

# **Sample Chapters**

**ARC (Advanced Review Copy)**

# 10

## Dr. Jordan Roberts

### Bogotá, Colombia 2001

Jordan is mumbling into her satellite phone. "Well, I just never wanted to see Faruq die. I know he was your friend."

Saleh replies from the other end. "You have your minion, and now I have to find another."

A man screams in Saleh's background. "AAAHH!"

"What was that?" Jordan asks. "Is everything all right? I could call you back later if this is a bad time."

"AAHHH!! OH, GOD NO! NOOO!" The man's voice fades off.

"That's just someone who made a mistake," Saleh says. "Why don't we meet up? Where are you now?"

"I'm traveling. We'll have to postpone a meeting. Besides, you're still upset from our last meeting."

"I'm still committed to my task," Saleh says. "I just don't think I'll be the one to do the work."

"It sounds like you're a long way from the penthouse, Saleh."

"That is true." Saleh snickers. "Oh wait, are you in a penthouse? Sir Francis Drake? I can come by."

"Talk to you later, Saleh." Jordan hangs up the satellite phone.

She looks around. She's sitting inside her private jet, leather seat reclining comfortably. Her daughter, Margarita, sits across from her, staring out the window.

Jordan moves to sit in front of her daughter.

"What's in Colombia?" Rita asks, staring out the window.

"Bogotá," Jordan replies.

"What's in Bogotá?"

Jordan takes a deep breath. "Well, you were born there."

"Uh-huh." Rita rolls her eyes.

"And I have a past there," Jordan says.

"Is it dangerous in Bogotá?"

Jordan swallows a mouthful of guilt. "Yes, it is."

"Is that why he's here?" Rita darts her eyes to Evan, who sits in his passenger chair, asleep. Deep asleep.

"Yeah, but—" Jordan cocks her head to the side. "—He can't protect us from everything."

"If it's so dangerous, why are we going there?" Rita asks sarcastically.

Jordan scoffs. "And they say raising kids is hard." She chuckles.

Rita isn't amused. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Jordan shifts in her seat, getting serious. "Bogotá is a place to be feared, but it's exactly because of that that we visit."

"Say more." Rita keeps her eyes out the window.

"I have real business there, but I brought you because it's where I lost your mother."

Rita gives her full attention to Jordan. "My other mom died here?"

Jordan goes slow. "I lost your mother in Colombia. I don't know if she died. I did all I could to find out."

"But she was last seen here?"

Jordan nods. "Yeah."

"Tell me everything." Rita sits up, turning to Jordan with an unblinking stare.

Jordan forces up the best face she can. "She disappeared when we were creating you. I employed everyone I could to look for her. In fact, there are still people I pay to let me know if they see her."

"And no one has said anything?"

Jordan shakes her head. "Nope."

"Well, I want to meet these people."

Jordan sits back in her chair. She exhales. "How will you start?"

"You give me the names and I'll go see them." Rita is more animated now. "I'll take Evan with me."

Jordan licks her lips, choosing her words carefully. "I'm impressed by your enthusiasm."

"You can't stop me," Rita says.

Jordan puts her hands up. "I won't stop you."

"What, then?"

"The body is nothing without a sound mind," Jordan says carefully. "In order to achieve your goal, you have to put cognition before your emotion."

Rita rolls her eyes. "English, Mom."

Jordan states her words coldly. "The cells inside your body are waiting to be perfected. They want it." Jordan leans closer.

"Then you should've made me stronger or faster."

"I can't make your body do things it hasn't learned. That's not how my work works. You have to do that for yourself."

Rita pushes her sarcasm. "I work out every day, and I read all I can."

Jordan slowly nods. "You could be killed. Bogota has the Cartel. If you don't pick up on social cues or become savvy to their culture, they'll kill you. Or kidnap you, or whatever else."

"Then why did you bring me here?"

"I want you to learn." Jordan is earnest. "It's scary bringing you here, but I know it's the thing you need. This is the one place I shouldn't bring you, but it's the place we fear to go that holds the highest reward."

Rita leans in. "Mom, as an accelerated clone, my mind is developing cognition too quickly. I need someone or something to advance my thought process."

"Rita," Jordan says. "You have so many talents. You don't need to be taller or have bigger muscles. You can achieve what you want right now. I know you can figure out what happened to your other mother."

"I'm under-equipped. You chose to create me as accelerated, meaning I didn't get to be a child or an adolescent. I came out as a fully developed nineteen-year-old with nothing in my brain. That was a couple years ago. I'm stumbling and failing in everything."

Jordan forces a hopeful tone. "If you could simply learn what is possible as a person but still have the creativity of a child, then you could surpass what we know as human beings. You could gain everything and more. You could let go of what we perceive as limits and develop your own rules. Then we could see another tectonic shift. Instead of technology, it could be our society." Jordan smiles.

Rita scoffs. "What about Evan?"

"Evan can only help you get there. As a person living with psychopathy, he cannot create original ideas, much less build new rules."

"Are you going to tell me how he developed psychopathy?"

Jordan puts up a confused face. "Urbach-Wiethe Disease."

"Urbach-Wiethe is a mutation. I scanned Evan's DNA at the lab. He doesn't have it, Mom."

Jordan puts up her hands. "Then I don't know."

"Okay, then I'll find out about that, too."

"That's good." Jordan is defensive.

Rita rests back on her sarcasm. "I read that the psychopath will perpetuate an unsound system simply because there is a possibility that they can take it over."

Jordan shrugs. "That's possible."

"That means you're in danger, Mom. Evan could kill you and take over your company."

"I don't mind. I'm fine with anything that perpetuates my work."

"Since Evan has changed, he poses more of a threat to you than anyone else."

"Evan is the person most equipped to take care of you."

"Why?" Rita asks.

"Most people become docile after cognitive dissonance. Psychopaths don't experience it."

"Why are people easier to control with cognitive dissonance?"

"Weak minds submit or cope with adversity. They don't conquer it; those are underdeveloped minds."

"Mom, I have an underdeveloped mind."

Jordan shakes her head. "No, you can learn anything. You're just depressed by the amount of information you've absorbed."

"I'm depressed?"

