spoiler or Other Information: Third in a series. "Texas Hold 'Er" and "Forgive Us Our Trespasses" were the first two. You should probably read them if this one is going to make any sense...

Archive: Only with permission from the author

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## **Labored**

"Mama. Baby," the twenty-three month old little girl repeated. Over and over. Like a mantra.

"Yes, Sweetie, Mama is going to have two babies," Olivia Benson told her beautiful daughter, absently. She looked at Sierra in the rear view mirror to make sure she was still snug and secure in her car seat. Then she glanced over at an extremely pregnant and obviously uncomfortable Abbie in the passenger seat, eyes closed, trying to concentrate on something other than the pain of a baby's foot jammed up under her ribcage.

"Mama's gonna to have Wywee and Coe," Sierra said, in a sing-song manner, pronouncing every word slowly and carefully.

"That's right, Sunshine, you're going to have a baby sister and brother in another month," Olivia confirmed.

"Or less, God willing," Abbie Carmichael sighed, her eyes still closed, her hands on her belly. "If

we ever decide on another baby, you will, *believe me*, carry that one."

"Yes, Dear," Olivia smiled.

Abbie opened one eye and trained it on her striking partner of six years. "Are you trying to appease me?"

"Yes, Dear," Olivia answered, looking over at Abbie and grinning.

"Yes dear," Sierra echoed.

Returning her smile, Abbie shook her head and closed her eyes again. "Oh, Liv, I can't wait until I can sleep on my stomach again."

Chuckling, Olivia said, "I can't wait until *I* can sleep on your stomach again."

Abbie reached over and playfully swatted her lover on the arm.

"No hitting, Mama," Sierra admonished Abbie from the back seat.

"That's right, I'll have to put Mama in time out, won't I, Sweetie?"

Sierra pointed at Abbie. "Time out, Mama."

"Thanks, Mommy," Abbie mumbled.

"No, you can thank me later," Olivia stated suggestively, reaching over and patting Abbie's thigh.

"Thanks Mommy," Sierra repeated.

"We're raising a parrot," Abbie said, a hint of a smile curling her lips as she reached down and stroked Olivia's fingers. The women listened contentedly as the little girl in the back seat started singing her ABC's. For what seemed like the hundredth time in ten minutes.

"Remind me to thank Logan for teaching her the alphabet song," Abbie deadpanned to Olivia. "In fact, remind me to sing her my thanks about a thousand times an hour because that's just about how much I hear this."

The Carmichael-Benson family was on their way home from Abbie's obstetrician appointment just outside the Harrisburg city limits. Olivia always took time off on those days to accompany her partner and their daughter to the doctor's office. The women were including Sierra in as many aspects as they could regarding the impending birth of the twins, a boy and another girl they decided to name Cole Alexander and Reilly Serena, respectively.

Sierra was always enraptured by all the clean, sterile whiteness of Dr. Pegram's office. She really liked the Winnie The Pooh characters on the wallpaper border and she could name every one

(and did every time she went there). While the doctor checked Abbie's weight, blood pressure, heart rate and breathing, Olivia held Sierra and explained the process to her in terms the little girl could understand. Sierra's favorite part was when attention was spent on Abbie's belly - checking of the fetal heartbeats, fetal sizes, positions, etc. When it came time for a more internal examination, such as checking the cervix for dilation, Olivia carried Sierra over to behind where Abbie's head lay and told the little girl what Dr. Pegram was doing.

Sierra was a bright, inquisitive toddler, fascinated by everything. She was a little spoiled by her mommies but both women knew when to draw the line and the beautiful little carbon copy of Abbie was extremely well behaved. Sierra was headstrong and stubborn which was nothing unusual when dealing with a child nearly two years old. She was very excited about the anticipated arrival of her baby brother and sister and both Olivia and Abbie hoped that after Cole and Reilly were actually here, Sierra's height of enthusiasm would not turn into jealousy and resentment. They were hoping including their daughter in the process would help in the eventual adjustment of Sierra not being the only child and center of attention anymore.

They had spent the first part of the morning at Sam's Club, replenishing their nesting supplies. There were still quite a few newborn items left over from Sierra's birth and, that they were having another girl meant she could wear a majority of Sierra's hand-me-downs. Also, the twins and Sierra could share the same bedroom for a while before the two women had to think about adding another room to the house. Shopping for Cole was a whole new experience. What they did not get from Abbie's baby shower, they made sure they purchased because Dr. Pegram had prudently advised her pregnant patient that with twins, she could very well deliver early.

But with shopping and the doctor's appointment, it was a full enough day for Abbie, who was thrilled at the thought of having two more babies but was well ready for the gestation period to be over. Her back hurt, she had leg cramps, one of the twins was obviously practicing hurdling in there and oh, God, did she have to pee. Again.

"Liv?"

It was the tone of voice that Olivia recognized. And it was obviously familiar to Sierra, too. "Potty again, Mama?" inquired a tiny voice from the back seat.

Both women couldn't help but laugh. "Yes, darlin,' Mama needs a potty," Abbie confirmed, still smiling, shaking her head.

"Can it wait until we get home?" Olivia inquired.

"I can barely wait another fifteen seconds, you think I can actually wait another fifteen minutes?"

Grinning, Olivia turned left at the sub way off Route 11 and headed toward a small private business that sold plants, flowers, fresh fruit and vegetables, knowing that not only did they have a clean restroom area, they sold kiwis. Abbie had been craving the tart, green fruit with the fuzzy brown skin for the past two weeks. This would kill two birds with one stone.

Ten minutes later, Abbie returned to the SUV with a bag full of two-dozen kiwis and a relieved smile. "Okay, let's go home," she announced, settling into her seat.

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Sierra had gone down for the night without a protest, usually not her routine but it had been an eventful day for everyone. After making sure the baby monitor was on, staying in the room, Olivia watched her daughter drift into a deep slumber, almost feeling guilty for cherishing the silence, when something broke her concentration.

"Liiiiivvvv...?" Abbie whined from the bathroom.

Opening the door, Olivia leaned against the frame. "Yeeessssss?" she answered, imitating Abbie's tone.

"I know I'm a pain in your ass..."

"But...?" Olivia was smiling before Abbie could continue.

"Could you shave my legs for me, please? I look like a Wookie. I swear I could knit my own leg warmers..."

"Yeah, I know...remember me, the one who sleeps next to you every night?"

"You know I haven't been able to see the lower half of my body for at least a month..."

"All right, I'll shave your legs. I'm also going to clip your toenails and shave your toes."

"What? I have hairy toes?" Obviously this was news to Abbie. She looked skyward, then back at her lover and sighed. "I'm part Hobbitt, aren't I? You just didn't want to tell me."

