

# FIRST CONTACT ACT III

MALCOLM  
DRESDEN



**THIS IS DEDICATED TO  
THE WORKING CLASS**

# **FIRST CONTACT ACT II**

**MALCOLM DRESDEN**

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# PROLOGUE

The *Illuminati* have arrived but are hidden in the shadows as the core families and secrets are revealed. *Goldmans*, a major component to the *High Rise* is now in hands of the Paravari empire, with *John Paravari* now the enemy of everyone he loves. Those that love him must do whatever it takes to secure *Goldmans* and protect the *High Rise*.



**WORK TO  
DO**

# CHAPTER 1

The outpouring of general media outlets surrounded the Picasso home of *Burundi Milano* as Lauren left for Goldmans. Her life

# 2175

was yet again in unavoidable chaos as *Goldmans* was now unfairly positioned under the leadership of John Paravari. She was a newly pregnant mother. How could she

dream of bringing her child into the world she lived in? A world where corporate injustice thrived amidst the opulence of the elite. A world where her protegee, Mark, must struggle to come into who he is.

These worries nearly kept her from putting her keys in her ignition that morning but the comfort of her black leather stilettos and one of her favorite songs *Work to Do*, a cover by *Giavangaria*, pressed her into her agenda, the song was originated by the *Isley Brothers*, and it was a song she shared love for with John Paravari. She couldn't believe what had happen but the hope of the music filled her with a succulent roar of determination. She could feel her Louboutin *red bottoms* sing as they reached the lobby of the exordium as everyone smiled at her.

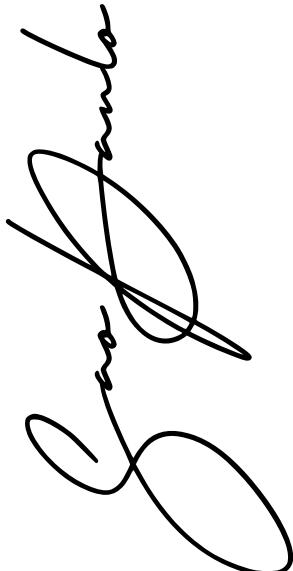
“Good morning, Lauren.”

This would be a good day.

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*John Vincent Leonardo Paravari, what the hell are you doing?" Alex was livid as she and John talked in his hotel room. Malcolm was in shock as he listened.*

*"I know this makes no sense to you right now but I had to do it," John explained.*

A large, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "John Vincent Leonardo Paravari" in a cursive, flowing style. The "J" in "John" is particularly prominent and stylized.

*"John Paravari is worth over seven trillion dollars in revenue. We've never gone bankrupt and now you want Goldmans? Abuelo, this makes no sense."*

*"Malcolm, please leave the room while I talk to your grandmother," John was serious as he looked at him.*

*Malcolm then walked out of John's room and found Will and Thomas.*

*"Did you get anything?" Will asked.*

*"Nothing."*

*"Damn," Thomas replied.*

*"Let's get the hell out of here," Will suggested and they left the hotel.*

*"How could this possibly benefit us, John?" Alex asked.*

*"Alex, listen to me. They asked me to do this," John insisted.*

*"No. No! We were done with them! Done! Oh my God! They did this to Adina didn't they? You said no and they nearly killed our granddaughter! They blew up over fifty people to make an example out of you," Alex was terrified as she spoke.*

*"They wanted Goldmans to go public," John explained, "I didn't have a choice."*

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“But they weren’t just messing with you, they got April Carr. These people...they never let you go until they have everything,” Alex looked up at the ceiling as he spoke, “So how long will the man I married succumb to the Illuminati? How do we get rid of these people?”

“When they get the company back and they will get it back, Alex, I’m going to come forward,” John was serious as he stood in front of Alex.

“What good is that going to do?”

“It’s something, Alex.”

All she could do was pray he was telling her the truth as she looked at him.

“Where did you get all this information?” Gabe asked Kareem. They were sitting in the Hilton bar.

“My informant managed to gather enough intel. I’m telling you, John has been planning this for months,” Kareem replied, “The only thing I’m not sure of is my sister’s involvement and Derek’s for that matter.”

“Do you think he coerced them?”

“Probably but this thing goes deeper than you or I could even realize? They’re back, Gabe and they tried to get to April,” Kareem was serious as he drank a small glass of scotch.

“No. I thought Uncle Amis was able to sway them. What could they possibly have wanted?” Gabe replied, “Oh shit. Of course.”

“Yes, exactly. They were attempting to get April to purchase a few Goldman subsidiaries. What they didn’t know was that I purposely leaked the deal to the press so the general public would call her out on it,” Kareem added, “My wife doesn’t know it but I’m always watching her. She got scared. That secret was looming over our family for years. I knew they’d use it against her. I knew then I had to force her to come forward. They kept sending her pictures. There was no one to trace it all back to. They’d send her a request in

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the form of a letter. They'd give her a time limit and send her more incriminating evidence. How they got all this shit, I'm not sure. It's like they have eyes everywhere."

"Do you think they'd come after John?"

"Absolutely but they're more forceful with him and with how long he's done business with them the more dangerous they've been, I'm sure. Did you know about Adina's college bombing? Do you really think that was an on-campus student? They were sending him a message," Kareem explained, "The best thing for John to do is to come forward with the truth. That's his first swing."

"Has April received anymore threats?"

"Nope and guess what. She won't. They know they can't touch her," Kareem was sure of himself as he mentioned it.

"How can we fix this, man?" Gabe wondered.

"Right now, all we can do is gather as much intel as possible on the current shareholders and figure out a way to vote John out."

Laura was numb as she returned to her Goldman mansion, where Diego and her husband *Eduardo* were waiting for her. The home was dim and quiet as she returned. Diego and Eduardo were enjoying drinks sitting by the fireplace.

"Mom? What happened?" Diego was nervous as he saw the look on his mother's face.

"Are you alright, sweetheart?" Edward held his wife by the shoulders and kissed her on her forehead.

"How did I let this happen? How did this happen, Eduardo??" Laura wept.

"What are you talking about, sweetheart?" Eduardo asked he held her tight.

"I lost the company," she threw her head into his chest as he kissed her on top of her head.

"No!!! You're lying that didn't happen!" Diego became furious as she spoke.

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“John Paravari is CEO. The company is going public tomorrow,” Laura explained as she passed him her tablet.

“I’ll fix it!!!”

“Diego, no!” Laura yelled as she saw him run out the door.

“That kid,” Eduardo smirked as he looked at Laura.

“Yeah, he’s just like papa,” Laura laughed as she wiped her face.

“Well, it looks like we’ll have to pull out our Ace card,” Eduardo said.

“No, not yet. I want to see everyone involved in this. Every traitor and backstabber. He wasn’t alone.”

“Pita, you can’t shield him from everything,” Dietrich was sitting by the fireplace as he talked to Laura. It was the day before she became CEO of the company.

“I just don’t want him to grow up so fast,” Laura added.

“He won’t but sweetheart, he is a Goldman. He’s going to run this company someday and he has to be ready when the time comes,” Dietrich responded as he held his daughter’s hand.

“What about the other grandchildren?” Laura suggested as she looked at her dad.

“They have their own dreams and goals to pursue in life. This is in his blood. I feel it when he’s around me,” Dietrich smiled as tears ran down Laura’s cheeks.

“How do I do this, Papi?” Laura asked.

“Don’t give him any passes. He is to start at the minimal level as a grocer,” Dietrich smiled.

“He’s going to fight me all the way,” Laura laughed.

“No he won’t. He’ll know it came from me,” Dietrich held her on the shoulder and she gave him a hug.

“Diego is going to get it done!” Laura told herself as she watched Diego step into his car from the driveway.

That evening, Diego drove his *Porsche 918 Spyder* to *São Cristovão* bar. He loved going there to clear his head, enjoy good

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food and watch football.

“Diego, what will you have?”

“A whisky,” he replied as he sat down. He pulled out his laptop and began studying John Paravari.

“Clever isn’t he, Diego? The man’s as clean as a whistle,” Will was speaking over Diego’s shoulder as he looked at Diego’s laptop.

“It’s Miguel,” Diego responded as Will pressed him.

“No, you’re Diego. *Diego Bourdain*. I’ve known for a while now, son. I won’t tell Lauren if that’s what you’re thinking. What’s funny to me is that you worked with my brother Thomas at *Corteno*. Why were you working as an Assistant Director, I have no idea but I guess you have your reasons,” Will joked.

“Does Lauren know you’re here?” Diego asked as Will pulled out a seat.

“She does,” Will responded he’d been following Diego since the airport.

“Why would a *Paravari* be interested in the grocery business?” Diego wondered.

