

# Do Not Answer

By Kasey Riley

## Prologue

Genetic engineering in humans is against the morals and values of every nation on earth. Yet, it was researched back in the horrible days of Hitler's regime. Lebensborn mothers gave birth to children at Hitler's directives, his scientists searching for perfect and pureblood soldiers. It is not beyond belief that the donated sperm were modified to create larger, more intelligent, healthier babies. Perhaps the children had talents beyond the standard and senses above the normal range. Experiments on humans were being done in the labs of WWII (and could be still); genetic modification is a valid assumption. This story is the final in a series of novels dealing with possibilities of what descendants of this program could be like today. These experiments could have happened back in WWII. They could even be happening today if scientists, governments, and wealthy supporters are willing to break the laws of man and nature.

*If you have not read Do Not Assume and Do Not Accept, I strongly suggest you do if you want to get the most enjoyment from this novel. However, if you decide not to read the first two books of this trilogy, the following will give you an idea of what has happened to bring John and Anna to the week before their wedding:*

Police discovered a wailing newborn baby in a murdered woman's hotel room. The woman had been the victim of an apparent mugging attempt. *Nicoleta Sophia* was hand-written on a scrap of paper, giving the child her name. Born and orphaned the same week, Nicoleta survived being

shuffled around the foster care system until she was adopted at age eleven. Her new parents wanted only to provide the child the home she had never known.

At twenty-three, Nicoleta uncovered her heritage. Following her DNA test, she was kidnapped by scientists from a Romanian laboratory owned by a powerful American corporation. Nicoleta's mother was the only woman who had ever managed to escape the facility—the perfect product of their genetic manipulations lost to the scientists. These scientists wanted Nicoleta because she carries her mother's genetic code as well as the code of her father. This specific genetic makeup has unique talents beyond the normal human range. A natural empath, Nicoleta can also broadcast emotions to others. Nicoleta can heal her body of most injuries and seldom becomes ill. Her Romany father added to the strength of her mother's powers, giving Nicoleta abilities she had yet to discover.

With the help of James Woodruff, security boss for Nicoleta's employer, she escapes the laboratory. Nicoleta returns with the MackWood Security team to destroy the lab to prevent the researchers from harming or producing more victims. Nicoleta and the team learn the scientists have been busy producing more children from the stored eggs of Nicoleta's mother. They discover some of her half-siblings, created using her mother's frozen eggs. Unable to leave the children behind, the group escapes with them. Hacker Richard copies the scientists' files and destroys all the data. Nicoleta works her talent on the scientific group, hoping they will give up their research. With any luck, the scientists will think they lost everyone to the fire that destroyed the facility, and those paying the bills will move on to more lucrative endeavors.

After the lab's destruction, Nicoleta, James, and the crew found a way to smuggle five half-siblings into the United States. They created birth certificates, health records, and all the expected data that the birth of a newborn child generates. Nature and a good friend work together to supply the perfect cover for the orphans to enter mainland USA. Once clear of Customs, the five children and three adults move south from Lexington, Kentucky. Their destination is the Navajo Reservation, where James has land, and the family can settle safely.

Hacker Richard, who created the documents for the babies, creates new identities for Nicoleta and James. She becomes Anna Michaelson while James becomes Michael John Wilson.

Exhaustion and an illness bring them to Bear Springs Lodge just outside Catfish Creek, Kentucky. Between caring for five children and having experienced mentally and physically draining adventures in Europe, Anna needs a rest and time to heal. John is ready for a break and a planning session about their future. George, the man who rescued them in Serbia and Romania, is excited about spending time in a peaceful location without work stress. They decide to settle in Kentucky instead of Arizona. No one is looking for them in Kentucky. Besides, a multi-day road trip with five youngsters is no one's idea of a good time.

George, a producer, arranges a makeup artist session in Louisville to help John and Anna confuse facial recognition software. John persuades Anna to marry him and finds a venue to hold the wedding. George buys the lodge, and John finds a job as sheriff of Catfish Creek after the man holding that position is wounded and retires. The main challenge now

is to get their families to meet them at the wedding venue in time for the perfect wedding, arranged in five days or less.

John and Anna are making friends in Catfish Creek, including some people with quite similar backgrounds to Anna's. It seems that the U.S. scientists at Oak Ridge (about a hundred miles away) were also experimenting during WWII.

## Chapter 1

“Wow! I never expected Venetia's confession. It never occurred to me that our government was running the same kind of genetic research as the Germans during and after WWII.” Anna began as she and John walked to their Nissan van. Until they managed to pick up an extra, smaller car, the van or the sheriff's cruiser were their only choices of vehicles.