Casually stepping over to where Abbie sat, Olivia leaned down and kissed her reassuringly. "I think you're beautiful, Hobbitt toes, Wookie legs and all."

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Three hours later, Olivia and Abbie were snuggled in bed, the one with the big belly trying to find a comfortable position. to no avail. Olivia had shaved Abbie's legs (and toes), gently massaged moisturizer all over her, carefully and tenderly made love to her and was ready to settle in for the night, when her phone rang.

"No, no, don't answer it, Liv, please..."

"I have to, honey, I'm sorry." Olivia put her cell phone to her ear. "Benson."

"Chief? It's MacEvoy."

"Yeah, Mike, what's up?"

"Sorry to disturb you and the Mrs. so late but there's a general alarm fire over here off 81 by the Plainfield exit, near the old Par 3 golf course."

"And...brush fire or structure?"

"House fire, fully involved and there may be at least one fatality but I'm not sure about that. I just got here"

"Suspicious?" Olivia inquired.

"That's the buzz."

"Anyone call Silva yet?" She asked, referring to Jesus "Jesse" Silva, the county chief fire investigator.

"Um...I don't know. I don't see him here yet but there's a lot going on. I'll find out. If he's not here or on his way, I'll make sure he's at least notified." MacEvoy hesitated. "It's...it looks bad here, Chief...there's that new trucking warehouse right next door and they're trying like hell to keep that from going up."

"Wait - that brand new place that's been vacant since it was built last year?" Olivia asked, hurriedly, sliding into her jeans, as she cradled the cell phone between her shoulder and chin. Abbie studied her partner with apprehension. She knew Olivia would not leave her in the middle of the night, so late in her pregnancy, unless it was an emergency.

"Yeah, that one." MacEvoy waited for a response. He was rewarded with a thoughtful silence and he knew the gears were clicking in Olivia's head just like they had in his.

Finally, Olivia spoke. "Are you thinking the house fire may have been set in hopes that the warehouse would catch fire so that the Van Buskirk Corporation can collect on the insurance?"

"Yeah. That's what I was thinking. It would look less dubious if the fire was caused by the house and not started in the warehouse"

Olivia almost found herself smiling at MacEvoy's use of the word 'dubious.' He was trying to improve his vocabulary by learning a new word or phrase every few days and then use it properly in a sentence or situation. "Is John there?" Olivia inquired, referring to the county coroner, John Hollenberger, a friend and colleague since Olivia's appointment as the Cumberland County State Police Chief Investigator.

"He just got here. But his presence may be premature."

"True but it's good he is there, just in case. Listen, Mike, don't go anywhere, I'll be there in about

twenty minutes Or less."

"Okay. I will hopefully know more by the time you get here."

"Okay, Mike, I'm on my way." Olivia pressed the button that ended her phone call and finished getting dressed.

"What's going on, Hon?" Abbie asked, cautiously. She wanted to know and she didn't. With Olivia asking if John was there, Abbie knew it had to involve a death of some sort. And by monitoring Olivia's reaction to this call, Abbie presumed it was a suspicious fire.

Olivia exited the bathroom, after brushing her teeth and washing the essence of lovemaking off her face and hands. "I'm not quite sure. Sounds like arson but I won't know until I get there and talk to Jesse Silva."

"You asked if John was there. Did someone die?"

"That's unknown at this time. It's good he's there, though, just in case."

"God, I hope not."

"Yeah, I know. But that's why I need to go down there. If this turns out to be something deliberately set, fatality or not, I don't want to find out anything about this crime scene second hand."

"So...I guess that means it can't wait until morning?" It wasn't a whine or a plea. It was just a question from a woman, heavy with child (or children, in this case), who had gotten used to not being left alone at night.

Olivia looked at her impossibly pregnant partner, took a patient breath and sat down next to her on the bed. "Sweetheart, I won't be gone all night, I promise," Olivia reassured her, as she gently took Abbie's hand in hers. "I just want to see some things for myself before the crime scene becomes totally destroyed. I'll call Logan and ask her if she'll be available to get here quickly if you need something and I cannot get back to you and Sierra in time." Olivia was referring to Logan Jessup, the older teenager who lived down the road. A very trustworthy and responsible young lady, Logan babysat Sierra, did lawn and gardening work and took care of the dogs and horses at the Carmichael-Benson homestead when she wasn't in school, taking care of her many brothers and sisters or working her other jobs.

"No, no, don't call Logan. She's got school tomorrow and she gets so little sleep as it is. I'll be fine. You go ahead. If, God forbid, anything happens, I'll call you and if you're still in town, then I'll call Logan and see if she'll come over and drive me to the hospital and stay with Sierra."

Leaning down, Olivia kissed Abbie. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves. I won't be gone that long. I'll let the dogs out when I leave." She started to stand up when Abbie pulled her down for another kiss.

"I love you," Abbie told her, unnecessarily.

"I love you, too," Olivia said, just as needlessly, smiling back at her. She leaned over and soothingly, adoringly, kissed Abbie's bulging belly, and then stood up, went downstairs, kissed a sleeping Sierra and left the house.

## **Fired Up**

The dark night sky was lit up with an orange-brown glow. Olivia had spotted the strangely fascinating color on the horizon the closer she got to the interstate. The nearest she could park to the location was Cold River Drive, which was approximately an eighth of a mile away from the first fire truck. The area had been cordoned off by crime scene tape a thousand feet in each direction. Spotting Michael MacEvoy, a senior state policeman on her staff, Olivia walked over to where he stood and joined him.

"Mike," Olivia acknowledged, observing all of the activity. It now looked like a side of the warehouse was erupting in flames. The smoke in the air was thick and it stung their eyes and burned their throats.

"Hey, Chief." He looked down at her. In the past several months, MacEvoy and his boss had called an unspoken truce and were connecting almost like she used to with her colleagues at the Special Victims Unit in Manhattan. In the beginning of her tenure as the state police county chief investigator, MacEvoy rebelled against her every chance he got. He was aghast and offended that a female had been placed in charge at such a responsible rank, which was, coincidentally, also over him in chain of command. Michael was from the "old school." Women had their place in society and it was not in a position of power - especially over any man. Then, as if to add insult to injury, she made no secret of the fact that she was a lesbian. This was almost too much to deal with for someone as traditionally and chauvinistically male as MacEvoy was. He was borderline insubordinate every chance he got the nearly six years Olivia controlled the unit.