"I first noticed your depression when you refused your birthday, remember? True depression causes you to refuse celebration or social events."

"Yeah, I just don't want to celebrate my handicap."

"With a developed mind, all your talents lie in wait. You've refused to acknowledge that. That's depression. Remember the speed-reading class? It developed your mind so quickly. Things like that awaken your talents."

"Maybe I could acknowledge my talents if you didn't always thrust me into some new endeavor. Like Bogotá!" Rita crosses her arms in anger.

"Fail big. Failure is the start of real learning. You can't become great if you don't fail. It's the doing that'll take you to the next level." Jordan leans in. "Don't wait for someone to tell you how great you are. Show them."

"Is that what you tell all the new clones?"

"All new clones have to work their way up. Under Evan, we'll get the best possible clones." Jordan sits back in her chair.

"Mom, why not make them all citizens?" Rita pleads. "You could afford that."

"That wouldn't help them." Jordan shakes her head. "They have to earn their way."

"They're desperate; they'll do anything to survive."

"Yes, and it's that need for survival that will push them to become great."

"Like you did?"

"Yes! Like I did! I work hard, Rita!"

"We're citizens, Mom. Your creations have no place to call home. They have mental challenges. They're anxious all the time. It's those obstacles that are holding them back. That holds me back."

"They'll learn to overcome that. They'll become better than you and me."

"They won't if they're constantly worried about being murdered."

"Well, I don't decide that. Evan does."

"Ah yes, your pet."

"He's achieved a lot, Rita."

"And he's still a lowlife dog."

"Maybe if you talk to him, you'll see his achievement."

This triggers Rita. "What happened on the boat?" She leans into Jordan's face. "What happened on the boat?!"

Jordan shakes her head. "Just talk to him. He'll tell you everything."

After the plane lands, Jordan, Rita, and Evan disembark into Colombia. It's summertime, and on top of the tropical environment, the weather is hot, humid, and almost unbearable. El Dorado Airport shimmers in the sun, and after they grab their bags, Jordan and her crew see a black SUV in front of them. The driver stands in front with a sign that reads *Dr. Jordan Roberts*. Jordan giggles and directs her group to get into the SUV.

The ride is more than pleasant, and the driver doesn't say much. Rita and Evan enjoy the sights as they wind through palm trees and banana leaves, all with the ocean in front of them. After passing the rural farm areas, the SUV heads toward a large house in the distance.

As they approach the bloated, expensive, paradise-like house, Rita has questions.

"Mom." Rita's eyes are fixed on the house. "Who are we going to see?"

Jordan grins. "An old friend."

Rita raises an eyebrow. "Is this old friend a drug dealer kingpin-type guy?"

Jordan responds coldly. "Yes, he is."

Evan giggles.

When they reach the front of the house, the group is escorted in through the front doors. They pass a large foyer, and go through a vast living room and into a large office that must've been custom built.

The guide speaks to Jordan. "*El Jefe en diez minutos.*"

"Thank you, Chuy," Jordan nods.

Chuy exits.

Jordan turns to Rita and Evan. "Have a seat, guys." Jordan sits in an expensive chair facing the desk.

Rita and Evan sit on the couch behind her.

They wait.

Ten minutes pass and a man emerges, followed by a couple guys with guns.

"Jordaaaaan!" he shouts, with his arms wide.

Jordan stands up. "Santiagooooo!"

Jordan and Santiago embrace. They're old friends.

"Please, have a seat," Santiago says.

Jordan sits back down in her seat.

Santiago sits behind his desk. He smiles. "So happy to see you, Jordan."

"Good to be seen," Jordan says.

"Hey, Jordan." He gets a devious grin on his face. "When the people ask, who do you say you work for?"

"I say that I work for Silvio Mariano Santiago Joaquin—"

"She knows my name!"

The guards go for their guns.

"Hey, hey!" Santiago has to stop the men from pulling their guns. "It's okay. She's an old friend. Old friend, *hermanos!*"

The guards put their guns away.

"Santiago, were they just about to shoot me?" Jordan is semi-upset.

"Yeah!" Santiago guffaws. "Nobody uses my full name, anymore."

"Jesus Christ, Santiago!"

"Jordan, come on." Santiago giggles. "I wouldn't let them shoot you. You're a friend. I'm just having some fun."

Jordan shakes her head. "You certainly haven't changed."

"Me?" Santiago is surprised. "Come on, where have your talents taken you? Hmm? You have your own thing, now. You're a boss, just like me." He nods approvingly.

"That's very accurate," Jordan says. "But I'm not like you."

"Jordan, you're the best doctor ever, but you're a liar. You make up too much."

Jordan emphasizes by pointing to herself. "I only embellish what I have to."

"Jordan, you are lucky." Santiago raises his finger to his temple. "Nobody knows you. Not like I know you."

"Fair enough, boss," Jordan says reluctantly.

Santiago rubs his hands together. "So I finally have you down here, eh?"

Jordan forces a friendly grin. "Well, I like you, Santiago. You've been loyal to me and I'd like to return the favor, but I also want to show my daughter... well, *teach* my daughter... about her mother."

"Ah." Santiago leans back in his chair. "I see, I see."

"You know, after we finish our talk, I'm hoping to take my daughter around and maybe talk to the locals. You know, see if they've heard or seen anything."

Santiago is sincere with his next words. "Yes, I understand. Jordan, you have better taste in women than I, but you chose a slippery wife. I would've started a war for you but there was just no proof, you know?"

"I get it, Santiago." Jordan nods sincerely. "It's all fine. We're still friends, but I feel like I owe it to my daughter."

Santiago puts up an absolving hand. "I know the pain you went through. That's why I'm so happy to see you."

Jordan nods. "I'm happy to see you, too. So, what can I do for you?"

"Well, Jordan." Santiago has a gloating face. "We are doing well, buuuut we need you. Name your price."

Jordan reluctantly rolls her eyes.

Santiago pleads. "We've got to have you as quality control for our product. Just until our people can get up to speed."

"Boss, I want to do that—I *can* do that—but I have this contract with the SFPD now—"

"SFPD?" Santiago bellows. "How? For what?"

"Well, my genetic research has taken off."

