

————— *Bloodline Trilogy 1* —————

# PROOF

*A Novel*

JORDYN  
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Publications

## Chapter 3

*September 3*

KADIN HOVERED OVER Sara, the baby he'd delivered from Torrence Campbell in the ER a week ago. She was snuggled in lamb's wool, lying within the clear walls of the Isolette, her black hair combed and parted to one side. A pink bow with pearl center was secured to her head with a drop of corn syrup. A tube parted her pale lips.

He glanced at the monitor and watched the infant's heart rate dropping despite the efforts of Dr. Kerns, the neonatologist who now looked down with a defeated countenance. Nancy, Torrence's mother, held the small baby's hand between her fingers. She caressed the ivory skin, tears threatening to breach her lower eyelids. Paul, her husband, seemed to sink within himself and leaned against a chair one of the nurses had brought for him. He refused to sit down.

"There is honestly nothing more we can do," Dr. Kerns said, his voice breaking pitch.

"Won't you try to restart her heart if it stops?" Paul asked.

"Sara is already on the maximum amount of medications that we can use to keep her heart going. Again, as I've told you, the issue is not with her heart. Her problem is the large bleed in her head. Because of it, her brain cannot control the functions of her body anymore. That's why she's dying."

"What about taking her to surgery and taking the clot out?" Nancy said through stifled tears.

"The blood is diffuse and can't be removed. I think your time will be better spent saying good-bye."

Kadin rested a gentle hand over Nancy's arm. She gripped the baby's hand tighter and closed her eyes. Tears split caverns down each cheek. Paul withered into the chair, dropping his face into his hands. His shoulders heaved.

“Do you mind if I say a prayer for Sara?” Kadin asked. With her free hand, Nancy dabbed each of her eyes with a crumpled, torn tissue as she nodded her assent. “Lord, we pray for Sara. We ask that you swaddle her in your comfort and ease her suffering. Give peace to her loving grandparents as you come today to take her home.”

In his peripheral vision, Kadin saw the woman swoon and reached for her arm to hold her steady. One of the nurses sensed his plight and rolled an additional chair to the bedside. He eased her gently into the seat.

For several minutes, each was quiet. Dr. Kerns watched the monitor. Paul was stoic, eyes wide and unblinking. Nancy wept without making a sound. Kadin prayed silently, both of his hands covering the baby through the portholes.

Finally Kadin secured the closures and turned from the Isolette. He lowered himself to his knees in front of the grandmother. “I want to take Sara to Torrence.”

“That will kill her!” Nancy pushed up from her chair. Kadin stood as well, stepping back.

“I think it could help her. She’s never had a chance to be with the baby.” Dr. Kerns turned away from the monitor, arms folded across his chest.

“Do we have to tell her the baby is dying?” Paul asked.

“We can leave that to your discretion,” Kadin answered.

“I think we should, Nancy. Just bring the baby to her and see what happens. Torrence is strong.”

“The baby is the whole reason she’s dying!” Nancy clutched her shirt in her hands. “If Torrence had done what that monster asked and done away with it, she wouldn’t be in such straits!”

“Nancy, we will not travel down this path. I know you don’t mean it! The only guilty party is the man who victimized her.”

“And we still don’t even know that. Nothing good has come from her keeping the baby.”

Paul stood in defiance and approached Kadin. “Take the baby to Torrence.” He turned to Kerns. “We give you permission to stop your efforts to save Sara’s life.”

After those words, he left. Nancy followed with slow steps in his wake, once glancing back with pain-ridden eyes. “Forgive me,” she mouthed.

Dr. Kerns was at the Isolette. He opened the side access door and pulled Sara toward him. He made quick work of disconnecting the monitors and

removed the breathing tube from her lungs. One of the nurses approached Kadin, a white patchwork blanket with pink stars folded between her hands.

“Is this one of my sister’s quilts?” Kadin asked.

“We’ve been saving this one for the right baby.” She unfolded the blanket and placed it over Kadin’s outstretched arms. His throat thickened. Dr. Kerns placed the infant in the middle, bundling the edges around her and bringing the top down to cover her face.