As frustrating and maddening as it was, Olivia was always able to rein him in and keep him from crossing the line of disrespect. Despite his obstinate and inflexible temperament, he was a good, thorough career cop and Olivia had, if nothing else from having a child, learned forbearance. Between the Amber Barclay murder and the arrest of the girl's father eight months earlier, Olivia and MacEvoy had to work closely together, tirelessly, in order to quickly solve the case and to put the community at ease. After that, the two just clicked and all the prior animosity disappeared. Olivia couldn't explain it but wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"Where's Hollenberger?" Olivia asked.

"He went down to Sheetz to get some coffee. Until they put this thing out, there's not a damn thing he can do"

Nodding, Olivia said, "not a damn thing any of us can do. Any more info on a body in there?"

"No...it's merely speculation at this point. Old man Schauwaker lives here and no one's seen him. But that could mean he just isn't home."

"Where's his car?"

"I would guess in that burning garage, attached to that blazing house. If he's home."

Olivia nodded. She would have deduced that herself, given a few more minutes. Two points for MacEvoy. Looking up at him, he sported a silly smirk. "Shut up," she grinned back at him.

Spotting someone walking around the front of a red and white SUV with gold and black lettering on the sides, MacEvoy got his attention. "Hey, Jesse," he called to the ruggedly handsome man, "Got a second?"

Jesse Silva was a newly divorced, tall, slim, charming guy in his mid-fifties, a self-proclaimed ladies man, which more or less contributed to the demise of his twenty-year marriage. He and MacEvoy were in the same bowling league, on the same team. Every Tuesday night they got together to roll a few balls down the lane and toss a few brews back. After his fourth beer, Silva could not stop talking to MacEvoy about Olivia Benson. His attraction to Michael's boss was unrelenting. Like clockwork, by beer number six, Jesse was bragging to his bowling partner about how, if he got Olivia Benson in bed, she'd never go back to a woman. Vain, full of himself (but usually only when influenced by alcohol), by the end of the evening, Silva had always convinced himself that he was Antonio Banderas. Before MacEvoy had permitted himself to get to know Olivia, he would have believed that if anyone could convert the chief investigator to a straight lifestyle, Silva could. Now he knew better and he had even reached the point where Jesse's ridiculously cock-sure verbal strutting on bowling night, incensed him. However, having allowed it to continue for so long, he had no one to blame but himself, and following a few 'knock it offs' which went unheeded, MacEvoy found himself habitually biting his own tongue to keep from embarrassing Silva and himself. Other than that particularly annoying little flaw, Silva was an okay guy.

Noticing the delectable Chief Benson standing on the sidelines with his bowling partner, Silva nearly broke into a sprint to get to them. Which is exactly what MacEvoy expected. Possibly he could use Chief Silva's hammering crush on his boss against him to get information they would not be able to find out otherwise.

"Mikey," Silva affirmed, slapping MacEvoy on the shoulder.

"Jesse, you know my boss, Chief Benson?" Michael gestured to Olivia, who extended her hand.

"Yes, we've briefly met on different occasions and exchanged paperwork and phone calls. How are you, Chief Benson?" Silva shook Olivia's hand, always surprised by the firm grip.

"I'm well, thank you, Chief Silva, and you?" Olivia inquired, releasing Jesse's hand.

Nodding toward the raging inferno before them, Jesse said, "I've had better nights." He smiled at



Olivia. "What brings you down here, Chief? A little out of your area of authority, isn't it?"

Olivia and MacEvoy traded glances, before she returned her attention to Silva. "Maybe at this particular time...but I was advised that this may be arson, and if that's true, it then becomes as much my business as yours and whoever the insurance company investigator is. I was also informed that somebody may have died as a result of this fire and that would also be my area of authority," Olivia let him know, without a hint of offense or ill will in her voice. "Honestly, I was hoping to, maybe, get a look at the crime scene when everything has been deemed safe," she said. "As I'm sure you know, a lot of evidence can be destroyed by a fire, firemen and other officials, so the quicker I can get an overall view of things, the better it is for my investigation."

"And, as you know, my boys' first priority is to put the fire out, not to preserve the crime scene." Silva rested his hands on his hips.

"I understand, Chief -" Olivia began, but was interrupted by Silva.

"Jesse, please..." His smile was ingratiating, his expression saying he was waiting for an invitation to be as informal with Olivia.

Continuing as though she never heard him, Olivia resumed, "I certainly don't want to put anyone's life in jeopardy here and I didn't mean to imply that any investigation is more important than the safety and well-being of your firefighters. I just know that an investigation involving a fire can be muy complicado. If someone intentionally set this fire - especially if someone has died as a result - I want evidence as uncontaminated and irrefutable as it can be under the circumstances."

Even though she wasn't flirting, inadvertently, her intense beauty and smoldering proficiency made her hard to resist, Silva discerned. "I do see where you are coming from," he conceded, hoping he was making points with her, "I don't see a problem with you taking a look when it's safe, you can -"

"She can go in with me," stated a voice behind them. The trio turned to see John Hollenberger approaching with a cardboard carrier enclosing three twenty-ounce cups of coffee. The county medical examiner handed a container to Olivia, as MacEvoy took one and Hollenberger took the last one. "I would have brought you some coffee, too, Jesse, but I wasn't sure when or if you'd be here so soon."

Silva held his hand up. "Not a problem, John, I don't drink coffee anyway unless it has a shot or two of whiskey in it."

"Thank you, John," Olivia smiled.

"Sure. Mike said he'd called you, so I figured you'd be here by the time I got back." The four of them stood watching the flames finally starting to respond to the efforts of the two town fire departments and assorted volunteers who were battling this blaze. "How's Abbie? She's got to be getting close."

Taking a swallow of coffee, Olivia grinned at the mention of her significant other's name. "She's cranky but doing great, thanks. She's ready to pop these twins out and I'm ready for her to."

Laughing, John said, "getting a little antsy, is she?"

"We all are, Sierra included."

Nodding, John returned his attention to the fire. "What do you think, Jesse?"

Other than being a little envious of Hollenberger's easy rapport with former SVU detective and torn between being morally outraged by her open sexuality and turned on at the thought of Olivia Benson and her gorgeous female partner together, Silva's focus was a bit scattered. He ran a hand through his thick salt and pepper hair. "Looks like they're getting it under control. I'm praying Artie Schauwaker took this week to visit his daughter in Wilkes-Barre."

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The charred remains of a body believed to be that of Arthur Schauwaker was found in the debris of what used to be his modest farmhouse. The flames had spread across a small field and licked the sides of the abandoned warehouse owned by the mighty Van Buskirk Corporation, an out-of-state conglomerate that was a Goliath in the business world. Their name was well known on the east coast for buying up land, building monstrous structures and then leaving them vacant as a tax write-off. The locals resented this practice as it destroyed land, brought unnecessary traffic and turmoil to the area and once the construction was done, provided no new jobs or revenue for the town. That's why the suspicion of arson was a strong one.