“Diego, money is the draw for all things. Goldmans is extremely profitable. Who wouldn’t be interested?” Will explained, “You can never have enough money, son, remember that.”

“He’s already holding a *public stockholders meeting* in a few weeks?” Diego wondered.

“I think the question to ask would be; What doesn’t he plan on doing? He’s going to reduce wages earned, save money on production costs, and reduce the amount of labor put into stores. This will quickly put more money in the stockholders’ pockets. Yeah, he’s John Paravari and doesn’t need the money but if it were me, I would honestly tell you he’s being forced,” Will explained.

“So he’s going to appease their needs as much as he can so he can get whatever he wants from them? What do they have on him?” Diego replied.

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“As far as I know the man is extremely clean. He has a pretty good family. They’re all good people but I wouldn’t be surprised if he made a few back-door deals to get JM to where it is. It’s really sad for Goldmans in general,” Diego was engaged as he listened to Will.

“The stores.”

“Morale will plummet and the company will suffer from high turnover but John won’t give a fuck. It’s not his company,” Will replied.

“I have several of my people on standby for when the company goes public,” Diego replied as he rolled through the Paravari public stock history.

“Well you better get moving. It’s five days from now. I’ve already got my people buying,” Will explained.

“How many shares do you plan on purchasing within a few hours?” Diego asked as Will sat in front of him. They enjoyed a stack of ribs and lime seasoned rice.

“How do you know if I’m here just to buy shares?” Will asked as Diego watched him.

“I’m not stupid Will, you clearly knew this was going to happen,” Diego replied.

“Do you know who Reginald Dresden is, Diego?” Will asked.

“That’s right, I read somewhere that you were Reginald Dresden’s nephew. He’s a great man,” Diego replied.

“My uncle was close friends with Mr. Paravari in their earlier years. They both invested a great deal of money in your grandfather’s company as shareholders,” Will explained, “I was summoned here as a representative for my uncle and I also have shares that I personally have acquired for both myself and my brother.”

“I’m actually a huge fan of your brother, he was definitely a heavy hitter for my dad. He speaks very highly of Thomas. He was

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one of my dad's big three and we once worked together. He was my mentor."

"If this was our farewell year, this would be one hell of a loss," Eduardo was sitting with Thomas in the living room as they shared an old bottle of whiskey.

"You're right, Coach, this wasn't what I expected today. I was surprised not to see you there," Thomas replied.

"You know I'm not of fan of that soiree shit. I'm no board meeting man. Just put me on the field."

"Me, either. To be honest after this year, I'm not sure if I'll direct again."

"What? That's crazy, Thomas, you're one of the best, man. Is it the money?"

"No, I just feel like I'm ready for a new chapter. So many stores. So many different issues. I just feel numb to it. Don't get me wrong I love the work but I want to build something new!" Thomas explained.

"Do you know where to start?" Eduardo asked.

"I'm not sure," Thomas replied.

"Well, an executive position will be waiting for you if you do."

"I appreciate that, Coach but I'll be fine."

"Man, just sitting here with you brings back all those memories, you boys nearly ran off the rails. The shit you guys got me into."

"I think you're definitely putting it lightly. You and I both know that's bullshit," Thomas laughed.

"How is Adrian?"

"She's fine. Monetarily I'm assuming. She's safe. Her latest bestseller hasn't left the top spot. We're friends these days."

"That's progress!"

"Oh, Thomas is here. Thomas, how've you been?" Laura was delighted to see him as she joined the two.

"I'm sorry about what happened earlier."

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“Oh, you know that’s not an issue. I can’t remember the last time I saw you. You and Malcolm are now married, right?” Laura asked as she kissed him on the cheek.

“They are.”

“I have a question for you, Thomas. How long have you known Diego was in Norfolk?” Laura wondered.

“Malcolm and I both knew for a while, but we suspected it was for a good reason, so we didn’t expose him,” Thomas explained, “but I knew his talent would expose him eventually.”

“I’m sure it did. I appreciate you for not saying anything. Are you hungry? Let me have Emily get you something,” Laura suggested.

“I’m ok, I have to get going in a few. I just came to check in with this old guy here. Have you talked to *Ernest* and *Aabir*?” Thomas asked.

“I saw Ernest a few days ago during my store trip in Miami. Aabir called me probably three weeks ago. Ernest is still hurting from Amina even after all these years. It’s fresh for him. *Aabir* has been watching over him since. *Jeho* and *Kai* are doing ok but...”

“*Hikeem* isn’t taking it as well. I’ve known that kid since he was five. It’s hurting me, he’s suffering but *Hikeem* has always suppressed a lot of his pain. All I can do is just be a supportive uncle when he needs me. I think Malcolm and I probably pray for that boy three times a week,” Thomas was saddened as he mentioned it.

“If anything *Laurence* is taking on a lot for Ernest since he can’t be there for them like he wants.”

“I’m sure April’s admission made things a lot harder but I’m sure he understands it had to come out,” Laura replied.

“He told me he left the country for a few days after everyone expected a response from him but April already told him days before the admission,” Thomas replied.

“Thomas, I have another question for you. Why do you think we couldn’t see what was happening in District 25?” Laura asked.

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“Well, Malcolm, Makeba, Lauren and I were all moved to districts outside until recently so even though we lived within those areas, we had no way of knowing what took place in District 25. Most of us shopped in the stores where we worked so it was pointless to go anywhere else,” Thomas explained, “Lauren was probably the last to leave the area but something else happened with Lauren.”

“Yes, we fired Derek. I remember when I told Dierdre to do it.”

“How did this channel of communication get to shit?” Thomas wondered as he mentioned it.

“I have a few buyers ready to purchase at least twenty five percent of the shares when we go public,” Diego informed him as he grabbed one of his ribs.

“The food is good down here,” Will laughed at Diego as he enjoyed the rice, “Hey man, don’t worry, Your mom will be CEO directly after this public stockholders’ meeting. I guarantee it but you have to listen to me, ok. We have to do this my way.” Will then pulled out his folder and began to show Diego his plan.

Diego could only think his grandfather would’ve never foresaw this coming as he leaned in view of Will’s detailed plan.

“Diego, you must always protect your business,” Dietrich advise Diego. He was ten years old as he watched his grandfather facilitate a boardroom press conference. He’d watch as his grandfather would speak in various languages to buyers and potential clients and yes, the public to announce the new changes at Goldmans.

“Tell me what’s the second most important thing Diego,” Dietrich asked as Diego sat in front of him holding a notepad.

“*Protect your people!*” Diego replied.

“Why do we have to protect our people, Diego?” Dietrich asked. Diego was in front of the buyers as they smiled at him.

“Our people make our business,” Diego shouted.

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“Yes, son. Yes! If you want to be CEO someday, what comes next?” Dietrich asked him as he stood up on his feet.

“*Protect your time!*”

“Why is our time important, Diego? Can you explain that to me?”

“Because our time is something we can never get back. A Goldman never wants to waste his time!” Diego shouted.

“And why is that?”

“Because people are relying on us with theirs! Everything we do must add value to the lives of people!” Diego replied while smiling at his grandfather.

“This is the beginning of a new age for Goldmans today. We just opened our fifth hundredth location in *Miami*,” Dietrich revealed on his projector.

“What do you see for the future, Mr. Goldman?” a reporter asked while seated in the boardroom.

“More locations. More opportunity and more growth. I look forward to adding more value to the lives of all our customers,” Dietrich responded, “I was just a kid not much older than Diego when I bought my first store. It was a Boardwalk. The customers grew by-and-by before Isabella and I reformed it into our first Goldmans.”

“How do you plan on giving back to the community with these major wins?” the reporter asked.

“Well, we already have our facility in New York for asthma and bronchitis treatment. I was a carrier when I was nine years old. My mother would take me to the hospital repeatedly. It was a scary time for my mother and I but we made it. The *Monica Goldman* Center will always hold a special place in my heart. This facility led to the discovery of various treatments that have traumatically reduce the effects of these diseases. We have gotten so many letters from young parents and how their sons and daughters are now more

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active in sports due to these treatments. I can't tell you how much of a blessing that has been to hear these testimonies."

"We have discovered Goldmans has purchased several plots of land a few miles within several store locations. Are you building more facilities?" the reporter asked.

"We are building educational facilities for our youth and for men and women who never received a proper education. We are offering general education certifications, assistance with job hunting and even affordable daycare," Dietrich added. The room began to clap as he spoke and walked the room.

"Every young man deserves just as much of a shot like this one will," Dietrich held Diego's shoulders as he spoke into the camera.

