

MOTHER OF ALL BETRAYALS:

'My best friend stole my dead baby son'

When Corrinne Boulton suffered the devastating loss of her newborn, the person she thought she could trust most in the world did the unthinkable...

When Corrinne Boulton and Hayley Bell met at college, they quickly became inseparable. As they got older, they were there for each other through the ups and downs of life.

So, when Hayley, a funeral director, announced in 2019 that she was opening a funeral parlour with her partner, Richard Elkin, Corrinne couldn't have been prouder.

Then, in June 2023, tragedy struck when Corrinne gave birth to a little boy, Albie, at just 21 weeks. Heartbreakingly, Albie died just 11 minutes after he was born and in her darkest moment, Corrinne called the person she trusted most – Hayley.

Hayley promised to take care of all the funeral arrangements. But things took a dark turn when just weeks later, news broke that Hayley and her partner had been arrested after police had found bodies left unrefrigerated.

Hayley and her partner denied any wrongdoing, but in December 2025, they were found guilty of preventing lawful burial, intentionally causing a public nuisance and fraud.

A worried Corrinne spoke to the police, who admitted they couldn't account for where Albie had been kept before his funeral. The heartbroken mum says, 'Now I have to live with the fact that I'll never know the truth about what happened to Albie. Only Hayley knows what she did with our son.'

HEARTBROKEN

'I feel guilty. It was me who'd called her, and it feels like I'd let Albie down. The thought of him alone, who knows where, in those days before his funeral breaks my heart.'

Corrinne met Hayley at college in Portsmouth. Corrinne says, 'We had the same interests, such as ghost-hunting nights and going to Comic Con.'

Corrinne went on to get married and have three daughters, Alice, now 16, Ava, 14, and Alexandra, nine. But when her marriage collapsed in 2012, Hayley was a shoulder to cry on.

Nine years later, Corrinne met Sam on a dating app and they hit it off instantly. She says, 'He had three boys from his first marriage, and together with my girls, we had a lovely blended family.'

In 2019, Hayley announced that she was opening a funeral parlour, Elkin & Bell, and Corrinne was thrilled for her friend.

She says, 'She'd worked in that field since she'd left college, and I was proud of her.'

In 2022, Corrinne found out she was pregnant with a little boy, who they decided to call Albie. But at 21 weeks, tragically, she went into early labour. Corrinne says, 'When I pushed Albie into the world, there was silence – the midwife confirmed our son was gone.'

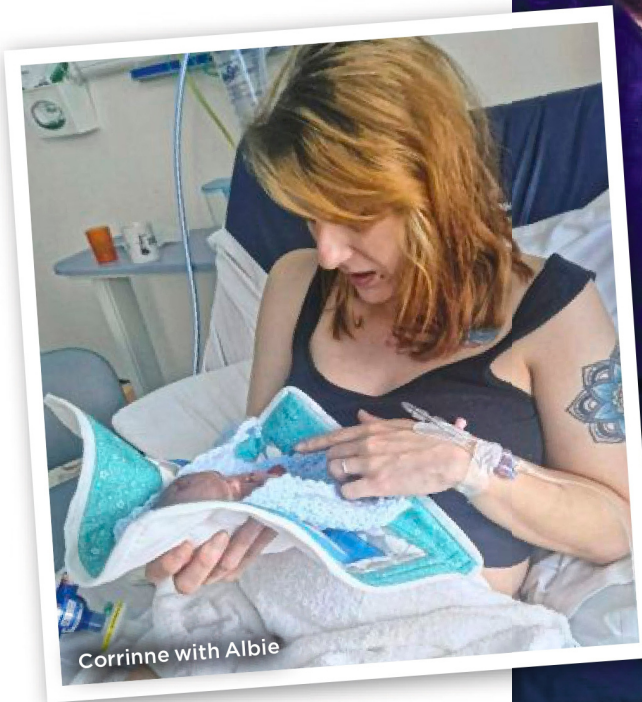
'I called Hayley and she gently talked us through funeral preparations. When she told me she'd collected Albie from the mortuary, I felt comforted to know he was in her care.'

The day before the service, Corrinne and Sam decided to go to the funeral home to see Albie one last time – but Hayley

stopped them. Corrinne says, 'She said, "No, I'm putting my funeral director hat on – you should remember him as he was. I've glued the casket shut so you can't be tempted." It felt off, but I thought she was trying to protect me.'

GIFT

At the funeral, Corrinne was supported by Hayley as Sam carried in Albie's coffin to Ariana Grande's *Raindrops*. The couple later collected a heart-shaped urn from Hayley with Albie's ashes in it. Corrinne says, 'I felt so low. But a few weeks later, I discovered that I was pregnant again. It was Hayley's birthday, so I messaged her with the good news. "This is a gift," she replied.'



Corrinne with Albie

'I HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE FACT THAT I'LL NEVER KNOW THE TRUTH'

Hayley and Corrinne had been best friends for years



Corrinne and Sam have since gone on to have Anastasia

came to speak to us. They'd discovered that after Hayley had collected Albie from the hospital mortuary – but before his funeral – environmental health inspectors had visited Elkin & Bell and found that no bodies were there.

REPOSSESS

'I wanted to know where my son was, but they had no idea. They suspected my baby might have been kept in their van, but with Hayley refusing to answer questions, they couldn't be sure. I was furious. I'd trusted Hayley to care for him and she'd betrayed us.'

Days after the trial started, Elkin and Bell were both found guilty. Corrinne says, 'The sentence wasn't enough for what they'd put us and the other families through.'

Now, Corrinne wants to make other people aware about the lack of regulations in the funeral industry. She says, 'It's a free-for-all and ripe for exploitation. Anyone can become a funeral director. You don't need qualifications, there are no set standards and no laws governing how bodies are treated. That needs to change to spare others going through the same ordeal as us.'

● If you have concerns about funeral care, you can report them anonymously by visiting ryfe.uk

But soon after, Corrinne was scrolling through Facebook, when she saw on a local news page that people from the Elkin & Bell funeral parlour had been arrested on suspicion of fraud and preventing a lawful burial. Corrinne says, 'My first thought was, "Poor Hayley", certain it must be some awful mistake. I messaged her but she didn't reply.'

But then Corrinne started to panic as more revelations surfaced about the funeral home being in disarray, with no refrigeration and bodies being left to decompose.

Worried, she called the police with her concerns. Corrinne says,

'They called back and said, "We believe your son was in his casket and the ashes you have are his." It was scant comfort, but it was all I had.'

In April 2025, Corrinne gave birth to Anastasia, but she felt she couldn't relax into being a new mum again as she had nagging thoughts about what had happened to Albie.

In December that year, Richard Elkin, 49, and Hayley Bell, 42, appeared at Portsmouth Crown Court where a jury heard their business was in huge debt, and when bailiffs had turned up to repossess the building, they'd found it in a state of chaos with

no refrigeration, coffins strewn about and water coming through the ceiling.

They also discovered the decomposing bodies of two men – one had been there for 36 days. Hayley and Richard claimed he hadn't been sent for cremation as they hadn't been paid. But his family told the jury he'd had a funeral plan, which had taken care of the costs.

Shockingly, it was revealed that over a period of 18 months, 46 bodies had been kept in an uncooled, unrefrigerated mortuary, some for more than 30 days.

Corrinne says, 'The police



Hayley Bell was jailed for four years



Richard Elkin was also jailed for four years