Olivia had returned home to find Abbie up and pacing. The stunning law professor could have blamed it on her uneasiness about being left alone or being concerned for Olivia's welfare, as she always was when Olivia was called out in the middle of the night but the truth was she had terrible indigestion. She wondered if the twins were getting sick of Kiwis and rebelling. Olivia stayed up and walked the floor with her until the heartburn passed.

Waking Abbie up the next morning for some cuddle time before she left for work, Olivia ritualistically made it a point to rest her cheek on Abbie's abdomen, enjoying the feel of the babies' kicks and squirms. Showering and bringing a talkative Sierra upstairs to watch television with Mama while she napped, Olivia made it to John Hollenberger's office by seven a.m. She was exhausted but knew they needed to get a jump on this investigation before too much time passed. She sat in the tiny conference room of the county coroner's office, trying to stay awake and focused with a jumbo cup of black coffee in front of her. Also in the room were Jesse Silva and John.

"So from what we have so far, it looks like Artie was consumed by flashover," Silva offered. He was also dog-tired as he and Hollenberger had not yet gone to bed since being called out last night.

"I have a good idea what flashover is but explain it to me again," Olivia asked, wishing she had thought to bring in a dozen donuts when she stopped to get her coffee.

"It's a fire behavior, which takes place in the progress of a contained fire when surfaces exposed to thermal radiation achieve ignition concurrently and fire spreads swiftly throughout the space." Hollenberger told her.

"Actually, it's a severe type of fire behavior," Silva clarified. "It occurs when heat is emitted more rapidly than a piece of ignited material can burn. Smoke climbs to the ceiling and as the temperature increases, it reaches a flashpoint. Fire then rushes across the ceiling, radiating heat downward, which then rapidly ignites all combustibles. Anyone with the misfortune of being in such a room will die from extreme heat and toxic gases."

"Do we have a heat source yet?" Olivia wondered.

"Well, the scene is still pretty hot so what we have been able to do so far has been limited. However, at this point, I would take a pretty good guess and say some form of accelerant was the source. Petroleum based. Kerosene, maybe. The initial trailings from the house to the warehouse were too precise for just a random fire."

Nodding, Olivia stomach rumbled loudly. She smiled, self-consciously, and tendered a courteous, 'excuse me.' How she could even remotely think of food was beyond her. The meeting room was small with no windows for ventilation and both men reeked of smoke. "So now we have to figure out if it was definitely arson - which it sounds like - what motivated it. Thrill seeking? Revenge? Insurance Fraud? Robbery? Murder?"

"Who would want to murder Artie? He was an eccentric old guy but I don't think he had any enemies. He just lived his life with his three dogs, not bothering anybody," Hollenberger stated.

"What about the dogs?" Olivia wondered, compassionately, hoping they had somehow escaped a horrible fate.

"So far, we have not found any trace of his dogs," Silva told her.

"Does anyone else find that a little odd? I have three dogs and if they escaped a fire, I am pretty sure they would stay in the area or come back at some point to see if they could reunite with us. They are very loyal."

Neither man had thought of that. "Huh...now that you mention it..." the county coroner agreed.

Jesse Silva looked at his two colleagues, attempting to rub the lethargy out of his eyes. "Well, in order to get to the bottom of our arsonist's motivation, we need to get back to that crime scene now that it's cooled down before there's any more evidence spoilation."

"You two go ahead," Hollenberger yawned, standing up, "I'm going to start on Artie."

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Sitting out on the deck, deciding to take advantage of the sunny but mild weather, Abbie propped her feet up, sipping on a glass of ginger ale. She was enjoying a calm moment with the twins' movement down to a minimum and watched Sierra playing in her sandbox, yelling at the dogs for stealing her beach toys.

"No, Gwacie!" the little girl admonished the golden retriever who had grabbed her shovel and ran up to the deck to present it to Abbie. "Mama, Gwacie took my shovel!"

Grinning as the dog dropped the little plastic tool beside her chair, Abbie reached over and scratched behind Gracie's ear. "Thank you, Gracie. Now bring it back to Sissy." Gracie just sat there, staring obediently and lovingly at her mistress, panting. "Go on. Go give it to Sissy," Abbie urged.

"Mama!" Sierra hollered.

"Yes, Baby Girl, be patient, I'm trying to get Gracie to bring it back. Can't you play with something else until she does?"

"No!"

"I am *so* learning to hate that word," Abbie mumbled to herself. She firmed up her voice when talking to the retriever. "Gracie, go give the shovel to Sissy now!" The dog didn't budge. "Gracie!!"

Down in the sandbox, Sierra stood up and indignantly placed her hands on her little hips and stomped her foot. "Gwacie!! Damn it!!"

Abbie stared at her daughter, speechless. She knew the worst thing she could do would be to bring attention to Sierra's new phrase. As she tried to recall if she had somehow cursed in front of her impressionable toddler, Gracie picked up the shovel and brought it back down to the sandbox, letting Sierra take it from her. Now Abbie knew she needed to address it. She did not want Sierra to associate the dog's compliance with swearing.

Just as Abbie was about to move out of her comfortable position and casually stroll down to the sandbox to nonchalantly inquire about the origin of her daughter's new vocabulary, the portable phone rang. Checking on her daughter, she observed Sierra return to quietly occupying herself in the dirt. Abbie picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Abbie? It's Alex." Alexandra Cabot Kingsbury was calling from her little lake cottage off Point Sebago in Maine. Over the past seven years, she had become almost as close to Abbie as she had been to Olivia. Sans the sexual history, of course. After she left the federal witness protection program, she remained in New England with her husband, Jake and their two sons. They had driven to Pennsylvania twice to visit Abbie and Olivia and the Carmichael-Benson family had gone to Maine once to visit the Kingsburys. It was funny how whenever they physically got

together, Alex stuck mostly with Abbie while Jake and Olivia hung out. The reasons were never put out in plain words, however, it was assumed that the two lawyers had their profession in common and the two law enforcement officers had theirs. In the beginning, it probably had more to do with it being easier for Olivia to spend time alone with Jake than with Alex. Not that either ever considered cheating on their respective spouses but there was no point in tempting fate. Now Olivia could not imagine her life without Abbie in it and it was pretty obvious Alex felt the same way about Jake.

"Alex, hey. How are you?"

"I'm doing great. More importantly, how are you?"