Afterwards, Dietrich took Diego out to get ice cream at *Vipiteno Gelateria*, he wanted to reward Diego for his hard work. They'd both rehearsed and practiced for hours the day before.

"I love you, grandpa. Thank you for letting me help today," Diego high-fived his grandfather as they stood in front of the bar.

"What would you like for your hard work today, Diego?" Dietrich asked.

"I want that Grandpa!" Diego pointed at the *chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream*.

"Two scoops, Ma'am," Dietrich asked the clerk.

"Of course, Mr. Goldman, it's good to you," she replied as she scooped two cups of ice cream for the two of them.

"So when did you know you wanted to build a grocery store?" Diego asked as he dug into his ice cream.

"Your grandmother was an excellent cook. Her cooking made you want to dream about life and what it could be," Dietrich explained.

"Interesting, Grandpa," Diego replied.

"She made me a muffin once."

"Really a muffin?"

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“Yes, it seemed quite trivial then but there was something about the way she made it.”

“Did she put a million dollars in it?”

“No, son. It was the care she put into it. Plus, she was extremely beautiful. I pray you’ll be able to have a woman who will be able to cook as well as your grandmother,” Dietrich smiled as he talked to Diego and thought of his wife.

“So what happened afterwards?” Diego asked.

“Your grandmother began to develop products. I assisted her and we decided to make a grocery store.”

“Somehow that story never seems to get old,” Diego replied while smiling at his grandfather.

“So Diego, we’ve talked about me? What do you want to be when you grow up?” Dietrich asked as Diego enjoyed his scoop of ice cream.

“I just want to make a difference in people’s lives, Grandpa. Isn’t that what you do?”

“I’ll ask you again, Diego what is it you want to be when you grow up?” Dietrich asked seriously.

“I want to someday run the company like you, Grandpa?” Diego responded and from that day forward his grandfather began to mentor him until he was twenty. From that day forward, Diego’s mind was already made up, he would continue his grandfather’s legacy as long as he lived.

“I have to get the company back,” Diego began to tear up as he remembered his grandfather’s words that day.

“Do you know this woman, Diego?” Will asked as he put the photo in front of him. They were standing in Will’s hotel room as they strategized their moves.

“No, who is she?”

“That woman is Angela Corteno. She was married to your great uncle *Montreal Goldman*. He had shares and left her one percent of your family’s company. She was the deciding factor in

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your mom losing her chair,” Will added, “but not all the shareholders were there to make this decision.”

“I’m aware of this. Grandfather gave a lot of his shares to family members. He even stated in his will that we wouldn’t have access to all of those shares,” Diego replied.

“Diego, I have acquired some of those shares,” Will explained.

“How in the hell did my brother lose his shares in a poker game?” Diego replied when Will gave him his picture.

“My nephew beat him and gave them to me,” Will explained.

“Sounds fair to me. They’re yours for now. So what do you suggest we do about Mrs. Corteno?” Diego added.

“You’re missing it, what’s her last name Diego?” Will asked.

“No way!! That can’t be. Mark’s grandmother is a shareholder?” Diego was shocked as he realized it, “He spoke so highly of her.”

“She is a really good woman, Diego. I’m sure he took advantage of her. We can’t address her now even though she’s still in the city. If we go to her now, she won’t be receptive. We’ll have to wait a while. We still have majority shares now,” Will suggested, “but there’s the issue of property.”

“There are two other shareholders, that haven’t been revealed,” Diego suggested as Will gave him a blank stare.

“Well, who are they, kid?” Will asked as he laughed at Diego.

“I can’t reveal that information out of respect for those two people. We do have their support,” Diego added while smiling.

“Asshole,” Will replied.

“So what do we do for the time being?” Diego laughed.

“We need to rally and gather as many of the shareholders as possible for this public stockholders’ meeting. Trust me, John will be prepared before then. I assure you,” Will was confident as he spoke.

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“We need to go back to Virginia and play everything normal for a while. Is that what you’re saying?” Diego added.

“Exactly. Hold on. My phone is ringing,” Will pulled out his phone.

“Hello,” Will answered nonchalantly.

“When were you gonna tell me you acquired shares of Goldmans from *Ferdinand Bourdain*?” Lauren asked as she stood in their living room. Word has it, Laura was removed as CEO.

“Babe. Just wait until I get home,” Will replied as he felt her calm down.

“Is Diego with you?” Lauren asked as she looked through her pile of profiles, “Look you and Diego need to come back to help us deal with the aftermath. The turnover we’re getting is ridiculous.”

Will smiled as Lauren confirmed exactly what he knew.

“Makeba has gotten five resignations within the past hour. Everyone knows about this and are already making decisions about where they’ll work next. It’s a mess.”

“So she knows,” Diego laughed as he nodded.

“Yes, Diego! I know now and it doesn’t change anything. You’re not getting any special treatment from

*Dans En Machine*

*Today, all I feel like doing is asking God why me? Asking life why it just hit me like a ton of bricks. I miss you every day but you’re so far. I’m working on this job but I’ve got nothing to show for the quality of work that I’ve given. Something has to turn around while I’m out of here but then suddenly there’s a knock on the door, a letter at the door post. I love you. We want you back and I would love to go out with you this week at eight o clock. You better not stand me up and I don’t have much to wear. It’s cool all I need to see is your face. That’s more than enough.*

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me," Lauren teased as Will pointed the phone towards his ear.

"See you when we get back, Beemo," Diego teased her.  
"I'm gonna kill William."

# **TIES AND SAKURA DIAMONDS**

# CHAPTER 2

“America’s Chocolate box has officially gone public. Today, it was confirmed that John Paravari of *John Paravari Corporation* has been appointed as the new CEO of Goldmans. This comes as a shock to many, as twelve thousand employees have already pulled their 401ks, their retirement benefits and have officially resigned. Insiders say, internally, store employees are frightened that John has absolutely no insight in grocery at all. Mr. Paravari runs a fashion house and is not in the business of selling groceries,” *Marc Gross* explained to viewers at *CNN*.

“In other news, the stock rate for the company is at an all-time high and won’t see a decrease anytime soon. Officially, now a public entity, Goldmans sits proudly at number two underneath the DOW. The company has never been public but has always been profitable as the number one grocer in the world. The announcement of John Paravari’s appointment comes days after a private stockholders meeting was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Not much is known about the happenings that took place but it is safe to say the shareholders had this in mind. Whether it was a great move for the company, well folks, that remains to be seen. I’m Marc Gross and this is CNN News.”

Jane looked forward to dinner with Chris as she walked home towards her loft in *Downtown Norfolk*. Life couldn’t have been

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THE  
WATER SIDE

better as she thought of him but as she got closer to the *Rockefeller Norfolk*, she saw an interestingly familiar face.

“Sydney?” She couldn’t believe her eyes as she noticed her. She was in a teary position as she began to walk inside.

“Oh my God. Jane. You live here?” Sydney began to gather her emotions as she looked at Jane.

“Are you ok? You don’t look so good,” Jane held Sydney’s shoulder as they sat on a bench in the apartment lobby.

“Oh Jesus..I literally just moved here,” Sydney explained, “How long have you lived here?”

“It’s been over five years now,” Jane explained, “Why don’t you come upstairs so you can gather your thoughts?”

Once they got upstairs in Jane’s large loft. The loft was decorated in art deco styled Korean pieces of furniture and filled with memories of family and a few with Chris. Sydney was more at ease with herself upon sitting down. Jane served her a hot cup of coffee as she sat in her living room.

“This is interesting. How did we get here?” Sydney smiled.

“A few years, months and a few weeks at a time,” Jane smiled, “You know Sydney I never thought of you as a foe or enemy.”

“I never felt that way about you either. I actually admired you a lot,” Sydney explained.

“The feeling was mutual,” Jane replied as she drank from her mug, “So now that you are here, I have to ask. Why Norfolk?”

“I’m here working at the Norfolk executive offices until the districts are aligned and for the Reinhardt Pharmacies,” Sydney replied, “but....there is someone here I care about.”

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“Oh my God, now that you mentioned it. I’m really sorry,” Jane immediately recognized Sydney’s face from an article she read days ago about a high profile relationship.

“He won’t hear me.”

“You know when Chris kissed you that day. 48 hours before our wedding to be precise, I blamed him, you, and myself but I realized the best thing I could’ve done was release him,” Jane explained, “We were so much younger back then.. do you remember?”

“I do,” she smiled.

*Christopher Isaiah Dresden* carried three *Louis Vuitton* suitcases with several collections of clothing from *São Paulo International Airport*. The suitcases were gifts from his mother Tatiana who was mournful to watch him leave Virginia to Brazil for four years. Both Chris’ parents were high profile individuals.