“Steve, thanks for letting me do this.”

“You’re going to need to hurry,” he said.

Kadin turned to the nurse who’d brought the quilt. “Call the ICU for me—.”

“Already done.” She smiled, nudging him forward.

Leaving the neonatal ICU with Sara, Kadin rounded the last hall and waited for the elevator. Sometimes his determination in bonding babies with their mothers, even if they were dying, defied logic. In reality, it was penance for an act that had caused unending suffering to someone close to him.

Early in his career, his sister miscarried a baby at twenty weeks that was disfigured from a rare genetic mutation. Fearing the trauma it would inflict on Ellie’s psyche, he refused to let her see or hold the baby, convincing her she would heal better if she never connected to the infant.

It resulted in the exact opposite.

Ellie grieved the baby in every quilt she made for other sick infants. The nursery was a kaleidoscope of her tears. Even after five years, she didn’t stop sewing through her despair.

It was always the unknowing that festered open wounds.

A woman tapped his shoulder. The elevator doors opened in front of him.

“Can I see the baby?” She reached forward, attempting to pull the corner of the quilt up to see Sara’s face.

He swiveled his body, and the cloth slipped from the woman’s fingers.

“I’m sorry, she’s got RSV. No harm to you, but we don’t want to spread the virus around the hospital.” Scurrying into the elevator, he pushed the button for his desired floor. The woman’s blank look was framed by the closing doors. He leaned against the back wall, letting his held breath escape slowly.

He made his way to Torrence's room and saw Lilly at her bedside. Joy edged into his sadness.

"Not enough mayhem to keep you busy in the ER today?" Kadin hugged the infant close to his chest.

"I came to check on her. The nurses told me you were bringing the baby. I thought I'd sit with you."

"How is Torrence doing?"

"Her parents made her a DNR. The neurosurgeon believes she'll be in a persistent vegetative state from her head injury. Her organs are failing. It's not likely she'll live much longer. The baby?"

"Kerns let me bring her here to say good-bye."

Lilly crossed the room, grabbed the wooden rocker that sat in the corner and pushed it closer to Kadin.

"The baby may be what Torrence is holding on for. Her injuries are so devastating that there's really no reason she should still be alive."

"Maybe we should call her parents," Kadin said.

"They were just here and made it clear they don't want to come back. They've already said good-bye."

"I guess we better not waste any more time. Shall we introduce Sara to her mother?"

Kadin stood and approached the bedside. Tubes snaked out from beneath Torrence's covers. The ventilator and dialysis machines hissed and hummed in the background. He rested Sara at the foot of the bed and unwrapped her from the quilt. Removing the blankets nearest him, he pulled Torrence's arm away from her body and with one hand, scooped the baby and laid her in the crook of her mother's arm.

"Torrence . . . this is your baby, Sara." Kadin edged the rocker closer. "She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, and I've seen a lot of babies." He encircled Sara with her mother's limp hand. Watching closely for several minutes, he saw the baby breathing only intermittently.

Lilly pulled a chair up and sat down.

"He's right, Torrence. She has lots of black curls, and somehow they managed to get a pink bow in her hair. Those neonatal nurses have some tricks up their sleeves."

"I think they use corn syrup."

"Well, I don't think they could make your baby any sweeter." Lilly cradled Torrence's free hand between hers.

A shrill triple beep sounded from the monitor. Kadin noted Torrence's heart rate converting into a lethal rhythm. Lilly stood, reached up, and silenced it.

"You're right." Kadin rocked gently in his chair. "She was waiting for her daughter before leaving."

"At least they're together," Lilly said softly.

Her eyes drifted to the floor, and Kadin felt her emotionally pull back as if she'd physically walked away.

"This is hard for you." He ached for her to connect with him instead of choosing the hollow well she often retreated to.

"I should go. I'm meeting Dana at my place." Lilly stood and strode to the door.

"I'll stop by later," Kadin called.

He wasn't sure if she heard his words.