"Huge." Hearing Alex laugh, Abbie then said, "when did your kids start cussing? I mean - the first time you heard them swear when they were learning to talk?"

Alex pondered Abbie's question, trying to remember. Her oldest son, Oliver, was now seven years old and her youngest boy, Morgan, was four. "Well...let's see...Oliver has actually entered that phase again. I'm not overly fond of one of his little school chums, Jared, because every time they're together, he comes home with a new colorful phrase. What bothers me more than his saying it is that he is also using it in the proper context. And Morgan...for about three months after he began talking non-stop, we had the hardest time with him pointing at everything red and calling it a 'fire fuck'."

Snickering, Abbie said, "Yeah, I could see where that might be a problem."

"Especially at the annual church picnic when the minister pulled up in his brand new red SUV. Why? Sierra picking up some language?" Alex listened as Abbie related the story. "Ah...hmm...have you asked Olivia yet?"

"Actually? No, I haven't but Olivia has been very careful about what she says around her." Looking over at Sierra, making sure she was still safe and content, she said, "How did you handle it?"

"Well...the 'fire fuck' thing was a little hard to ignore since he always seemed to do it in front of a vocally appreciative and amused audience, so with that, we just kept practicing the word 'truck' with him until he got it. There were a few times he picked up random words from conversations he has overheard but he doesn't make a habit of repeating those words and we try to ignore it unless we see it becoming a problem - which we haven't with Morgan. Oliver went through a horrible stage with swearing. He would hear anything and everything from the kids next door and repeat it at the supper table when Daddy would ask what he did that day."

"What did you and Jake do?"

"Oliver's demeanor, when he spouted this stuff, let us know that he knew what he was saying was wrong and not nice. He was four and doing it more for effect, testing his boundaries with us."

"How do you know that? Four still isn't very old."

"True. But when Jake talked with him about it, he admitted that, although he didn't understand what the words meant, every time the kids next door said them, they got spanked and punished."

"Then why in heaven's name would he say them?"

Alex's smile could be heard through her words. "Because he's Oliver. If I told you he was just as stubborn and inquisitive and unique as his namesake, would you understand a little more then?"

Abbie laughed with her. "It does make it a little clearer. How are you dealing with his cursing now?"

"He loses privileges. And it works. Until the next time. Trust me, he defines 'precocious'. Last year, Jake and I were tucking him in and he says, 'where did I come from?' and he's six at this point, so you can imagine the dilemma."

"Oh, good Lord, what did you say?"

"Well..." the tone of Alex's voice telegraphed that this story was going to be embarrassing, if nothing else. "We didn't want to lie to him and have that come back to haunt us later. Jake and I made sure Morgan was asleep and we both sat on Oliver's bed and took turns painstakingly describing the birds and the bees in terms we thought he would understand."

"And did he?"

"That's the funny part. He laid there, his eyes as big as peeled onions, hanging on to every word we said. When we were finished and satisfied with our explanation, Jake asked him if he understood. He looked at me, then at his father and shook his head 'No' and then said, 'Jared came from New Hampshire. Where did *I* come from?'."

"Oh, you're kidding. Boy, I guess that's a lesson to make sure you clarify before you respond. The joy of raising kids," Abbie commented, taking a couple of swallows of her now warm ginger ale.

"Cherish her at this age. Because the next couple of years will certainly test your humility factor." Alex wisely advised. "So how much longer, Abbie?"

"Three and a half weeks but my doctor doesn't think I'll go that long and I *know* Olivia hopes I won't. Poor woman. She has the patience of a saint."

There was dead silence on the other end of the phone. "Olivia? Olivia Benson? The same Olivia Benson who worked Manhattan SVU?"

This made Abbie laugh. She continued to converse with Alex as she eased her way out of her

deck chair and ambled down to retrieve Sierra and get her out of the sun. After a series of polite 'No's' from the little girl, she finally reached up and took her mother's hand, walking up the stone ramp and into the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

Olivia had been at the crime scene most of the morning with Silva while John Hollenberger was at the morgue with the burnt body that had been found in the house. The affected area had been secured with traditional yellow tape and guards posted by a multi-departmental effort. Cautiously walking through the destroyed house, Chief Silva and Chief Benson did as much as they could without getting in the way of the crime scene technicians and fire investigators. They were still waiting on the insurance investigator, a man named Russ Woodrow, to arrive. Several calls and pages had been placed to him already and he had yet to respond to any of them. Silva commented that he didn't blame Woodrow for taking his time. If, by some miracle, the cause of this fire turned out to be accidental, the damage done to the Schauwaker property and the warehouse would yield a phenomenal check from Woodrow's company.

"We had a couple color factors in trying to determine the fuel source," Silva noted, killing time, standing off to the side with Olivia. "We had yellow and white flames with black smoke on the grounds leading to the warehouse, which indicates gasoline and we had a reddish-yellow flame with grayish, brownish smoke coming from the house."

"Which indicates what?" Olivia inquired. "Wood?" It was an estimated guess because the farmhouse had been mostly wooden.

"That and/or fabric." He pointed to one of the crime scene techs gathering evidence. "Our search begins there. It appears to have the most damage. It's called the 'seat,' which is the lowest point of the action."

"How can you tell that?" Olivia asked, curiously.

"Fire burns upward and outward," Silva gestured, his hands close together by his waist then raising them until they were fully spread out over his head. "The depth of the scorching indicates the point of the most intensity. The scales on the wood that I pointed out to you earlier are smaller at the bottom than the top, which is also indicative of where the fire started. In this case, it looks like we have two seats which pretty much tells me this was arson."

Olivia nodded, reluctantly fascinated by the education she was getting. Silva went on to explain to her what the technicians were doing and why. The hydrocarbon indicator, the accelerant swabs, the paint can-type looking containers specifically used to collect evidence from a fire...she was engrossed when her cell phone rang. "Benson."

"Chief?"

"Yeah, John."

"You should come to the morgue right away. We have a problem."

\*\*\*\*\*

Walking through the double doors that connected to the county coroner's office, Olivia slowed when she saw Hollenberger standing in front of an elderly man, apparently explaining something to him. "Hey, John, what's up?" the eye-catching brunette asked, sizing up the gentleman with her friend.

"Olivia - Chief Benson...this is Artie Schauwaker."

Stunned, Olivia extended her hand. The tall, slender seventy-ish man looked lost, helpless, as he accepted the chief's handshake. She looked over at John and pointed to the passageway that led to the morgue. "Then...who's that in there?"

"*Not* Artie Schauwaker," Hollenberger confirmed.

"I don't know who could have been in my house," Schauwaker told her, his voice trembling. "I haven't been there all week, I was up in Wilkes-Barre with my daughter."