His father, *Andrew Dresden* was born to biracial upper middle-class American educators who worked in Southern and Northern Virginia. They taught him the value of self-preservation, honor and remaining humble and grounded in all situations. These values would later press Andrew into becoming the Senator of *Virginia*.

Chris’ mother *Tatiana Woodland-Dresden* was born into the *Windsor* bloodline as a royal in the house of York and as a Woodland to Afro-British aristocrats who settled in America. They were shareholders of a much larger entity, *Woodland*, this company was at the time number three underneath *eBay* and *Amazon* in terms of e-commerce, handling and shipping. Tatiana was taught the value of pride, self-respect and equality.

Although Chris grew up never having to worry about money, things had not always been so great for him in his younger years, particularly as a twelve year old student at *Norview Middle School*. Andrew and Tatiana wanted him to grow up just as they had in great public schools where he could build many great friendships but

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eventually, even they began to realize their notoriety would bring trouble to him.

“They want to charge our son with a felony assault charge!” his mother Tatiana was shocked as she heard the words.

REVIEW  
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It was by far one of the most shocking times of Chris’ time in seventh grade. He was twelve years old and had severely beaten up the school bully *Harris Daniels*.

He was jealous of Chris academically and attempted to bully him often. He was more of an annoyance to Chris than a bully. One day, he made the mistake of pushing Chris in the hallway and the rest was history.

Harris suffered a few bruises. There was one on his eyelid, a few on his left arm, and one on his ribcage from running into a table. Chris had none.

“Listen, kid. I don’t care how big or how tall any other kid is. You better always defend yourself. Otherwise, son, you better not think about setting foot on this doorstep,” Andrew explained to a five-year-old Chris. It was a mantra his dad had always instilled in him when he first began school.

“With all due respect, we don’t intend on expelling Christopher. He’s a great student here but Harris’s parents are not as forthcoming and do not understand how Chris was affected by him. All they see is the damage Chris made,” he was the *Norview Middle School* Dean of Academics *Gregory Jamison*.

“Our son is a straight-A honors student!” Andrew argued, “And to my knowledge, Harris was almost expelled three weeks ago. You mean to tell me, you want to waste taxpayers’ dollars on a young boy who was only acting in self-defense! It’s inexcusable!”

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“I’m sorry, Senator Dresden but Harris’s parents came here and discussed with our staff that not only did they want Chris expelled, they also intended on ensuring he would be charged to the highest extent of the law,” he was sorry as she mentioned it.

“There have been over six fights over the course of three weeks in this building and not one of those kids who fought Harris were served. Now you’re saying that our son who is twenty-four inches shorter and just so happens to be an African American may be charged with felony assault charges. For Christ sake, he’s twelve!” Tatiana was in awe as she listened to Gregory.

“Again. We’re not suspending him but we do suggest the two of you consider transferring Chris,” Gregory was disappointed, “Now this school does not want to lose Chris. Chris is exceptionally gifted but we are unsure of how to protect him for the media side of this situation. He is just a young boy.”

“That’s not something we’re considering. He loves it here. All of his friends are here and we can’t do this to him,” Tatiana explained as she held Andrew’s hand.

“She’s right. We won’t do this to our son. He stays right where he is.”

“Senator Dresden, how do you expect your son to walk through such scrutiny?”

“You clearly don’t know our son, do you? He may just be twelve years old, but he’s already a young man. My son won’t back down from anyone!” Andrew was confident as he stood up, “Let’s get out of here, honey.”

Once Andrew and Tatiana returned home, they coached Chris on what to do if he was approached by a reporter.

“What if I get asked a question?” Chris asked.

“Don’t say anything, honey. Just smile and keep walking,” Tatiana explained, “Go to class as usual and stay away from any incidents. Especially any school fights.”

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“Am I going to jail, dad?” Andrew laughed as Chris mentioned it.

“Jail!” their younger eight-year-old daughter *Elle* walked in the room as they laughed. She was in attendance at *Norview Elementary*.

“Let’s get out of here, sweetheart. Let’s let the boys talk,” Tatiana walked Elle out of the room.

“You roughed up that kid pretty bad, son and yeah, this looks bad but jail will never be a place you’ll ever have to go. Never be ashamed of defending yourself. It’s your human right as an American citizen. Never forget that,” Andrew rubbed his son’s head as he looked at him. He knew immediately who they needed to see.

“This case is open book shut,” her name was *Harper Duran*, one of the best attorneys in Virginia particularly when it came to criminal law. She began her law firm *Duran Law* with Tatiana three years before Tatiana met Andrew. *Duran Law* was ranked number one by *Forbes* in terms of criminal law and civil suits until being unseated by *Brooks, Laurence and Corteno*. They both were *Regent Law* grads as well as best friends. Andrew had many of wins and losses against Harper in court in his early days as prosecutor.

“These people are not really after what they see as justice for their son. They’re after television appearances, money, any opportunity to that would push them over the middle class. They know they’re not winning. There are too many witnesses. We’ve reviewed this incident with over ten students who saw everything. It’s number three on *Youtube* today by the way,” Harper explained.

“I knew this was a waste of time when I looked at it,” Tatiana replied, “This is about using our notoriety to their advantage.”

“They’re going to look at Chris as this privileged black kid whose parents didn’t raise him to have respect for others. It’s exactly why he was targeted. The networks are not going to waste

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time following their narrative if we don't move quickly. His face is going to be the new billboard of upper-class privilege."

"What are you suggesting?" Andrew asked.

"We need to invite someone into your home. Andrew, there are rumors circulating you're being considered as a member of the cabinet. Chief of Staff to be exact and if this is the case, we can sway the motive that this is all a hoist to ruin that," Harper explained, "I'm going to bring in my own team of investigators to cross examine the Daniels family. I don't want any of your hands in this. Just go about life as usual."

Harper was disturbed that this case was even picked up but she was even more disturbed that a former colleague of hers would serve as a prosecutor for the case.

"Is this some kind of joke, counselor? Did you really think you were going to win this case, Joseph?" He was a former classmate of hers named *Joseph Wilkins*.

He approached the Daniels when he found out Harris went to the hospital to check out his bruises. He had been watching Chris for a while. This was his moment.

"Your client did quite some damage to mine and to my knowledge, he had to sit some weeks out of school because of it. The courts may consider this self-defense but that won't stop the court of public opinion."

"Who suggested he stay out of school for a few weeks? To my knowledge, it was just a few bruises. Don't look at me like that. I'm not stupid, Joseph. You've clearly targeted them."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Harper."

"So what? You're in this for interviews? How many shows have you booked the Daniels? Two...three. Wow. One black eye and one big bruise on a ribcage! Wow. What happened to integrity, Wilkins?"

"The only thing that matters is the public opinion. The Daniels will score so many interviews they won't even think about

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who wins or lose. I'm sure the *President-elect* will be watching closely also Harper. Whether this case is dismissed or not, the Dresdens have lost."

"This isn't even about the Daniels is it, Joseph? This is about your notoriety. Your big firm dreams.... I just hope it all suffices afterwards. You smile but because your name is so far stenched in this...Who will want you? Think about it. I'm your friend and I'm telling this....Listen...this is a big mistake! A huge mistake!" He could only hope she would regret her words.

Over the course of four months, Harris' father and mother, Edmond and Fiona Daniels appeared on *Good Morning America*, *CBS This Morning*, *Today*, *The View*, and many other outlets singing the sweet melody of victimhood. In the beginning, Chris was the 'head' on the torch but two weeks later, reports began to surface of Edmond's involvement in the embezzlement of over two million dollars. He'd wired the money into five separate bank accounts for three years prior to the case.

Allegedly, he'd stolen the money from *Francesco*, it was a major casino organization in *Atlantic City*. Angela Corteno, who was then *Invictus*' top Branch Manager reported her findings to headquarters and discreetly leaked the information to Harper's private investigator. Edmond was arrested without bail but this still didn't stop them from going through with their case. It was by far the hugest embarrassment Joseph ever experienced but he still pressed on.

"Mom, can't we just stop this?" Harris was more than serious as he talked to his mom while she held the letter. She felt so broken for her son and never wanted to go through with the charges in the first place.

"You can't drop the charges. If you don't go through with this, it'll be over for you and your family. You think this is going to stop. Let's not forget the fees, I plan on charging you for all these," Joseph pressed Fiona as she stood in front of him.

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A few days before court, Andrew decided to write the Daniels a letter of sincerity due to all the negative effect it was having on Harris. He had transferred to over two schools across Virginia Beach and wondered if a stem of normalcy would return to his daily life.