"The genetics? The stuff your wife was working on? How did you do that?"

"The program is in its infancy, but we'll be providing personnel."

"You're going to provide personnel to the cops? That's perfect!" Santiago gestures to his guards. "We have some amazing candidates!"

The guards chortle.

"Whoa!" Jordan says. "Santiago, this is serious. I can't do anything to taint my program."

"Why not?" Santiago says. "This could be perfect for us."

"Santiago, the personnel I provide will be pure and separate from bias. That's what the whole program's about: unbiased police officers, smart and untainted by our culture. Incorruptible."

Santiago roars and cackles. "Well, good luck with that!"

"Thank you." Jordan is sarcastic. "So you see, this is why I can't do anything to hurt the program."

"Jordan, I get it," Santiago says. "However, I'm curious to know how you made these personnel. How did you create them?"

"Just like the women we made for you, and the workers we made for you. We made soldiers for the Middle East, cured some diseases. You know, stuff like that."

"Oh, the women and the butler boys. Yes! Jordan, you are truly a genius. You can make soldiers and other people like that?"

"Yes." Jordan nods. "Yes, we can."

"Oh, Jordan, we could use that kind of help, too. This is all with the genetic stuff?"

"Well, Santiago, I'm spread pretty thin right now. This new program is taking up all my time."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. But Jordan, we need your help," Santiago pleads again. "The women and butlers were great, and I told you we could use more."

"Well, boss," Jordan stammers. "It's not that easy. The technology is cutting edge. I devote a lot of time in order to create the clones—"

"I know, I know," Santiago says. "The work is big. You're a genius, Jordan!" he turns to his guards. "*Hermanos, esta doctora, ¡es un genio! ¡Ella puede crear vida!*"

The guards are impressed but don't really grasp Jordan's talents.

Santiago continues. "*No solo eso, ¡puede convertir a un bebé en un adolescente en solo unos meses!*"

The guards placate Santiago with impressed faces but then think about the 'few months' part of his statement. They become a little confused.

"Jordan," Santiago continues. "I'm curious. How did you get the SFPD to accept your program?"



"Well," Jordan begins. "The police have always needed good people. Back in 1999, there were some shootings just north of San Francisco. Maybe you heard of Salomon Hernandez or Kevin Saunders?"

Santiago shakes his head. "No."

"The cops shot these guys. People feel it could've been prevented. The point is, incidents like that spread the need for my program."

Santiago nods in understanding, but he's still a little confused.

Jordan continues. "We could've opened up in Seattle, but SF bid higher and won our contract." Jordan falls into her business persona. "Seattle and San Francisco are very progressive cities, and that's why they're willing to try out this program."

Santiago nods some more, but still has a furrowed brow.

"I don't know if you've heard of the Zebra Murders back in 1970?" Jordan continues.

Santiago shakes his head. "No."

"Well, back in the Seventies in San Francisco, there were these Black Muslims who randomly shot people on the street. It was horrible. Some say it was racially motivated, but bottom line, that shouldn't happen again. Ever. To anyone, you know?"

"Wow," Santiago says. "So wait, Jordan, what do you do with these clones? They don't have a concept of American culture or racism?"

"No, they aren't burdened with our culture or prejudices. No racism, no fascism, no anti-Semitism. None of that. They're growth is accelerated and then they get raised in an accelerated learning program. Once they've passed that, they get turned out into the city to integrate. If they are deemed successful in our society by Evan—" Jordan motions behind her. "—Then they are considered for police training."

"Oh, that guy on the couch? He runs your streets, eh?"

"He sure does." Jordan nods.

Santiago raises a fist toward Evan. "Ah, *solidaridad, hermano!*"

Evan grins and raises his fist. "Si, señor!"

Santiago smiles. "Good man!" He turns back to Jordan, "So, Jordan, have you had anybody get considered? Do the clones pass?"

"Not yet," Jordan says sadly.

"Nothing?" Santiago is surprised.

"We have some promising up-in-comers, but nothing yet. If this goes well, I can expand to Oakland. That's who really needs my program."

"*Interesante,*" Santiago is blown away. "*Fascinante!*"

"So this is why I'm reluctant to commit to you," Jordan says. "This can be huge for my company and I don't want it to be tainted, you know?"

"Cutting edge!" Santiago shouts. "This is what I'm talking about," he says to his guards.

The guards nod approvingly.

Santiago goes on. "We have history, Jordan. You should be with us!"

"Santiago," Jordan says. "I'm always willing to help, but I need time to get San Francisco going."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, Jordan. That's fine, I understand. Just send us what you can. I can send some guys to San Francisco and—"

"Santiago! I'm serious. I can't be involved with any Cartel activity."

"Oh, come on, Jordan! We need your help. What do you want from me?"

Jordan sighs and rubs her chin. "Okay, Santiago, I can help you with a few women here and there. And of course I'll still be quality control for you. I just need time to finish my work in San Francisco."

"Ah, Jordan, you are the best!"

"You're welcome, Santiago. I'm happy to help."

"You know if we can use your women for prostitution or workers for housework, maybe the real people—the citizens—can aspire to something better, you know?"

Jordan takes issue with Santiago's statement, but she presses on. "That's what I've been hoping for."

"We're going to change the world, Jordan." Santiago stands up. "I'm glad we're friends."

Jordan stands up. "Me too, boss."

Santiago crosses the table to shake Jordan's hand. After they shake, he hugs Jordan.

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After the meeting with Santiago, Jordan sits in an extravagant hotel with Rita and Evan. Rita has some questions.

"Mom?" she asks.

"Yeah?" Jordan replies.

"Why do you take those calls from the Middle East? Why are you dealing with that drug dealer guy? Why didn't you do something more respectable with your talents?"

Jordan sighs. "When I was in school, people looked down on me and laughed at my ideas. They called me the Science Fiction Phd. That hurt, and I figured I'd have to go my own way. Santiago was looking for a smart doctor who would work for him, and I jumped at it. He accepted me and treated me as an equal."

"Keep going," Rita says. "Tell me about the Middle East."