"Mr. Schauwaker, did you hire anyone to take care of your dogs, check on your house while you were gone?" Olivia asked him.

"No. No, I take my dogs to a kennel down on 641 and nobody should have been in my house. No one." He looked at Olivia for confirmation. "Is my house really gone? All of it?"

"Yes," Mr. Schauwaker," she said, gently. "I'm sorry."

The elderly man sat down in one of the plastic chairs next to the wall. Speechless, tears began quietly streaming down his face. It broke Olivia's heart.

Sitting down next to him, she said, "Is there anyone you can stay with? Anywhere you can go?"

He shook his head. "Not around here. My nephew lives over in Perry County, I suppose I could stay with him until I figure out what to do."

"Do you want me to contact him? Explain everything?" Olivia offered.

"No. No, thank you, Chief Benson. He saw the fire on the news, he's the one who called my daughter's house and told me so he knows everything."

"And nobody was supposed to be in your house at all during your absence?" she asked him once again for verification.

"No."



Looking up at Hollenberger, he appeared just as perplexed as she.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We have another problem," Hollenberger told Olivia, after she returned from escorting Artie Schauwaker to his nephew's house, which was approximately a four hour round trip.

She sat down in the cushioned chair across from John, who was seated behind his desk. "Oh good," she remarked sarcastically, "because this case was going so smoothly..."

He pushed a file toward her. She opened it, looking at photographs of a burnt body. Thankfully, he spared her the usual protocol of her having to view the corpse firsthand. Nothing was as pungent or stomach-turning as the smell of charred flesh. She studied the pictures as Hollenberger spoke. "At first glance, he appears to be a typical burn victim. Intense heat causes muscles to contract. His position is just what we expect to find."

"Then what's the problem - other than him not being Artie Schauwaker?"

John stood up and rounded his desk. He separated several photographs from the group and spread them out before Olivia. They were close-ups of the skull. "Whoever this is, he was dead before the fire burned him."

"How can you tell?" she asked, finally looking up at him.

"Because there's no trace of carbon monoxide or soot in his lungs which would indicate smoke inhalation. And..." he specifically pointed to a particularly unattractive spot in the picture that looked to be near the temple. "...See this here? It's a gunshot wound. Bodies are frequently not burned so badly as to cover up the source of an unrelated, brutal death. The assemblage of white blood cells point to the presence of a wound in a living person, which blisters in heat. As opposed to postmortem which is apt to be yellow and firm."

"So what you're telling me is that we have an unidentified body in a house where he didn't belong who may have been the victim of homicide?"

"Or suicide." Hollenberger returned to his chair. "The first thing we need to do is find out who this guy is, which I think I can do, having extracted his nuclear DNA. The next thing is to find out what he was doing in a place where he didn't belong and why he was dead before the fire."

## **Desperate Intent**

Olivia couldn't remember exactly when she began suspecting Arthur Schauwaker for masterminding his own crime. Call it gut instinct or women's intuition but something seemed awry from the beginning. Bouncing all the facts off Abbie's analytical mind put all of the particulars into perspective. Within nine days of the fire, the sweet, elderly, eccentric Artie Schauwaker was in custody, charged with a host of crimes, running the gamut from insurance fraud to murder.

No one was supposed to die. It was intended to have been a simple fire to collect the insurance. The plan had been into effect for nearly six months. What Artie hadn't counted on was the greed of his co-conspirator Russ Woodrow. Somewhere along the last month, Russ decided if he was going to take all the risk that he deserved more than half of the cash. It wasn't just the farmhouse that had been ruined in the fire, there were also precious family heirlooms which also had been insured, so they were looking at quite a bit of money coming back to them. By the time Artie was ready to leave for Wilkes-Barre, Russ had bullied the old man into a nearly 75-25 split. Which was unacceptable. After all, the money wasn't going to be for Artie's enjoyment, it was to put his beloved grandson through Yale. His daughter and son-in-law didn't have those kind of resources and, combined, they netted too much to qualify for the amount they would need in a loan. He didn't want his grandson to have to sell his soul to go to his dream school. So, Artie sold his soul, instead.

Four nights after he had left to spend the week at his daughter's house, Artie picked an intentional fight with his son-in law, causing him to leave the premises in a huff and hit a nearby movie theater for a double feature. Buying a ticket, he left the building soon after the first movie began, jumped in his grandson's car, which he had borrowed, drove to Plainfield and confronted Russ in the living room of his farmhouse. After telling the insurance investigator why he was doing what he was doing, Artie shot Russ in the head, threw up, lit a firestarter stick and tossed it against the wall furthest from where he was standing and left, driving back to Wilkes-Barre, getting back to the movie theater only moments after the second feature let out. Artie then went back to his daughter's, apologized to her husband and waited for the phone call.

To Artie's credit and, unfortunately for him, to his disadvantage, he was not a criminal. He had never thought or behaved like a criminal. His initial intentions, although illegal, had been honorable and if Russ hadn't screwed it up, they probably would have gotten away with it. The other thing Artie hadn't considered was the miracle of modern forensic investigation. He figured the extreme heat of the fire would have incinerated Russ' body. He also incorrectly assumed the farmhouse would burn completely to the ground, leaving no clues. But he was glad when he was finally caught because the guilt was eating him alive.

After Olivia brought up the possibility of Artie being the perpetrator, arguing with the initial disbelief, Hollenberger, Silva and all their staff collectively zeroed in on him as a suspect. When Russ never showed up to investigate the fire or even contact his office or the other inspectors, that was odd enough but when Kathlyne Woodrow reported her husband missing, having left his home without explanation the night of the fire and never returned, it didn't take a genius to test the victim's DNA with what they had on file for Russ. When it matched, Olivia's speculation of Artie being involved seemed the next logical step.

He knew he was under suspicion when Olivia made a trip to Wilkes-Barre to speak with Artie's family. His daughter wasn't exactly rude to her but the idea of investigating him for this horrendous crime was absurd. She provided Olivia with a timeline of her father's whereabouts during his visit, even showed her the ticket stub from his evening at the movies the night of the fire. It was when Justin brought up that his grandfather had borrowed his car and had put a couple hundred miles on it that night, Olivia knew she was right. After a multi-jurisdictional

request, the Wilkes-Barre police confiscated Justin Schauwacker's vehicle and searched it for accelerants and devices, anything that could link Artie to the crime scene. They found exactly what they were looking for.