August 18th

*To the Daniels family,*

*First, we wanted to apologize for any damage this case has caused to your family, it has come to our knowledge that recently your home has come into foreclosure. If this was a result of any loss caused by our family, we want you to have this as an extension of our apology. Best wishes to all of you.*

*Sincerely,*

*The Dresdens*

Enclosed in the envelope was a check for *eighty thousand dollars* to prevent the foreclosure and fully purchase the home. The following day, with Andrew by her side, Tatiana even had a press conference to protect both Fiona and Harris from any further scrutiny.

“It is not the wish of our family to add any more grief to the Daniels than we already did. We ask that the media gives not only us but the Daniels solace in their time of uncertainty. Harris, especially,

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he is still an impressionable young man. He doesn't deserve America on his doorstep."

Fiona didn't know what to do after the press conference but with Joseph pressing her all she could do was push forward with the case.

"She still hasn't drop the charges?" Harper was puzzled as she spoke to Tatiana.

"Joseph is playing her strings. Let's play with him," Andrew smiled.

The day of court was a circus of colorful witnesses, one kid after another cooperating each other's sequence of events.

Sarcastically, every story made sense. The verdict was very clear Christopher acted in self-defense and with Harris fully recovered. It made no sense to continue. Will, Lauren, Makeba, Gabe, Malcolm, and Thomas were all in amazement at what they were witnessing but nothing was as unthinkable as what Joseph had done.

"Your honor, this case is nothing but a plea for a grab bag. Where is the man who conjured up this case? Where is Mrs. Daniels's attorney? With all due respect, how much longer should my client endure this scrutiny?" Harper explained to the judge. Joseph left a message on Fiona's voicemail that could no longer represent her.

"You're right, case dismissed."

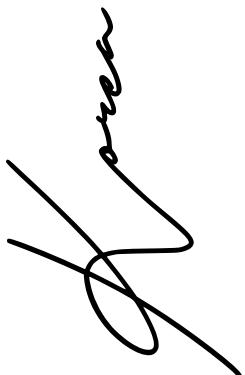
After court adjourned, Harper brought to the attention of the courts that Joseph was unethical in his handling of the Daniels case and had him disbarred from the examination as a Virginian prosecutor.

After court, Andrew and Tatiana extended an olive branch to Fiona and Harris for lunch. Their families shared lunch at *219 American Bistro*. They all sat, apologized and broke bread with one another. Chris and Harris quickly became friends afterward. Andrew assisted Edmond in his case after explaining to Andrew he was innocent. Andrew further investigated and Edmond was relieved of all the charges. It was revealed that a family member had used his

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identity to laundered all the money from the beginning. The Dredens' and Daniels' friendship would carry them throughout all Chris and Harris' adult years. Chris and Harris couldn't have been more ready for high school.

"How do you expect us to live under these circumstances?" Her name was *Si Mao*, she was the current wife of *Hee Young Reinhardt*. Hee Young was the younger brother of *Si Young Reinhardt*, also known as *Amis Reinhardt*, and the older brother of his sister *Ae Sun Reinhardt*. Hee Young was a trustee of the Reinhardt estate, this fortune amassed him authority with his siblings over twenty *South and North Korean* hospitals. The founder of this empire was none other than their father *Jin Hwa*.



*Jin Hwa Reinhardt* was born in *Hamhung, North Korea* to neither a father or mother and grew up in various foster homes with his younger brother *Mi Seo* until he was sixteen. Their mother died from severe thyroid disease as she was their father's mistress. He swore to his wife he would never have anything to do with them.

Once Jin Hwa and Mi Seo were old enough, they managed to salvage enough money to purchase a small food truck and move into an apartment. This food truck would cover their school costs on tuition at *Sungkyunkwan University*. Mi Seo would pursue a degree in business at the same university with Jin Hwa pursuing the same. Jin Hwa would eventually part ways with his business major and develop an interest in medicine.

During his change of interest, Jin Hwa's professors took notice of his abilities and strongly pressed him to attend the school

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of medicine once he obtained his degree in Chemistry. Jin Hwa was nervous and reluctant but eventually, he saw this pursuit as a means to saving many lives. Mi Seo would eventually move to London to work as an executive designer and administrator for *Bourdain*.

As Jin Hwa entered medical school, immediately he was acknowledged as an immaculate genius due to strenuous study and well-rehearsed pathology. Surgeries with him were often fun and entertaining to watch as his peers cheered him on and when losses came, Jin Hwa's passion only grew.

Once five years passed, Jin Hwa was unable to declare a specialty in surgery and decided to stay another three years and master several specialties. They were general, cardiothoracic, and neuropathology. His colleagues deemed him the 'trinity of medicine.'

Both Jin Hwa and Mi Seo experienced a herald of success, Mi Seo as a designing director and Jin Hwa as the Chief of Staff at Sungkyunkwan. During a June Bourdain opening, Mi Seo met the love of his life, *Adessa Woodland*, daughter to the *Woodland* estate, and two years later, they bore three children, *Adisa*, *Chikere*, and *Eiko*. During a Christmas family dinner in Seoul, Jin Hwa met the love of his life *Jiao Lei Wang*, she was the daughter to the *Wang* estate, a major high-end jeweler and owner of seventy premium outlets across America, northern Europe and east Asia.

During their whirlwind love affair, Jiao watched as Jin Hwa continued to soar into new heights but hit great walls of defeat when it came to the many patients who weren't able to receive treatment. Jin Hwa and Jiao often debated much about what choices to make and whether Jin Hwa abandoning his career was better for their family as a whole but ultimately, they made the decision to build their own medical facility. The work to get there put a strain on their marriage but ultimately, they were successful. *Reinhardt Regional Hospital* was a high-end emergency care facility and never refused treatment to anyone. Often held in regards as an ethereal experience

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to patients, the South Korean government wanted the hospital to continue growing so it began financing all its future endeavors.

Five years later, and three locations in both North and South Korea, Jiao and Jin Hwa shared three children, their oldest Si Young (*Amis Reinhardt*), Hee Young and Ae Sun Reinhardt.

Si Young easily took after his father under the Reinhardt umbrella, Hee Young developed political aspirations and Ae Sun took after her mother under the Wang umbrella.

After many years of climbing the ranks as a congressman, Hee Young became the current president and chairman of North Korea but the safety surrounding his family became unsightly. Jin Hwa consistently disagreed with Hee Young's choice but Hee Young persisted for he wanted a chance to stand alone without the power of Reinhardt. He also had an unwavering desire to establish Korea overall as a dominate and established power. He tired of other countries assuming their 'authority' over Korea.

During Hee Young's presidency, North Korea began to adopt a few capitalistic ways of democracy but Hee Young's developed a grave hunger for progressive weaponry. North Korea would press towards modern weaponry and developed innovatively stunning technology for modern warfare. This made North Korea, a target for rising terrorist factions. The United States military did intervene to assist the North Korean Military with the factions and for three years, the danger stopped but still Hee Young persisted. The North Korea reunification with South Korea became a distant dream to never occur for many years.

During this time, North and South Korea convened it's fourth summit of negotiations for unification but Hee Young still persisted with refusal to stop his developments. He believed he was acting for the greater good of the world and that many other nations had much more modern warfare as North Korea. His work was only in fairness. This disbarred him from his Reinhardt family fortune.

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“Si Mao, this is only a setback. I promise there’ll be no more...” Hee Young stared at Si Mao as she held the hand of her two-year-old daughter *Chun-Hwa*.

“Your lies have no meets to an end. You’re a toddler unable to seize your hunger for power. How can Chun-hwa aspire to such things?”

“But I love you...” he grabbed her hand.

“Si Mao, I love you but I can’t promise you won’t lose another loved one. Si Mao, I’m sorry your mother is no where to be found. No...body...No trace of my mother...she was my mother!!! Don’t touch me!!!” She pushed him aside as he teared up.

“You cannot leave me!!! You can’t leave...” he was on his knees as she pushed him away.

“I don’t care if you never sign these papers. This marriage is over. I can’t even look at you...”

“Where will you go?”

“It doesn’t matter...You will never see us again. Never,” she was filled with conviction as she spoke to him in tears but more than anything she was heartbroken. She knew her marriage was over.

“I know that I can’t give you what you deserve. What they deserve. I know I don’t deserve to be their father but can you give me the chance to change?”

“I can’t raise these young girls to be good women if I contradict myself every time I kiss a man whose values don’t align with mine.”

“Please. Don’t leave me...” she let go of his hand as he sat on his knees in agony. *Chun-hwa* and Si Mao walked out the door.

His idealistic thinking became too much for her. She wanted him to live a more safe and wholesome life like his older brother Si Young. After his first daughter *Chun-Hwa*’s second birthday, Si Mao had enough. She served him divorce papers. He couldn’t say anymore. All he could do was let her leave. He knew he’d put her

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through enough hell and though he loved his children, it was safer for them to leave.