Jordan licks her lips. "Saleh is upset with me, but in time, she will come to understand that I did what I had to do. They threatened me and I didn't cower and turn tail. Some people want things their own way. You should learn from that; you don't have to be afraid of anyone. It doesn't matter who they are. Besides, I have Santiago, I have Hamini. I have the other outcasts of society as partners to help me in my endeavors. Hamini's money and Santiago's money are building my business."

"Isn't Hamini a warlord?"

"He provides to warlords. He's not a soldier. Our operation is about making money in Afghanistan. He's a businessman, that's all."

"A businessman in the desert."

"Business happens all over the world, Rita. You can't take things on first glance. Look deeper."

Rita thinks for a moment. "So is your business just about making money? Do you have a bigger plan?"

"My whole company is about disruption." Jordan says. "Creating opportunity or taking advantage of opportunity. Nobody sees genetic cloning like me, and it's an untapped industry. That gives me—that gives *us*—a great advantage. Freedom!"

"Mom, I don't have any judgements on your work, but newspapers, media, they say your work is unethical. Doesn't that bother you?"

Jordan shakes her head. "No. I've always thought differently about science and it always proved to be the better plan. Most people simply don't understand our future. People don't understand what they can't imagine. Most people refuse to see possibilities because they only understand what is in front of them. They called me Isaac Ass-a-hole, Arthur C. Bullshit, 2000-dummy: Space Cadet. Who *cares* about bettering the world? They didn't want me, so I made my own thing. People are barbaric and our society needs reshaping—an overhaul. We pass judgement on the first glance and anything different is deemed stupid or a threat or whatever else. No one can see the future because it scares them and threatens their way of life. You and Evan—us!—we are the future. Everyone will see that as a threat."

"Okay, I understand," Rita says. "Are we still going out to look for my mother?"

Jordan sighs. "I think I know what happened to your mother."

"What?" Rita asks.

"I'm fine with going out and talking to people, but Santiago is telling me what happened."

"What's he saying?"

"Well, he said he would've started a war for me. Meaning that he believes a rival Cartel could've been involved."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying we can go out there—it's fine. We can talk to everyone we want to, but I think Santiago is telling me something."

"What?" Rita asks. "What's he telling you?"

"I think your mother was taken by a rival cartel." Jordan rubs her forehead. "I'm sorry."

Rita sighs and shakes her head. "So there's no use in going into the city. No use in talking to people."

Jordan is as caring as she can be. "We can do whatever! I'm committed to doing what

you want to do, but that's my feeling, and I want you to be prepared for disappointment."

"I fucking hate this shit," Rita says. "It's such bullshit."

"I know you want to find your mother, honey." Jordan hugs her daughter. "Just keep an open mind. We may find something or we may not, okay?"

"Yeah." Rita wipes a tear from her face.

Evan weighs in. "After tomorrow, we're going to head home?"

"Yeah," Jordan says. "But after this trip, we'll probably have to go to Washington, D.C."

"For what?" Rita asks.

"Well, we may need to talk to some lobbyists there. Maybe make a play or plea to the president."

"Why?"

"Cloning might become illegal, and we can't afford to have that happen."

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The next day, they go out into the city. They knock on doors and follow general gossip, but ultimately, it's fruitless. The only closure Rita can have is that her mother was a brilliant scientist and was abducted, like a million other people in Colombia. It happens more often than not. Rita's crushed.

As they board the plane, Rita cries now and then. The ride home is solemn and melancholy. However, as the jet approaches San Francisco, Rita gets some news from the pilot.

"Hey, Mom." Rita shakes her mom awake. "Mom, the pilot says a plane crashed into the Pentagon."

"A plane crashed into the Pentagon?" Jordan asks.

"Yes. The pilot wants to know if you want to pray."

Jordan is confused. "He wants to know if I want to do what?"

## **Price Laurel**

### **San Francisco, California 2002**

**Y**ou have never been so frightened as you are when sleeping in your own car, in a dark city street. However, this is how Price Laurel finds himself in the summer of 2002. Twenty pounds lighter and with a bit more muscle, Price is in the habit of waking up early to work out at a gym in Hayward. It's his new routine and concludes with a fresh shower early in the morning. Price wanted to get a new apartment when he got the new job, but after hearing about his brother's death, he decided his life shouldn't be any more comfortable than it is for his parents back home. Pablo or Adam (people called him both) died after joining the army after 9/11. His parents didn't have him to lean on, and Price refuses to make his life any more convenient than theirs.

Price did look for apartments when he got his new job, and some were affordable. However, none of the residences he saw ever fit him. He told his friends and family that he found an apartment in Hayward, but this was a lie.

The death of his brother was very profound. Price felt a piece of his life was missing. Pablo was the symbol of his childhood. Pablo was someone Price had a significant bond with. Since his move to San Francisco, Price didn't get to talk with Pablo much, but he thought about him all the time. Price thought about the words that Pablo said at the airport: "If you fall, we will pick you up, and if you're afraid, we will listen to your cries, but don't give up. Understand?"

Price feels a void in his mind. Who will he turn to, now? Parents? Roommates? Friends? He's failed to become an actor, and now he has to make it right. The only way to redeem himself, he thinks, is to make good on his endeavors. He's lost his brother, who was a part of him. When he heard about it, he was living in this city, San Francisco. He has to do something with his life before he can return home.

"What else can I do?" Price says to himself.

*Price's Journal,*

*Summer, 2002*

*What do I do now? How do I keep going? Where do I go? What should I do? What is this world that I live in? Where am I going? Why am I in this situation? What have I created for myself? I feel like going here and there, but I don't know if it's the right thing to do. There's something I should be doing. If I was smarter, then it'd be clear. If I had better friends. If I was a better person.*

*It's been a few weeks since you died, and I want to tell you so much. You gave me strength when I needed it. You gave me support when I moved to California. It wasn't easy, but I always knew you'd be at home with Mom and Dad whenever I got fed up with my dreams. Well, I fell short and I can't even talk to you about it. Where do I go when I need guidance? When it's time to complain? When I need to visit the strip club? Why did you have to leave me alone? I wish you were here, now. I wish we could sit and talk like when we were younger. Where do I go? What do I do now?*

*—Price Laurel twenty-two years old*

\* \* \*

Price sits in his van, parked in front of San Francisco's City Hall. Actually, he's right where Polk Street turns into Dr. Carlton B Place, across from Civic Center Plaza. He faces down the street toward the Opera Hall: The Louise Davies Symphony Hall, that's next to the War Memorial Opera House. There is someone Price needs to talk to.