The Sunday dinner at the Doabs disbursed quickly after Adam took Venetia home. Anna and John stayed a short time before making excuses and seeing themselves out. It had been a long day for John, and the Venetia's revelations had him thinking about their situation. Escorting Anna out, he could tell she was about to pop with the need to discuss what had happened during the private meeting with Venetia and Adam.

“I've heard of the Secret City where the American government developed weaponry and had scientists hidden during WWII, but I haven't heard anything about genetic manipulation,” John agreed. “I remember reading about the scientists who worked on mRNA to create better vaccines. Still, I didn't put that together with DNA research or bio-engineering,” John mused.

“I guess knowing about Venetia, Adam, and Gary makes me feel a little less of a genetic monster.” Anna managed a watery smile. “After realizing my gifts were genetically designed instead of a natural mutation, I felt a little like a freak. I wondered how we were going to explain their differences to our children. I still worry, but I don't feel as

strange now that I know there are others out there like my siblings and me.” She hid a snuffle by rubbing her nose.

John stopped Anna at the door of the van. Even as he comforted her, his mind was racing. He ran his arm around her, pulling her close to his body and tenderly kissing her forehead. He sympathized with her about feeling out of place. He was the only Native American in the county as far as he knew, but at least he didn’t have to hide his heritage from those around them.

“Any time you feel like a freak, tell me, and I’ll explain again how wonderful you are. Scientists might have genetically created you and your siblings, but only you can control your gifts and talents. By doing good with those talents, you should never be ashamed. Mankind has messed with genetics and made some incredible things. You and your siblings are proof of that, just as Adam and Gary are proof of the same experiments in the USA. I wouldn’t want you or the children to be anything but what you are.” John paused to take a breath, uncertain exactly how he wanted to phrase this next bit. He thought a moment and plunged in with what he wanted her to know.

“For one thing, with you and your siblings in my life. I’ll never get bored, and I can guarantee that.” John hugged Anna close, then released her to open her passenger side door. “I seriously doubt that you could do anything that would make me ashamed of what you are and what you can do. Your siblings and our future children will be amazing adults too. All we have to do is find the proper way to raise them to control their gifts,” he said, helping her into her seat. He closed the door and moved to the driver’s side.

“I’m shocked that we managed to settle in a town where others with unique gifts have settled. What are the odds of

that? I want to sit down with Venetia one day and compare stories of her escape from the Oak Ridge Secret City with a newborn baby. I wonder how she managed to hide out in Catfish Creek. I'll bet she had help from the moonshiners who run the hills around here. There must be a ton of caves and cabins stuck back in the woods that only a select few know about," Anna speculated.

"I can think of a couple of ways she managed to hide out here. For one thing—back in the forties and fifties, the government didn't have so many places where citizens were listed. Babies were born at home more often than in hospitals in rural areas. Social Security numbers were issued to working people, and many farmers didn't bother. If you didn't deal in cash money, you didn't expect the government to guarantee your retirement." John couldn't help but think that those simpler times might not be a terrible thing. Sometimes less government brought out the strength and goodness inherent in humans. If you had to fend for yourself and take care of your family to keep them alive, you did what you needed to do.

Driving home to Bear Creek Lodge, John explained his theories. "In the country, barter was more common than having a bank account. I can see how Venetia was able to disappear into the population of Catfish Creek. So long as the residents accepted her and her child, no one would think to call the government and report them. No reason to report someone moving to town."

"You're right. The people in this area don't trust the government much. They would have no reason to talk about new residents with any outsiders. Communication was much more local back in those days—very few telephones. Radios and newspapers were the only ways residents learned about

regional or national news. A missing Tennessee woman on the news? Why would anyone tie her to the new lady and baby living with the Godfrey's?" Anna carried John's theories farther.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if *we* could drop out of sight so easily? We've been fortunate that there's only been the one pair of skip-tracers getting close to us." John pulled to a stop at their cabin. He'd lost some sleep with worrying about J.C. Foxborough tracking them down. Anna would always have the genetics the old man wanted to use in his experiments. He put his hand on Anna's and squeezed. "Now that we're part of Catfish Creek, we may be safe from outsiders."

"Well, we've done as much as we can to fade into the background. We changed our looks and names and hacked into databases to insert our new history. We have new passports, driver's licenses, and Richard even sent us copies of past-year tax returns. Nicoleta Parcels and James Woodruff no longer exist! They disappeared during a major hurricane in the US Virgin Islands. I don't know what else we can do, but we'll do what's necessary to protect those babies." Anna squeezed John's hands in return before she climbed out of the vehicle. John was out and at her side before she secured the van door.

"I'm just as worried about protecting you as I am about the children. You shouldn't have to spend your life looking over your shoulder, expecting the next person you meet to try to kidnap you again." John pulled her close, unwilling to let her go until she relaxed some of the tension he could feel in her body. This past week had been a doozy, and Sunday dinner with the Doaks shocking.