Si Mao and Chun-Hwa then boarded the *American Airlines* for Norfolk, Virginia. Si Mao could only think of what her new life would be like in America. All she could feel was stability as she looked at Chun-hwa but suddenly three hours into the end of the flight, the plane headed for an immediate crash into the Norfolk coast.

There were twelve survivors and forty three losses. All were being treated at the Reinhardt Regional Medical Center there. Si Mao and Chun-hwa were among the survivors. Chun-Hwa suffered a slight burn on her leg but Si Mao, at seven months pregnant, was bruised around her neck and suffered a massive concussion. She covered Chun-Hwa as the plane crashed. It was a miracle the two of them survived but Si Mao wasn't yet out of the woods.

“Get out of my way! You’re not touching her!” April immediately bombarded the emergency room as she rushed in with her team to care for Si Mao.

“If I don’t make it out of this! April, please raise my children! Don’t let Hee Young have them! April... please!” Si Mao was emotional as everyone drove to the emergency room.

“Just relax, honey. You’re gonna make it through this. Your family and I got you. Ok.”

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As April delivered the new baby, she was in awe of how healthy she was considering she was only seven months. The baby had a strong heartbeat and a steady blood flow. She gave her newborn baby two names, one in Korean, *Reinhardt Eun Sun Yaoji*, and the other was American *Jane Echinacea Nüwa Reinhardt*. Chun-hwa was also given both an American and Korean name, *Reinhardt Chun-hwa Weiwobo* and *Allegra Hydrangea Xi Hou Reinhardt*. Si Mao was born an American citizen and she wanted them to have both names just as she had. The names were formed to honor their grandfather's great achievements.

*The Nuwa Echinacea* was discovered by Jin Hwa in *Dalseo District*, in *Western Daegu, South Korea* served as a catalyst for his revolutionary *treatment* to *Diabetes* and the *Xi Hou Hydrangea*,

he discovered also in Daegu but on the eve of a full moon. It served as a catalyst for what would be a *treatment* to *thyroid disease*. This was a major milestone for Jin Hwa, due to the fact that it was the disease in which his mother died from.

It was also already a requirement for all Reinhardt men and women to not only have two names but to be raised in three languages, Korean, Chinese and American. This was due to the major Reinhardt and Wang estates.

“Is mommy ok?” Chun-hwa asked Kareem. He was watching her in the waiting room. She was completely cleared for leave.

“Allegra, she’s gonna be fine, sweetheart,” She was so sweet and adoring as he held her on his lap. All he could do was pray in his heart as he sat with her.

“Can I get a cookie?” she smiled.

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“Sure, honey, let’s just wait a few minutes,” Kareem smiled. He was relieved the trauma of the accident hadn’t affected her as much. April’s return from the operating room made things easier.

“She’s stable. She’s stable,” April was relieved as she kissed Allegra on her forehead and embraced Kareem.

“Mommy?” Allegra asked as April smiled.

“Yes, sweetheart, mommy is ok,” April smiled.

“Can we go see her?” Kareem asked.

“Right now, no. She’s been through a lot and needs a little rest. Tomorrow. We still have to run other tests but right now, she’s a living miracle.”

“Do you want to spend the night at my house, Allegra?” April asked as she kneeled over.

“Do you have cookies?”

“Chocolate Chip and Oreos,” Kareem replied. April pinched Kareem as he answered, “We can make some tonight if you want.”

“Yay!!!!” Allegra was excited as they both smiled at her.

“You can take Allegra to see her baby sister if you want. Afterwards, you guys should go get ice cream. It’s going to be a few hours,” April replied.

“Alright, honey. We’ll see you later.”

As Kareem took Isa to the NICU, he felt his heart jump out in two places as he looked at Jane. Like Allegra, he felt a special connection to Jane as well.

“When will she get out?”

“It won’t be long, baby girl but she’ll be out soon. You just make sure you’re a good sister to her. You will share, won’t you?”

“Share, what is sharing?” Kareem laughed as he poked her nose.

“I take it back. I don’t like her.” Allegra was all the more excited to leave with Kareem to get ice cream.

“Thank you for everything you’ve done,” Si Mao smiled as she looked at April.

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“You’re welcome, *Eugenia*,” It had been a while since she’d heard her name, “You should be fully recovered in about two weeks. Hey, why don’t you spend the rest of your time with us at the house before you go to New York.”

“That sounds like a great idea. Absolutely.”

Eugenia, Allegra and baby Jane spent their summer with April, Kareem and their son KJ. Once Eugenia fully recovered, she and the girls departed for Manhattan, New York to live with her sister *Vienne*, she was then an accessories designer for Ralph Lauren.

One night, Eugenia dreamed of a collection of bridal gowns flowing to the composition of eminent violas. Violas for her were a family symbol of love, luck reincarnation and eternal beauty. The following morning, she instantly designed a collection of fifteen gowns in three weeks. With every gown, she held a prayer that Hee Young would realize his love for her, abandon his ambitions and return to his family but she never got her wish. She simply named her line of gowns, *Eugenia*.

The gowns were made with special silk like wool called *Kami*. The Wang family created this wool but never knew what to utilize it for. This wool was immersed in *Sakura Oil* brewed from cherry blossoms. Once Jiao Lei saw the drawings, she immediately knew what to do with the *Kami*.

Once the general public had access to these gowns, there was an initial discovery made about them. Women who married men in these dresses would come to enlightening decisions regarding their relationships and see them for what they really were. They would either choose to marry or not at all. The dresses were special, and a woman could only marry her soulmate if she wore the dress.

The *Sakura Oil* permeated in the fabric of their dresses where a standard for Wang women when they would marry their spouses or not. Some of them would leave their groomsmen at the altar but when they would marry in these garments, their marriages would last a lifetime. Once Eugenia came to this conclusion, she

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began to realize the dresses were sacred and could save many lives. When women would first purchase a dress, they would experience vivid dreams for a total of ten days. As a result of these dreams, they would make their informative decision.

After her first initial run was successful, Jiao Lei Reinhardt invested in Eugenia every fall, winter, spring and summer collection. Eugenia was officially a luxury house after three years. Allegra began school in Harlem and Jane officially began reading at just the age of three. Things were looking up for the Reinhardt women until after what would be Eugenia's last collection. Eugenia was drawing on her terrace as the rain poured over the city and suddenly collapsed. Allegra immediately called 911. She woke up to a doctor.

"This isn't real. I can't have *lupus*," she could only think of her daughters as she visited her doctor.

"I'm sorry, Eugenia, most patients never have this severe case of *nephritis*. Your heart and both your kidneys are at risk. This is unfortunate, but you need to make preparations," he was serious as she looked at her.

"What about my daughters? I can't leave them!"

"You still have time, Eugenia. Take as much of it as possible."

As Eugenia's time began to lessen, she immediately recorded moments with her daughters and alone for them to see for themselves. The entire year, she'd recorded over *three hundred* videos for her daughters. The general public never knew of Eugenia's diagnosis and she wanted to keep it that way. She wanted as much privacy as possible. She prepared estates for both Allegra and Jane and agreed to leave them both with her sister Vienne.

Eugenia's death was untimely and a loss for the world. She would always be known for her great heart and undeniable gift. Vienne loved both Allegra and Jane but the responsibility of running Eugenia and raising the girls overwhelmed her. Hee Young took notice of her struggle and fought it out with her in court to regain

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custody of the girls. After several months of banter, he eventually was awarded custody.

After seven months, Allegra and Jane began to experience hardships in the general public due to his reputation and eventually he decided he would spare his daughters the humiliation of living with him. He then asked Allegra where she would like to live.

It was a long ride to Norfolk, Virginia but Hee Young and his daughters made it to Kareem and April's doorstep.

"This is gonna be a journey," April smiled at Kareem.

"Well I'm all for it."

They couldn't have been more thrilled.

Growing up in Norfolk for Allegra and Jane was smooth sailing in the Carr household. They grew up around their cousins and had the support of many aunts and uncles so things were always fun and interesting but once both girls entered high school they began to recognize the totality of not only who their mother was but also their father.

Jane was fourteen years old when she sat in her world history class. South and North Korea were in the rearview mirror of class discussion for over a month. Jane was conflicted with the lesson plan being covered, for much of the information being taught regarding her father was completely misrepresented. The current topic being discussed was North Korea's mass incarceration system. The conditions were inhumane and Hee Young reformed it three years into his presidency. It took him a scope of four years to reform it and he did but Jane's teacher did not get that memo.