He checks his shirt and pants. They were on sale at Ross. Price didn't want to spend much, but he still needs to look presentable. He dressed for less. He takes in a deep breath and exhales slowly. This person he's about to speak to is significant. Hopefully, he can get an interview out of the whole thing.

With dictaphone in hand, Price opens the van door and takes staccato steps down the sidewalk. As he walks, Price looks around. It's nighttime, and the opera is about to let out. Someone is sleeping on the sidewalk across the street. A kid waits for the bus at the end of the block. Price keeps walking. He can see the plaza in the distance. A large group of people in formal evening attire. Price gets to the end of the block and crosses the street. He waits at the corner.

The people are loud but boisterous. They are happy, smiling at each other and shaking hands.

"It must've been a good opera," Price mutters to himself.

He waits. The crowd is older, smiling faces inviting warm feelings of a social event.

Price keeps waiting. Some hail cabs, some hug strangers, and Price still remains.

Price vibrates the words through his teeth. "Where is she?"

Some of the concert-goers have their teenage kids with them. It's nice to see. The couples hold hands, the intellectuals strike vibrant debates with one another, right there on the street. Price still waits.

Through the crowd, Price sees a portly woman with a boy's haircut. Her tuxedo is pristine, glimmering in the moonlight. A deep breath, and Price makes his approach.

"Dr. Roberts! Dr. Roberts!" Price shouts.

Dr. Jordan Roberts connects eyes with Price, smiles, and walks over to him. A young woman trails behind her with half-Caucasian, half-Asian features.

"Yes?" Jordan addresses Price.

"Hello, Dr. Roberts, how are you?" Price is nervous.

"I'm well." They shake hands. "Your name, please?"

"I'm Price Laurel." Price tries to control his breathing. "I'm a freelance journalist."

"I see," Jordan says.

"Okay," Price says. He rubs his forehead and looks at the ground as if to say: Now what?

Jordan escorts the young lady with her around the opera-goers. "Did you have a question of some kind?"

Price looks up. "Yes, uh, well, yes, I do." He fumbles with his dictaphone.

Jordan looks at Price with confusion. "Are you going to ask it?"

Price composes himself and gets control of his body. "Would you have time for an interview to discuss your work? Your life?" Opera-goers pass by, and Price can feel their eyes on him.

"Sure, when? Where?" Jordan asks. The young lady with Jordan looks uncomfortable. The dress itches her around the waist. Price notices. She scratches, but Jordan stops her. "Stop that, honey."

"I'm free tomorrow," Price says.

Jordan gets closer to Price. "Come to my house, 2pm. Do you have a pen? The address."

A big smile smears across Price's face. "Just say it into the recorder."

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The next day, in Marin, California, Price goes to Jordan's home. It's just north of San Francisco, across the Golden Gate Bridge. The initial drive to Jordan's house is blissful. Riding through the Marina, passing through the Presidio, over the Golden Gate Bridge, up to Jordan's front door, it's like a dream. It's like a summer trip with the family back in St. Louis. Price can't remember a more delightful time leading up to a meeting. It's so



relaxing, the drive to Marin.

As he knocks on the front door, he notices several appealing aspects to Jordan's house.

The front lawn is covered in lush green blades of grass. The facade is covered in glass windows, through which you can see the pool in the back. The actual door that Price knocks on is, in fact, real wood. A thick slab that must've been handcrafted by an expert. You can actually see the grooves of the wood, smooth and warped, but in the right places.

*KNOCK, KNOCK.*

Price waits.

The door opens, and it's Jordan.

"Dr. Roberts!" Price says with delight.

"Hello, welcome to my home." Jordan ushers Price in.

Price walks in slowly, absorbing the whole house. The spirit of it. "Such a beautiful house!"

Jordan smiles and nods. "Take your coat?"

"Sure." Price removes his coat.

Jordan takes the coat and hangs it in the closet by the front door.

"How long did it take to build?" Price asks.

"It was built. All of it. I just came along and bought it."

Price behaves as if he is in an amusement park.

Jordan ushers him to the main room, and the couch. "Have a seat."

"Yes, of course," Price says, the smile still not fading from his face.

Jordan gestures at a place for Price to sit. Price sits, and Jordan finds a spot across from him on the opposite couch.

"So, Mr. Freelance Journalist." Jordan smiles, getting comfortable.

"Yes, ma'am," Price replies.

"What questions have you got for me?"

"Well," Price begins, pulling out his dictaphone and a pen and notepad. "I want to just start off with how I've been following you in the paper. I'm so excited about the breakthroughs you've made! The cloning, the research... I have a few questions, but I want to start off with how you got here. Um, what is the beginning of the Jordan Roberts story?"

"Well." Jordan licks her lips and rolls up her sleeves. "That is a great question, because I didn't start here, as you can see."

Price giggles a little.

Jordan goes on. "No, of course, I started in school. I went to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Double major, one in biology and the other in molecular biology. One led me on a path of botany, and the other to genetics. By the time I was studying for my doctorate, I was in Colombia, South America. That led me to central Africa and then finally to Afghanistan."



"How did you finish those two majors? Were they concurrent?" Price asks.

"Oh no, I finished my biology degree, and that put me in Bogotá, Colombia, but I kept doing my other major online, and that led to a PhD in human molecular genetics."

"Wow, two majors seems like a lot. I can't complete one."

Jordan giggles.

Price continues. "What are you most proud of?"

"Overall?" Jordan asks.

Price nods.

"Well, I guess the work I'm embarking on now. I've done some innovative things with genetics, and with this new contract, things will really begin to heat up."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, I'm very proud of it."

"Well, I hope to witness some of that."

"Of course."

"Okay, another question."

Jordan giggles. "Okay!"

"What used to be your biggest weaknesses?"

"Used to be?" Jordan asks.

Price nods.