"Thanks, it's nice to know how much you worry about me. But I can take care of myself. Those five babies are

helpless.” Anna lay her head against John's muscular chest, listening to his steady heartbeat.

“They may look helpless, but I think by the time they are three, that group of babies will be a force to reckon with. Charlie already can get his way without saying a word. Dolee can get anything she sees and wants. Yeah, give them a few years to grow stronger, and those five babies will be fierce. I'm still worried about what talents Sialia, Davy, and Tony will have. Life is going to be very interesting with them around,” John said before kissing the top of Anna's head. With a final squeeze, he released his hold.

Up at the main lodge, the front door slammed open. George escaped onto the porch, waving at Anna and John down at the first cabin.

“*Thank God; you're back!*” George moved more quickly down the front steps than John had ever seen the big man move. He was dragging a roll-around suitcase with both hands. It must have weighed thirty pounds.

“What's the matter? Is one of the babies hurt? Is one sick?” Anna questioned as she hurried toward the main building.

George appeared perplexed by Anna's question.

“What? No, no, nothing like that. Those *idiots* in Italy are screwing with my screenplay, and I've got to get there before they waste more film.” He dropped the handle of the suitcase to wring his hands.

John caught Anna's arm before she did something she might regret. Yes, he was angry too that George had scared him badly with his overly dramatic exit from the lodge but hitting the man would do no good. Besides, he would be a business partner and likely a close neighbor for quite a while in the future.

“George, you scared me half to death. Don't run out of the house shrieking, 'Thank God; you're back!' You made me think one of the babies had done something horrible or had a terrible accident. When there are children around, you shriek only when it's a life-or-death situation. Having to fly back to Italy *is not* life-or-death.” Anna chastised the older man.

“But, Sweet Thing, to me, it *is* life-or-death. Time and film are money, and the more they screw up, the more needs to be re-shot. Wasting time and film.” George explained his situation in a calm, rational voice—as though Anna was a slow learner.

“Fine. John can take you to the airport in Lexington. I'll stay here with the babies.” Anna turned to John.

“Oh, you don't have to drive clear to Lexington. A perfectly sized airport is in Oneida, Tennessee—hardly over thirty miles away. The runway is long enough, and my pilot is on his way as we speak.” George beamed at the couple. “I'll be able to get to Italy, clean up the mess, and be back in Nashville in time for your wedding.”

“Today is Sunday. We're getting married on Thursday afternoon. Do you seriously think you'll have enough time?” John asked. As he spoke, his brain ran through the calls he would need to make to change the ceremony. He wasn't even sure if the ceremony could be postponed until Friday, but for George, he would try. The man had been instrumental in rescuing Anna from first Serbia and then saving them all from Romania. Without his money and credit cards, they would have been sitting ducks to those trying to follow. George had been paid back, but the wedding wouldn't be complete without him.

“I'll call you if there are any delays. So long as my pilot can fly, I should be able to arrive in Rome, take care of

business, and have him fly me back to Nashville. Flying time is all that will slow us down,” George assured them. He hauled his suitcase to the van, loaded it, and climbed in on the passenger side.

John kissed Anna before he turned back to the van. “Guess that's my cue to drive to Oneida. Hug the children. I'll be back in a couple of hours. I love you.” Minutes later, they were on the main road south to Oneida. Not a straight road by any imagination, but a well-used and maintained highway with little traffic on a Sunday afternoon.

“How did your first social event go?” George turned chatty as they drove, seeming to want to know everything. “Oh, that's right, you had to work part of the day. Anything interesting happen at dinner or work?” George pulled a soda from his pocket, opened it, and waited impatiently for John to respond.

“Let me see—my deputy and I managed to catch the men who assaulted Sheriff Doug. Actually, only one survived. One of the two was attacked and killed by wild hogs as we chased them in the woods.” John shuddered at the memory of the gory and gruesome event. It wasn't anything he ever wanted to see again. He would never have thought to worry that hogs would attack a human. It was good that his deputy had grown up in this area and knew the dangers of the animals.

“By the time I got to the dinner, Anna was in conference with a woman who had some very revealing stories to tell. It seems like Anna isn't the only person in Catfish Creek with extraordinary talents and gifts. This woman has some too, and so do her son and grandson. Germany wasn't the only country doing genetic engineering using humans during WWII.” John didn't want to give more than that away

to George. George wouldn't publicize the information, but Venetia deserved to keep her secrets.

“*Wild hogs?* You lost a suspect to *wild hogs?* How on earth did that happen?” George looked both intrigued and disgusted. John was glad the man pounced on the hog story instead of asking about the second item.