Although Artie had the common sense to burn the clothing he wore that night, he forgot about getting rid of his shoes. They were his newest pair and, well, you just don't throw out an expensive pair of comfortable work boots, regardless of how much evidence they may have had on them. Bringing him in for questioning was the old man's undoing. Less than ten minutes in interrogation room with Olivia and MacEvoy and Artie confessed to everything but being on the grassy knoll in Dallas, 1963.

Just as Arthur Joseph Schauwaker was being booked, Olivia got the phone call.

### **And Babies Make Five**

The SUV raced into the driveway so fast Logan thought Olivia was going to drive right through the lower patio. She was impressed to see Olivia move so fast up the stairs.

"Where is she?" Olivia asked Logan, who had been waiting on the deck for her, holding Sierra.

"She was in the bathroom," Logan advised her, following Olivia into the house.

"Babies are coming, Mommy," Sierra informed her mother, seriously, as if she was telling Olivia something she didn't know.

Stopping quickly to give her daughter a kiss and to acknowledge her, Olivia said, "I know, Sunshine, let's get Mama to the doctor's."

From the living room, Logan and Olivia heard, "Ohhhhhhhhhh. Ooooooooooooh." Looking in the direction of the sound, they saw Abbie lying flat on the living room floor.

"Abbie! What happened!?" Rushing to her side, Olivia fell to her knees beside her partner.

Managing a weak but earnest smile, Abbie said, "Nothing. I'm just more comfortable here."

"Sweetheart, you need to get up now. We need to get you to the clinic."

Logan put Sierra down and assisted Olivia in delicately helping Abbie up off the floor. Once they got her to her feet, Logan slowly walked with Abbie to the car, while Olivia retrieved a pre-packed bag and other essentials that would be needed after the delivery of the twins. Logan met Olivia halfway out the door.

"She told me to tell you not to forget the car seats," Logan relayed.

"I go, too, Mommy?" Sierra asked, a little overwhelmed by all the activity.

Handing an armload of necessities to Logan, Olivia squatted down and pulled her daughter into a hug. "No, Sweetie, you need to stay here with Logan, okay?"

"Wanna go, Mommy. Wanna see Coe and Wywee," the little girl whined.

"Oh, Sierra, Mommy can't take you right now. After Mama has the babies, I'll come and get you and you can see them, okay?"

"Wanna go, Mommy!" Sierra pouted, sticking her bottom lip out

"She's gotten real good at that sulking thing," Logan smiled at Olivia. "It's her age. I've gone through it many times with my brothers and sisters. She's testing you. She'll outgrow it if you don't give in to her."

Looking up at Logan, Olivia grinned. "Sometimes I forget who's the more experienced 'parent' around here." She stood up as her daughter began to cry. "Sierra..." Sighing, upset at her daughter's distress, she shook her head. "Mommy loves you, Sunshine."

"Come on, Sierra Nevada, walk me to the car so you can give Mama kisses," Logan urged.

The little girl stood stubbornly in one place as Olivia ran into Sierra's bedroom and re-emerged with two car seats. Crying but not wanting to be left behind, she slowly followed Logan and Olivia outside and down the ramp by the garden that led to the driveway.

Once at the car, Olivia immediately noticed Abbie wasn't there. "Abbie?"

"Ooooooooooooh. Ohhhhhhhhhhh."

Following the sound of low moans, Olivia walked around the SUV to the passenger side and saw Abbie lying flat on her back on the grass. "Uh...Abbie?"

"You were taking so long, I had to lay down," Abbie told her. "Why is Sierra crying?"

"She wants to come with us." She stepped over to her partner and began helping her to her feet. "How are the contractions?"

"They were ten minutes apart before you broke all land speed records pulling into the driveway," Logan offered, dryly, putting everything she had taken from Olivia in the back seat of the car. She closed the door and picked up Sierra, who was still whimpering and brought her over to Abbie.

"Wanna go, too, Mama," Sierra wailed.

Kissing her on the cheek, Abbie said, "I know, baby girl, but not this time. Mommy will come back and pick you up and then you can see your brother and sister." Gingerly sitting in the passenger seat again, she closed the door and lowered the window. Olivia loaded the car seats

and got in the driver's side.

"Wanna go!!!"

"You stay here with Logan, Sunshine," Olivia said, leaning over the steering wheel. "Logan, you can let the dogs out when we're gone and I'll call you in about an hour or so to update you."

Switching Sierra so that she was now resting on the other hip, Logan grinned, "I'll keep Sierra Nevada occupied. You just go and have those babies and bring them home." She then looked at the little girl in her arms. "Huh, kiddo? Say goodbye to your Moms and when they come back, they'll have the babies with them."

Still sniffing and upset, Sierra burrowed her head into Logan. When she heard the car start and her mothers say 'goodbye,' she began to cry all over again. "Wanna go, Wogan."

Waving at the quickly disappearing taillights, Logan took Sierra's little hand and held it out as though they were dancing together. She turned circles with the toddler in her arms, until the little girl stopped crying. "Let's go let the doggies out and then go feed the horsies."

"No."

"Okay...how about a ride in your wagon?"

"No."

"How about a popsicle?"

Sierra lifted her head and stared at Logan. She nodded her head in an exaggerated motion. "Popsicle, Wogan."

"Okay, we have a winner."

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It took no time at all to get Abbie settled into her room at the Cumberland Valley Birthing Clinic. Dr. Pegram had been in and out frequently to check on the progress of Abbie's labor. She was now in the transitional phase and almost fully dilated.

Sierra's birth had been much more traditional and had taken place at the county medical center. When the obstetrician who delivered Sierra retired and Dr. Pegram took over the practice, she bought the building and turned it into a birthing clinic, to give women an alternative choice to a conventional hospital birth. Abbie and Olivia had also agreed to donate the twins' umbilical cords to the International Cord Blood Registry, a gift the obstetrician had already made the arrangements for.

Dr. Pegram closed the door behind her when she left. The lights were low and except for some

soft music, the room was very quiet. Abbie sat back in Olivia's arms, her upright position hopefully employing the laws of gravity to shorten labor, speed up dilation and the twins descent through the birth canal.

Abbie was tense and tired and entering her sixth hour of hard labor, most of it in her back. Speaking to her partner in very hushed tones, Olivia was doing her best to relax Abbie, keeping track of Abbie's contractions and warning Abbie when the pains were coming. She alternated massaging Abbie's abdomen and back and breathed with her when the exercises were required to get through the worst pains. Which annoyed Abbie to no end after the fourth or fifth hour. Now into her last hour of labor, it was all Olivia could do to ride out Abbie's mercurial moods.