"Well..." Jordan thinks for a moment. "People. People have been my biggest weakness. You know, you can't tell people what to do and then watch them do it. Most of the time, you ask someone to do something and they put their own spin on it, or they want to find out everything around the question you ask. People. People are so unpredictable. It can be quite frustrating. But in answer to your question, people. Its people."

"Wow." Price nods. "People... Okay, I get it. People. I understand."

"Okay," Jordan says with a smile.

At the top of the stairs, the young woman from last night. appears Price notices her and stops his questions. Jordan sees Price noticing and looks behind her.

"Honey?" Jordan gets up and goes to the stairs. "I thought you were on your computer?"

"I heard a man's voice talking to you."

"Close friend of yours?" Price asks.

Jordan grins at Price. "Daughter."

Jordan tries to persuade the young lady to come down. "Honey, do you want to come down and talk to the man with me?" She looks back at Price. "I'm sure he'd love to meet you."

Price is sarcastic. "I really would love to meet you!"

Jordan smiles at the joke. "Come on, honey," Jordan takes the young lady's hand and leads her down the steps to the couches. "Honey, this is Price. He's a journalist."

Price smiles sheepishly. "Freelance journalist, actually."

Jordan's attitude changes. "Well, as a freelance journalist, you should know what my daughter does for a living."

The young lady erupts. "Mom!"

Jordan snaps back, "What? He's journalizing my life; he should know what my daughter does for a living."

Stunned, Price watches the spectacle.

The young lady scoffs and heads back upstairs.

"Margarita! Don't walk away from me!" Jordan grabs her daughter and drags her back down the stairs, toward Price.

"Mom! You don't have to drag me down the stairs." Margarita yanks her arm away from Jordan.

Jordan ushers Margarita down the stairs and Margarita flinches as if she's about to be hit. Jordan grinds her teeth. "Then get down the stairs."

Margarita reluctantly stands in front of Price and speaks.

"Hello, my mother wants you to know that I work at a strip club. I dance for money most nights... and I love it!"

Jordan gives an intense stare at Margarita.

"She also wants me to tell you that I may not be her daughter. I'm an abomination of science."

Jordan crosses her arms and keeps up her stare.

There's an awkward pause.

Price extends his arm for a handshake. "An abomination, huh? How's that working for you?"

Jordan speaks up, changing her demeanor to sarcasm. "What she means to say is that her birth is a scientific achievement."

Price is surprised. This is the whole reason he wanted to get this interview. "Oh, really? Tell me more."

"Actually, her life is the basis of my work. She's a testament to my genetic research. She's amazing."

This statement triggers Margarita. "Actually, it's Evan who was the miracle. I'm the edited version!"

"Rita, not true."

"He was my friend, Mom! And now he's gone!" Rita storms off, back up the stairs.

Jordan sighs, annoyed. "She's so dramatic."

"It's all good," Price says. "Maybe we can do this again some other time."

Jordan nods reluctantly. "Yes, that would be best. Maybe next week? Same time?"

Price nods and shakes Jordan's hand. "That would be great. I'd really appreciate that."

"That's good." Jordan ushers Price to the front door.

"Oh, one thing, though," Price adds.

"What's that?"

"I was wondering if you knew of any other good people to interview here in the Bay Area. Maybe some colleagues on the verge of a breakthrough?"

Jordan smiles. "No colleagues that have made the accomplishments that I have, but the VA Hospital has a bunch of great people to interview."

"The VA Hospital?" Price is confused.

"Yeah, the Hospital for Veteran Affairs. The soldiers there have amazing stories to tell. If I were you, I'd be there, writing it all down." Jordan pulls out Price's jacket and helps him put it on.

"Ah, the VA Hospital. That's a good idea, thank you."

"No problem. Give me a call for next week, and we'll continue the interview."

"Yes, ma'am!" Price smiles and heads out the door.

"All right, see you then." Jordan smiles and then closes the door.

Price feels his pockets for his car keys.

"Rita! Get down here!"

Price can hear Jordan through the front door. He pauses, listens, and understands faint conversation.

"Rita!"

"What, Mom?"

"What's your problem? That's a journalist who's asking about my life. Why are you acting up?"

"You don't deserve this attention. People should know the truth!"

"What truth?"

"You're a murderer, Mom!"

"Rita, please. You don't understand what you're talking about. It's my work!"

"You killed him! You can't possibly believe you didn't have anything to do with his death. They fought to the death, and it was because of you!"

There's an awkward pause.

"Come on, we're going upstairs."

"Why, so you can beat me? I'm grown, Mom! I was never a child!"

"Go to your room."

Price heads to his car. Halfway to the street, he looks back at the door. He sees a silhouette through the glass. Is Jordan watching him? Could she see him through the glass, eavesdropping? Price gets to his van and hops in. He drives away quickly.

He drives to a bar in the city called Chelsea's Place. He walks in, sits down, and orders a drink. One thing runs through his mind: clones. If Jordan is creating clones, then that is illegal. Especially if she's making them for mass production. There's got to be a law against that, somewhere. Also, it's unethical. If Jordan successfully cloned a human being and then terminated said human being, then that constitutes murder. However, is the clone considered a human being? Then it may not be murder. But even

animals have rights. You can't just kill an animal in America for no reason, right?

If Jordan's daughter Rita works as an exotic dancer, then he can probably find her and ask her more questions. If she's a clone, he can ask her questions about her life. And more importantly, find out if Jordan is breaking the law. That would be news. That would be a breakthrough for Price. Also, who is Evan?

Price will spend the rest of the night hopping from club to club to find where Rita works.

After a few hours, he finds himself inside a bar off Polk Street called Edinburgh Castle. This bar is close to The O'Farrell Theater. Price remembered when he went there with Carol. Price has been asking all around the Tenderloin area, off of Market Street, Turk Street, etc., to find where Rita works. And the most recent lead seemed promising. It says that there is a pretty girl with a rich mother who doesn't approve of her lifestyle working at The O'Farrell Theater tonight. He also heard that the girl might be Asian. Although this describes most exotic dancers in San Francisco, Price knows he has to chase down this lead. He just wants to get Rita's view on her mother's work. Maybe he can get a dance from her or catch her after her shift. He needs the details any way he can get them. Long shots.