"So your father's not only a deadbeat, he's a dictator. He never had the best interest of the people of North Korea. They are crying for him to step down. The man is obsessed with modern warfare," Jane was quite annoyed as she heard her classmate.

"You need to shut the hell up because you don't know what you are talking about," her name was *Anisa Opeyemi Reinhardt*, she was Jane and Chris' cousin.

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“It’s fine, Anisa, you don’t have to defend my father,” Jane replied.

“No, Jane, it’s just not right. It’s just amazing to me how such a touchy subject can be taught out of a textbook when none of the people who wrote it even bothered to gather their material from reliable sources. It’s not fair. Especially to the people who are affected by it. Not anyone in this room by the way.”

Sitting across from Anisa had been Harris who was clearly intrigued by her and Chris who was positioned at the back of the class.

“Have you been to North and South Korea, Anisa?” the teacher asked.

“My family. Our family, our roots are in Korea. We know everything and the sequence of events displayed here are so out of order I don’t even know why this is considered history. My uncle’s presidency started years after the issues of the Korean prison system were sequential and when I mean Korea, I mean both the South and North. This was an ongoing problem that both my uncle and South Korea’s current president discussed,” Anisa explained.

“But what about his obsession with global warfare?” a classmate asked.

“Actually, my father’s ‘obsession’ has served many countries in recent years but that is information I am not at liberty to discuss. You can have your opinion about my father, it’s your right all I ask is that you don’t bother me with your questions.”

“I can respect that,” Chris answered as he smiled at Jane. She immediately began to blush.

“Korea, in general has made significant improvements I’ve read in recent years. Its infrastructure is among the best today. Number three behind New London. Travel is extremely easy and our president is even looking into working with them on a number of projects,” Harris replied. Jane began to smile as her friends defended her.

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“Hey, I bet you Anisa will go out with me?” Harris smiled.

“I’ll bet you ten, for Jane?” Chris smiled.

After class, Harris and Chris both took Jane and Anisa to *McDonalds* and they enjoyed two McFlurry’s and two Big Macs.

“So Anisa is your cousin? Interesting,” Harris smiled as he ate Anisa’s fries.

“You are greedy,”

Anisa rolled her.

“But you like it though. I’ll get you another one.”

“No. It’s fine,” she smiled.

“Her father is my cousin. I hate going to her house sometimes, her dad is always schooling us. They just moved here from London,” Jane explained as she ate Chris’ fries.

“My mother’s...”

“She’s on the board of directors at Hampton University. One of the leading professors of Organizational Leadership. My mother works under her there. She’s pretty amazing.” Harris explained.

Anisa was speechless.

“You two have a complicated history too,” Jane smiled as she spooned her Oreo McFlurry.

“Yeah. That’s old news,” Chris and Harris laughed.

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The pairs immediately began to date one another. Studying, attending theme parks, concerts, and parties were the norm for the foursome.

“Ok, make sure you’re focused. No don’t be nervous, sweetheart. You always have the safety right but you’ll wanna make sure that’s off,” Jane’s eyes were focused on her target as she held a 9mm firearm. Kareem gifted it to Jane and wanted to be certain she knew how to use it. He taught all his kids to use a firearm. This was his way of further protecting them when he couldn’t be around. Jane fired perfectly as the bullet hit the target in the forehead.

“Alright, now give me six more shots.”

After they finished Kareem took Jane to his office and she read off the weekly stock market and recent company merger.

“What was the recent Reinhardt dollar?”

“Two hundred and twenty-six dollars,” Jane replied as she looked at Kareem.

“Why did it go up recently?” Kareem asked her.

“Mom recently stepped up as CEO,” Jane explained.

“What was Eugenia’s recent stock quote?”

“One hundred fifty-eight dollars.”

“Good. Not bad at all.”

“Honey, you can’t keep giving these girls the one up on you. Harvard is looking at you over there,” Jane was a point guard for the Norview Pilots and she averaged 22 shots a game.

“Is she gonna be ok, honey?” April asked.

“She’s good. She’s got this.”

They didn’t win that day but Jane played well and was extended an offer to play for the Harvard Crimsons. That summer, Jane spent working with Kareem at his office, she was enamored heavily by his work. Kareem was considering purchasing a few magazine outlets and wasn’t sure of closing.

“Dad, you should purchase *Olympus*,” Jane suggested.

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“What do you know about *Olympus*?” Kareem asked. He was surprised she’d spent so much time researching them.

“They’ve gone bankrupt but their online subscription service has potential. They nearly reached two million subscribers but the owner Robert Davis spent too much of the money on his lavish lifestyle.”

“Will those people stay locked in if we took the service? What are they receiving every month?” He was intrigued as she explained but he needed more.

“They’re just getting the magazine. There’s no online applications, live videos or exclusives.”

“How old are the subscribers?”

“Mid twenty to late fifties.”

“Really? Let me see this. Wow, sweetheart. You’re right they didn’t capitalize off this. Do they have offers already?”

“None. No one believes it can be saved.”

“We could get advertisers on board. Get it on ESPN, live interviews with players during practice and off the field, go paperless, go green on production, develop a mobile game for free game tickets. We could relaunch in a year. Excuse me, honey. I need to make a phone call.”

It was the beginning of the Jane effect. Kareem had no idea, this was just the beginning for his sports magazine and network company *Blitz*. Well into Jane’s college years, it would eventually become a rivaling network alongside both ESPN and Fox Sports.

Senior year was a struggle for Chris, Jane, Harris and Anisa. They reluctantly wanted to face it but time gave them no option.

“Drafted! What’s that supposed to mean for you and me? I just signed a recording contract!”

“Anisa, you can’t expect me to let go of this opportunity. Baby, you know I’ve worked my whole life for this,” Harris was drafted into the *New England Patriots* as a linebacker.

# FIRST CONTACT

“Harris, I can’t move to New Hampshire. If you go. You’ll be going alone. I can’t do this.”

“So I guess this is where we stand?”

“I can’t see another way for us to be,” he kissed her on her cheeks as she teared up saying it.

“I love you, Harris.”

“I love you, Nisa.”

“He left me!” Jane wrapped her arms around Anisa as she cried in her arms, “He left me!”

“It’s ok, sweetie. You have so many good things to look forward to. You know I got into Harvard today,” Jane explained.

“Jane, that’s great but what about you and Chris?” Anisa asked.

“You can’t just up and leave me like I don’t mean anything to you, Jane!” Chris pleaded.

“It’s Harvard, Chris,” Jane explained.

“So I’m just supposed to wait for you? What? Visit you every two months for the next four to eight years? I thought you would come to USP with me in Brazil,” Chris began to feel a weight pummel into his chest as he spoke.

“I’m not asking you to do that.”

“Then what are you asking?” She felt her heart grow more nervous as she spoke to him.

“I know I can’t ask you to stay with me,” she cried. He then kissed her passionately but midway into their second kiss she placed her palm on his chest.

“We should just be friends,” she couldn’t believe she said the words and she had peace in saying it. He didn’t know what else to say. He just left her standing there in tears.

Chris didn’t know what else to do but he knew for the time being he needed to focus on school. Once he arrived to the University of São Paulo. He placed much of his attention in his newly formed sorority, *Alpha Sigma Psi*. USP did not have one at the time

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so Chris started one. During the first rally, he attracted the attention of someone, he didn't quite expect.

ASP's first step performance outdoors contained an audience of over three hundred students. This was new to São Paulo and even a reporter covered the event. Chris choreographed this performance for over two weeks and anticipated its success.

With an army of over twenty men, Chris marched and stepped completely in sync with his black and Brazilian brothers. Sorority was always important to many of the Dresden men because it was a symbol of pride and honor. Andrew, Zach and Will were also members of the sorority and each step at a period of time during college.

After the performance, Chris hosted a party on the floor of his dorm. Diego was in attendance and quickly became friends with Chris but there was one more person, Chris hadn't yet met yet.

“I’m sorry. What did you say your name was?” he remembered the young lady earlier.

“It’s Sydney but you can call me, Syd. That was pretty impressive back there.”

“Was it impressive enough for you to join me tonight at *Figueira*?” he asked as he smiled at her.

“Let me think about that.”

Chris changed his clothes and sat a table in the back of the restaurant and two hours later, Sydney showed up.

“How did you know I would show up?” Sydney smiled as he pulled out a chair for her.

“I didn’t know actually but I’m grateful you did.”

“What will you be having, sir?”

“I’ll take whatever the young lady is having. Please by all means give her whatever she wants.”

Sydney blushed as she covered her face with the large menu.

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As they enjoyed their meal, they couldn't believe how much they had in common.