Having been through this phase once before, Olivia was prepared for "Stop breathing with me!!! If you want to do the breathing you can have these babies for me, too!!!" and "Oh, Liv, my back." And when Olivia would start to rub her back she was greeted with, "Don't touch me!! Why are you touching me?!!!" and then when Olivia would remove her hands, "Why'd you stop?!!!" When Olivia would try to distract Abbie from her labor pains and attempt visualization with her, she would be rewarded with, "Would you shut up? In a few minutes, I'm going to be pushing two things the size of watermelons through a hole the size of a lemon and you're trying to get me to think about meadows of daisies?!!!" Thankfully Olivia knew these were not personal attacks and soothed Abbie with promises of "they're almost here, Sweetie, not too much longer" and "I love you."

Olivia would constantly reassure Abbie of how beautiful she thought she was. This was not said just to appease her expectant partner, Olivia could not believe how beautiful she really saw the mother of her children become every day. Now, at the most difficult stage of the entire event, when Olivia whispered those words to Abbie, she firmly believed them.

She gave Abbie ice chips and applied a cool washcloth to Abbie's forehead, neck and shoulders, waiting for Dr. Pegram to return to the room. When she did, the obstetrician checked Abbie's dilation and pronounced Abbie 'ready as she'd ever be.' "Let's get this show on the road, Professor," Dr. Pegram grinned.

Cole came out first right into Olivia's hands. She had caught Sierra, too, and cut the cord. It was an emotional experience and though she loved Sierra with every ounce of her being, holding her biological son in her arms affected her in a way she never thought possible. Weeping, she gave Cole to Abbie to cuddle before cutting the umbilical cord. Whereas Sierra seemed quite perfect when she came out, Olivia was a little dismayed that Cole seemed to have a cone head, very puffy dark blue eyes and a reddish blotch on his forehead, which Dr. Pegram described as a salmon patch and assured Olivia that it would disappear in a few days. He had a good set of lungs, dark hair and a very pronounced genital area.

"My God!" Olivia exclaimed, her eyes riveted to her son's genitalia. "He's going to make some woman very happy some day."

"Olivia!!!" Abbie admonished. Until she got a gander. "Oh my Lord...is that normal?"

Dr. Pegram laughed. "It's absolutely normal. Now let's get him cleaned up. You have another one to go."

As Cole was whisked away to the nursery to be bathed, weighed, measured and examined thoroughly, Abbie began pushing for Reilly, who followed her brother out five minutes later. The infant looked exactly like her brother, minus the obvious and distinct anatomical differences. Cradling Reilly after catching her, Olivia placed her daughter in Abbie's arms after cutting the cord. Following the delivery of the placenta, while Abbie bonded with her new baby girl, Cole was brought back into the room, all cleaned up and wrapped in a blanket, wearing a tiny blue knit cap and handed to Olivia. Neither woman could stop crying.

"You did it, Sweetheart," Olivia sobbed to Abbie, who was crying and cooing at Reilly before they took her to the nursery. "I love you so much."

"They're beautiful, Liv. They look just like you," Abbie observed, having studied both new additions.

"Only if I look like Winston Churchill," Olivia joked, pressing soft kisses to her son's forehead. She handed Cole to Abbie after she reluctantly released Reilly to be taken to the nursery. "I'm going to go call Logan to see if Sierra's awake."

"Tell her Mama loves her."

Walking outside the front doors of the clinic, Olivia activated her cell phone and called her house. Disappointed that Sierra was sound asleep, Olivia was still excited to give the news to Logan that the babies were here and were healthy and gorgeous and that Abbie was doing great.

"So are you coming home?" Logan yawned, trying to keep her eyes open.

"No, Sweetie, I'm going to hang out here. Can you do me a favor and call three people on that list I gave you?"

Sleepily stumbling over to the counter where the list was, Logan turned on a light and tried to focus on it. "Who do you want me to call?"

"Abbie's Mom and Dad, Elliot Stabler and Alex Kingsbury."

Logan rubbed her eyes and looked at the clock. "Um...it's one in the morning...they're not going to yell at me for waking them up, are they?"

"For news like this? They better not. No, they're expecting the call." Olivia provided Logan with all of the vital statistics, such as weight, length, hours of labor, which twin was born first, etc.

Writing all the information down, Logan was still trying to focus and hoping, after Olivia hung up, she could read her own handwriting.

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By the time the babies came home from the hospital, there was a full house at the Carmichael-Benson spread. Alex had driven over from Maine to spend a week, hoping to help Abbie and Olivia get settled in with the new brood. Elliot was designated to take pictures and videos for the rest of the SVU squad, so he had driven up from New York for the night and Abbie's mother and father, who had long since 'forgiven' their daughter for her proudly acknowledged lesbianism (right around the time she started giving them grandchildren), were going to be flying in from Texas the day Alex left to return to her own family. Logan, who had been watching Sierra until Alex got there, opted to hang out until Olivia and Abbie got back with the twins.

After everyone ooohed and aaahed over the babies and things began calm down for the evening, Elliot and Olivia grabbed a beer and slipped out onto the deck. It was great to visit with his former partner regardless of the circumstances but to see her glowing and so proud of her family, just melted his heart. They stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity, just grinning. Finally, Elliot spoke.

"I bought these for you," he told Olivia, removing two cigars from the breast pocket of his denim shirt.

Laughing jovially, she said, "Two cigars?"

"Two babies, two cigars. It's the law." He reached over and pulled her into a hug and then released her. "Well," he said, "light 'em up."

"No, thanks. I'll save them for posterity."

"Then you need to at least pretend you're smoking them for the camera. Don will kill me if I come back and don't have at least one of you with those damn cigars in your mouth."

"Later," she agreed. "I'm glad you were able to make it up here, Elliot, it means a lot to me."

Elliot shrugged, almost shyly. "It means a lot for me to be here, Liv. I missed Sierra's birth because Maureen got married, I wasn't about to not be here now. Sierra is beautiful, by the way. But I'm sure you know that."

"Thank you. She looks just like Abbie, she didn't stand a chance of not being gorgeous."

Taking a long swallow of beer, Elliot nodded. "I miss you, Olivia. But not enough to ever try to talk you into leaving what you have here to return to us at SVU. You have made an amazing life here. Great job, great house, great partner, great kids...and you are so obviously deliriously happy. You deserve this, Liv."

"Thanks, El." There were tears in her eyes. Must have been all the emotional excitement over the last couple days.



Reaching over and sliding his arm across her shoulder, he pulled her close and whispered in her ear, "But I honestly have to say, I don't know if I'll ever forgive you nailing Abbie Carmichael AND Alex Cabot instead of me."

Chuckling, she swatted him and took a couple of swift sips of beer. "Just like old times, eh?"

"Better," Elliot decided. "Much better."

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The End

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