Upon entering the theater, Price pays the hefty cover charge. This takes most of his spending money for the week, but Price goes through with it. Hopefully, he won't need to eat lunch every day for the rest of the week.

He walks deep into the back. For some reason, it seems different this time. After walking through the vast, curvaceous hallway, he makes his way to the live stage. Movie seats line the edge of the stage, with a desk for selling beverages in the back. The ceiling is high and vaulted. Price recounts an exciting fact: All of the high-class places he's been to have been strip clubs. A little depressing.

Upon sitting down in one of the red velvet movie seats, he is propositioned by a dancer.

"You want a dance?" she asks.

Price probes for his objective. "I'm looking for Rita."

"Oh, you'll see her soon. Keep watching the stage." The dancer smiles and walks away.

Price sits down and the music changes.

Then the DJ speaks up. "Coming to the stage, the porcelain queen, the imported beast from the East! The street fighter, Chun-Li!"

The lights go black and Price looks around. Some creepy older guys sit by themselves, big smiles all around. On the opposite side of the stage, there's a group of guys with Versace shirts on. The lights come up, and Rita stands in front of him. It's her! Price's eyes fix on the stage, as do all other eyes in the room. Price knows that Rita must genetically altered, because her skin is perfect, along with the rest of her body. She wears a black and red body suit that snaps at the neck. There's a campy dragon on the

front.

Price can't take his eyes off it for the whole dance. Until, of course, it comes off.

After her dance, Price finds Rita.

"I want to ask you a few questions," he says.

"You have to pay for my time," Rita replies.

Price nods in agreement. Before the next dancer comes out, Rita takes Price to a private dance area. He sits down and Rita closes the curtain. Her hips sway back and forth, and Price watches like a cobra poised on its prey.

He takes a deep breath. "Are you a human clone?"

Rita nods as she slowly unfastens her top.

"Who is your mother making clones for?"

"The police force," Rita replies.

Price watches Rita's outfit fall to the floor. Rita cups his chin and stares at him.

"Is that all you wanted?" Rita asks.

Price swallows his fear. "Who is Evan?"

Rita sighs with annoyance, but keeps moving her body. "Evan was my friend, until he died. My mother engineered him, too."

"How many has she engineered?"

"More than I can count. My mom started in South America and then moved over to Africa and then the Middle East before coming to California."

Price is mesmerized by her. "When can we talk more?"

Rita smiles. "That'll cost you more."

"I don't mind."

"I'll get your number."

Price rolls his eyes. "How do I research Evan?"

"His full name is Evan Chan. You can probably find him on the Internet. His death was in the paper."

"Okay." Price tries to get up to leave, but Rita pushes him back down.

"I haven't finished my dance," she says. "Plus, I haven't taken down your number."

Price stays for the full dance. It is exquisite and unbearable at the same time. After he leaves the theater, he wonders how he lived his life before. It was a fantastic experience.

However, after the dance and as he leaves, he has no idea that someone is following him.

## **Dr. Jordan Roberts**

### **Washington, D.C. 2002**

**L**adies and gentlemen, your flight to Washington, D.C. is going to be five hours and ten minutes of smooth sailing. No threats from Mother Nature, and so far, College Park Airport will have little traffic upon our arrival. Sit back, relax, and thank you for flying on Jordan's Private Jet today."

Jordan giggles as she turns her chair toward the pilot's door.

The pilot pops his head out. "How was that, Dr.?"

Jordan gives him the thumbs-up. "That was perfect."

The pilot disappears behind his door.

Jordan turns around in her chair and addresses Rita and Evan. "Hey guys, I want to speak with both of you for a minute."

Rita and Evan move closer to Jordan.

Jordan begins with "I want to talk about where we are going and *where* we are going."

Rita and Evan exchange a confused look.

"First, where we are going as a company."

Rita scoffs and sits back in her chair.

Jordan continues. "I know you're not excited about the permanent role I've asked you to take on at the lab facility. I understand your trepidation. However, if this is going to work, we need our new... progeny to receive the best upbringing possible."

Rita cuts in. "I'm not trepidatious because of my new role. I just don't want to be an idealized symbol for a bunch of misguided jarheads or police recruits or whatever."

"Rita, I understand." Jordan holds her hand up. "However, I want to make sure we are giving the new crop the benefits that the prior crop had, plus the extras we've been discussing."

Rita silently agrees.

Jordan continues. "As Rita is overseeing the cognitive development of our new crop, I want to address prior mishaps." She stares at Evan.

Evan forces a positive face. "What would you like to discuss?"

"First, the situation with Sean could've been handled better."

Evan cuts his eyes away in aversion, but says nothing.

Jordan continues. "I know there were complications and you two disagreed, but you cannot solve all of your problems by stonewalling. You have to explore other options when you're faced with adversity."

Evan reluctantly nods his head. "I'll do my best."

"Now," Jordan says. "Let's discuss the other 'where we're going.' Washington, D.C."

Rita and Evan turn attentive.

"This is the Nation's capital, and we will encounter decadence and shiny people. Do not become enamored with their lifestyles. We are here to ensure the legalization of our operation and solicit possible investors, and there will be a few who want to know about our Cupertino operation. Hold our details close to your chest. We don't need to tip more of our hand than we have to."

Evan raises his hand.

"Go ahead, Evan," Jordan says.

"Sean is still out there looking for me. How are we going to deal with him?"

Jordan tilts her head to the side. "Sean is still an ally but we've had to take legal measures against him. He cannot hurt our operation. However, you cannot initiate conflict of any kind. You can only retaliate if he takes action against you."

Evan sighs. "That'll be difficult."

"I know and I understand." Jordan leans in close to the two of them. "We are in a precarious position. We have a lot of opportunity for our business, so we have to play it safe. Disrupting the genetic engineering industry will always be our main goal, but we can't compromise our current position. The new crop, gaining a better educational program for them. Managing our current crop. These are the most important things we have going on."

Rita raises her hand. "How about the journalist? The new guy?"