“The pair were trying to escape us, and the road had a tree across it, so they took off on foot. They didn't realize that there was a sounder of hogs foraging in the direction they ran. The local suspect, Mark Tucker, saw the hogs and climbed a tree. His partner hadn't a clue about the dangers of wild hogs and never made it up a tree. In fact, he stopped and watched Mark climb instead of saving himself. We heard him scream but couldn't get to him before the hogs had taken him down.” Recalling the feeling of total helplessness of that moment was almost as depressing as when it occurred. John shuddered at the memory.

“My word. Nothing like that could ever happen in California.” George had paled listening to the account.

“The west has its varieties of natural dangers, but hogs are a lot smaller in the desert. I imagine a grizzly could do some damage, but there's something about a group of animals attacking a man.” John felt his stomach churn. “I shot three of them, and the others began attacking those before they were dead. The noise was horrendous. We managed to recover the body and get Mark Tucker to the car just as the highway patrol arrived. This has been a hell-of-a first day.” John hoped the rest of his tenure as town sheriff would be less violent. Catfish Creek should be a typical small town with common crimes and dangers, not a town where you didn't dare go into the woods.

“Oh dear, and now you have to drive me to Tennessee. At least it's only about thirty miles or so. Next time I come, I'll rent a car for myself,” George apologized.

“No, no. This drive is good for me. I'm probably not exactly fit company right now, and this time will give me a chance to process what happened. Much better for me than a stiff drink.” John smiled at the older man seated next to him.

“If you say so. But after hearing about your day, *I* want a stiff drink.” George shivered, shaking his shoulders and head. He'd been to many countries and movie sets, but he'd never heard about killer hogs before.

Just then, a song by Billy Joel blared out. George reached for his pocket and pulled out his cell phone.

“This is George. Oh, Stephen, good to hear from you. Have you landed in Oneida?”

John focused on his driving. The sound of George talking to his pilot hummed under the sound of the Nissan van's tires. He was surprised at how well the van handled the curves and hills of his adopted state. He hadn't expected such a large vehicle to be as maneuverable as it had proven to be. They were just crossing the Tennessee line when George hung up. “So, has your pilot landed?” John asked.

“Didn't you hear what I was saying to my pilot? Stephen called to tell me when he landed; he found another private jet had just touched down. Foxborough Enterprises corporate jet is now sitting on the tarmac at the Scott County Airport.” Consternation lined George's forehead.

“*Shit!* It would be stupid of us to think they just happened to be visiting this area. Did Stephen say if he'd seen the passengers get off?” John gripped the steering wheel tightly as he questioned George.

“Two men in suits seem to be waiting for ground transportation. They spoke to one of the ground crew and then made a call before getting back onto the jet. Stephen asked the crew if the other pilot had asked to be refueled, but they said no. That means the plane is staying or has the fuel needed to get to the next destination. Now, what do we do?” George whined, wringing his hands.

“I'm pulling into Tractor Supply, and we're going to find someone to take you the rest of the way to the airport. I can't let them see this van or the Kentucky plates. Surely, someone will be willing to run the errand for a twenty.” John made a right hand turn into the parking lot as he spoke.

“Why this store?”

“I trust the people who have livestock and shop here more than I would trust John Q. Shopper at any other store in town,” John explained as he looked for a parking spot a fair distance from the door.

“Oh, good point. The only safer place to catch a ride might be a lumber yard.” George agreed, proud that he thought of an ordinary rural shopping location.

John parked and observed shoppers entering and exiting the store. He watched a couple walk past the van and into the store. “You wait here. Let me negotiate this.”

Ten minutes later, John exited the store, pushing the shopping buggy of an older man and his wife. John motioned George to come over to where the couple and the cart stopped next to a silver crew cab pickup.

“This is the man I told you about. He needs a ride to the Scott County Airport. I would take him, but I got an emergency call from my wife, and I need to get back to Kentucky.” John pulled George and his luggage closer.

“Jeff and Martha, I'd like you to meet George Sampson of Sampson Pictures. He's a producer, and he's catching a private jet to the location of his current movie in Italy. Give the good people one of your cards, George.” John nudged George.

“Nice to meet you. I'm very thankful that you can give me a ride to the airport. My pilot would come to get me, but of course, he doesn't have a car, and there are none to rent at the Scott County Airport.” George produced a business card and passed it to the husband.

“I've never met a producer before. What exactly does a producer do?” Martha asked as George climbed into the back seat of the large pickup.

John finished loading the bags of grain and all the other supplies into the back of the truck and waved it off before jumping into the van and burning rubber back out onto the highway north out of town. He hadn't gotten too far when it dawned on him that he needed Anna, and a trip up to Kentucky and back would take over an hour. He pulled onto the old highway and found a shaded spot to park. Pulling out his cell, he was thankful there were three reception bars as he punched in Anna's number.