Jordan nods. "I really want that to be a positive relationship. If we can keep a positive spin on all of our dealings, it goes very far in helping us expand our operation. We want to treat him as the best guest possible. Be kind, be affable, assure him that he and the world have nothing to fear from us. Be as open as you can but do not share company secrets. This is the way we should treat all of the media we encounter. We have to portray a positive image in order to maintain our customers: Bogotá, San Francisco, and anyone else."

"What about Afghanistan?" Evan asks.

"Afghanistan is done. Now that 9/11 has passed we cannot affiliate ourselves with Hamini's operation, and I've communicated that with him."

"How did he take it?" Rita asks.

Jordan shrugs. "He had to accept it, but he was upset."



"You want to try to flip the kid?" Evan asks.

Jordan winces in thought. "It has to be his decision. If his journalism takes off then there's no chance, but if we treat him well and show him our operation, then there is a chance. We live unique lives, so if he wants to join us then that's up to him."

"What about the princess?" Rita asks. "Is the kingdom still an issue?"

Jordan thinks for a moment. "I don't think so, but we have to play that by ear. We still have friends in high places, but I don't know what Saleh is planning."

Evan and Rita nod.

Jordan smiles. "All right, team. Break!"

After the plane ride and a quick check in at the Four Seasons, Jordan and her group race to her meeting with a big wig.

Next to the West Wing rests a set of offices in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Jordan and company find themselves awaiting their meeting with the big wig.

"Mom," Rita asks. "Who is this guy?"

Jordan turns to her daughter. "David's a good friend. I've known him for a long time. He came up with some of my nicknames in college."

"Jordan!" David walks in, followed by men in suits.

Jordan gestures to David for Rita. "This is David. He's now in connection to... what is it? Janitor at the White House?"

David laughs. "That's right, I clean up crap at the White House, Jordan. Good to see you. Who are your cohorts?"

Jordan introduces Rita first. "This is my daughter, Rita."

"Hello, Rita." David shakes Rita's hand.

Jordan introduces Evan. "And this young man is Evan Chan."

"Hey, Evan, good to meet you." David shakes Evan's hand. "Please have a seat."

Everyone takes a seat and gets comfortable.

"So Jordan," David starts. "You've been pretty busy."

"Yes, I have." Jordan nods. "But my business is taking off and I'm very proud of that."

"Well, you should be," David replies. "The country needs more innovative entrepreneurs like yourself."

"Coming from you, David, that's high praise."

There's a quiet, awkward silence.

"Do you want to tell me about your time in Saudi?" David asks.

"I was defending myself in Saudi. Interpol didn't have reason to come after me. Did you see that?"

"That's true, Jordan, but Saudi hasn't forgotten. And your other connections are going to prove problematic."

"I'm aware of Afghanistan. That's their problem, now."

"Well, Colombia might have some difficulties, as well."



"David, I'm a big girl. I know the consequences of my actions."

"I just want you to be aware of the situation you're getting into."

"I know the situation, David."

"Good; I'd be sad if you had to go away."

"Me too."

"Who else are you talking with while you're here?"

"Uh, there are some potential investors. I'm going to let my daughter run the presentation."

"Ah, exciting. Keeping the business in the family?"

"That's right. She's going to step into a new role soon and we want her to be prepared."

"That's good to hear."

"David, I wanted to speak with you because I'm in tight with Big Pharma and have some concerns about stem cell regulations. Will there be any harsh restrictions coming up?"

David rubs his beard. "Well, the president is looking into it, but I can assure you this won't affect your operation. You'll still have access to some of your most precious resources."

"Ah, great. That's great, David."

"Was that worrying you?"

"Absolutely. I'm glad to hear you guys are keeping it open."

"Well, we do have trepidations surrounding the technology, but the regulations won't hinder your work."

"Great, David. That's all I needed to know. Will you be attending our presentation tomorrow?"

"I will if I can, but our presence will certainly be there. We're all excited to hear about the progress you've made."

Jordan gestures to Rita and Evan. "Well, you're looking at two successful creations behind me."

David takes notice. "Is that right? That's wonderful. I look forward to the brief."

Jordan stands up. "It'll be great. You guys are going to love it."

David stands. "Sounds good, Jordan. I look forward to your success."

"Thank you," Jordan says.

David and Jordan shake hands.

\* \* \*

The next day, Jordan and company use the conference room at the Four Seasons to prepare their presentation. It's a special event. Over fifty political insiders attend, and Rita stands in front of them all.

Rita takes a deep breath. "Hello, everyone. I'm here on behalf of my mother's company. My name is Margarita Roberts."

Everyone applauds. Rita looks to her mother and Jordan nods.

Rita begins. "Mental capacity is something very important to me. The new crop we are producing will be better and stronger, mentally. Cognition is becoming the forefront of our work and it's very exciting. I can't wait to share it with you."

She checks her PowerPoint presentation and hit a button. The screen progresses through graphs and videos as she speaks. "So, with the first few groups, we experimented with basic cognitive function. We played with genetic code and began to document the genes that give gifts. Someone's capacity to learn something quickly, we learned, is genetic. The piano, for example; we discovered a child, at the young age of three, that could play songs by ear. He or she has the genetics to enable that, and we wanted to duplicate those talents within our new crop. It's very exciting, and that's where stem cell research and CRISPR come into play. Once we were able to identify these special genes, we began to analyze their makeup and build a foundation for replication..."

When she completes her presentation, Rita interacts with a swarm of interested lobbyists and investors. Jordan and Evan have the same attention, and overall, the presentation is a success. Later that night, Rita savors the moment, but is still overcome with a sense of sadness.

"Mom?" Rita approaches Jordan in the confines of their hotel room.

"Yes?"

"Why are you grooming me for this? You're not that old and we still have plenty successes to come."

Jordan smiles and takes her daughter's shoulder. "In the future, I may not be around. You have to be prepared for that."

"Mom," Rita says. "I don't like it when you talk like that."

Jordan is caught off-guard. "Did you just verbalize your feelings?"

Rita's face barely cracks a smile.

Jordan smiles. "You're growing up and you're becoming something new." Jordan hugs her daughter. "I'm so proud of you."

Rita hugs her mother, who shakes with optimism.

Evan watches from across the room and nods his approval.