"I must ask Chris. How does a man like you who got accepted into Princeton end up at São Paulo U?" Sydney asked.

"I could say the same thing about you."

"My family lives here. I wanted to learn whatever I could about the company. I guess it's befitting for me since I'm a Goldman."

PAULO  
SÃO

"Interesting. I wanted the opportunity to attend college overseas. My cousin was actually the Divisional Logistics Specialist here a while ago."

"You must be referring to Gabe. He's amazing. I've seen a lot of his work on the recent Goldmans' store. The amount of effort he puts into each design. The company will definitely have to start paying him more for his talents."

"Your father has chosen a different path. It seems he's not eager to follow in your grandfather's footsteps."

"He isn't. He was quite reluctant to me coming here but he knew I needed to make the decision for myself. He never once tried to change my mind,"

Sydney smiled, "Your father is doing an excellent job in America these days as the Chief of Staff. Do you worry about he and your mom's safety?"

"Not really, my dad is pretty smart about everything and the security around him is top-notch."

"What do you want to do after this?" he asked.

"Whatever you want," Sydney smiled.

Two years later, Chris and Sydney were inseparable.

"This is not an internship. This isn't an apprenticeship. This is a one-time opportunity," Eduardo explained to Jane as she stood in his office.

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She nodded her head in confidence as he spoke.

“Wherever I go, you will go. Whenever I eat, you will eat. You and I are one.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now a drought may be occurring here in Sao Paulo shortly and I need you to give me a firm cost on how much we will need to assist the city?” Eduardo explained.

“A drought..”

“It is very rare indeed but it may just be occurring sooner than later. It’s something we have had to endure for many years.”

“How soon will you...”

“As soon as possible to be precise. This is a serious situation and Goldmans has always been out front during these situations. I expect a number in a few hours,” he asked.

Jane was only in Sao Paulo for her time with Eduardo. She was completely focused on work as she left for her cubicle. As she researched the drought, she wondered why the city hadn’t come up with more feasible options. The more she saw the severity of the droughts, she wanted to find a more permanent solution.

“Forty!!” she replied as she returned to Eduardo’s office.

“Forty million?” he was surprised as she explained.

“Every drought, the expense of the supplies have increased, sir,” he was disappointed as she explained. She passed him her expense report.

“You’re right. It’s all there. All of it. It is. Our suppliers are charging us more.”

“Taking advantage of the situation.”

“Exactly. I just wish there was a more pliable solution for this.”

“There is,” she explained.

She then passed him a folder of a research project that was tested in *Somalia* and *Ethiopia*.

“So it’s called the *Gold Nile*?” he asked.

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“It was recently successful in testing and neighboring countries have followed suit in purchasing the patents. It harbors saltwater for ten days and purifies it in a one-hundred-foot filter for consumption,” Jane explained, “It was tested for over twenty years until now.”

“We should gather the state officials,” Eduardo explained.

“The Sao Paulo droughts have plagued Brazil in the southern Atlantic for over one hundred years. We have spent billions in revenue navigating them only adding a small bandage to wound. We must put an end to draining resources that are far too beneficial to this continent.”

“What are you proposing?” His name was *Jacques Vasquez*, he was the current president of Brazil.

“The Gold Nile...”

The room was silent as Eduardo showed them the large water filter on his projector. Jane was filled with excitement as she watched Eduardo on the podium. The room was filled with councilmen as he stood there. All of them spoke completely in Spanish.

“So this is going to end the droughts.”

“It will. We should position them on three quarters of Brazil.”

“How soon can we have them built, Eduardo?” he asked.

“Jane, would you give me the honor of explaining?” she smiled greatly as he asked.

“The Gold Nile was an aggressive undertaking for the countries of Somalia and Ethiopia but thanks to the complexities of their detailed patent. This project should only require the minimum of sixty days.”

The room began clapping as she continued. She was completely fluent as she explained.

“This project will cost 250 million dollars per installation, however, in turn this reduces drought resuscitation costs by three

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trillion dollars and restores Brazil's chances of a surplus. This is truly a miracle that will forward Brazil into a place of prominence. Thank you," Eduardo was extremely proud as Jane returned to her seat from the podium. It was a monumental achievement for them both.

"You should stay in Sao Paulo," they were standing outside as he mentioned it.

"I can't. I have to return to Harvard, sir."

"I'll give you a full-time position and full scholarship at USP," he explained.

"I need time to think about this," Immediately, she called her mother.

"That's incredible, sweetheart. We always knew you had it in you. So you will take it won't you?" April asked.

"It's USP. Chris is there. I'm not sure," she replied.

"Honey, this is great opportunity for you. You can't turn down something like this," April was serious as she replied.

"But....he's here," Jane mumbled.

"Honey, so what! So what! He's there. Listen to me, don't you ever let any man keep you from any opportunity," she explained, "Eugenia would've wanted this."

"You're right."

"Of course, I am."

"My things...."

"Don't worry, honey, I'll send them. Just stay there. Congratulations!!!!" as April hung up she immediately ran into Kareem.

"Our daughter is an executive architect at Goldmans. She's Eduardo Bourdain's right hand!"

"That's incredible. She's only been there a few weeks! Oh my God. This family won't stop!!" Kareem was excited as he held his wife.

"We're so blessed."

"We are honey, we really are."

# FIRST CONTACT

“So it’s a yes then?” Eduardo asked as Jane stood before him.

“I would be honored, sir.”

“It’s great to have you,” he smiled as she began to walk away, “Hey, Jane. Come back. Take this.”

It was a scarlet binder with over one hundred companies under siege.

“I expect you to know everything in that portfolio by next week.”

“Of course, sir.” She was overjoyed.

“How long are you here for, Jane?” Sydney asked her. It was the week before their third year and Jane had officially transferred from Harvard to USP.

“I’m here for the last two years and then I’m going back to Harvard for Business School,” Jane smiled.

“I’m sorry, Jane. I gotta take this it’s my boyfriend,” Sydney smiled.

“Babe, I meet up with you later. I’m with my cousin,” Sydney explained.

“Ok, well don’t be long alright?” Chris asked. Jane felt a little uneasy as she heard his voice but didn’t think it was who she thought it was.

Once Jane settled into her dorm, she decided to make a phone call.

“Jane? Oh my God! You didn’t?” It was Anisa.

“Yes, I did.”

“Does he know you’re there?” she smiled.

“No actually, I want to surprise him.”

“Good for you, honey but keep your eyes open,” she replied as she hung up. Just as Jane hung up, she could see Chris three feet ahead of her. All she could dream up was running towards him but all she could do was sit there and watch him from a distance. As she watched Chris, she also noticed a smiling Sydney approaching him.

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At first, she was stunned that they knew each other but even more stunned to see him place his arm around her and kiss her.

Jane felt her heart break out in smiles as she began to stifle. There he was, the guy she fell in love with, holding someone else. Clearly, in love with someone else. She didn't understand why Sydney never told her or much less, if she even knew of his past with her.

Once Jane entered her first class on World History for the day, all she could think about was Chris. He further cemented in her mind as he sat down a few chairs in front of her. He didn't notice then so she stayed to herself and watched him.

“All I’m saying sir, is that North Korea has made vast improvements since Hee Young’s presidency. Progress is progress! It’s only a matter of time before Korea is one again. Right now, it seems far but they will get there!” Chris was passionate as he spoke in Korea’s defense.

“On what merit can you honestly suggest this, Chris. South and North Korea will and always be in opposition with one another. Your siting is baseless. Not only are you inaccurate, the argument you are making is rather aggressive.”

“I don’t think he’s argumentative or aggressive. Passionate would be the proper term, sir.” He felt his heart jolt in knots as he heard her voice. He couldn’t move his head forward as he feared seeing her.

“To agree on what my colleague is saying as a dual citizen of both Korea and America, I have to agree with Christopher. Korea has made significant progress in recent years,” Jane continued.

“Excuse me, sir,” Chris could no longer hear her speak and left the room.

“When were you gonna tell me you were here?” Chris and Jane were standing outside near an open park as they spoke.

“I’m not here to make things any more difficult for you than they’ve become, Chris.”

# FIRST CONTACT

“You think? Are you really serious about that?”

“Yes.”

“You were my life, Jane! My life!”

“Do you love my cousin?” Jane asked.

“What??”

“Sydney, you must have known, Chris. Really you didn’t know. Surely you must have known. How long have you been seeing her? A year. Oh...Two years.”

“What was I supposed to do?”

“You were not supposed to give up on me!”

“Look, I don’t want to fight with you. You’re here and as angry as I am at you. I don’t want us to be like this. Can we at least work at being friends?” she walked away as he mentioned the word.

“This isn’t a bar! How could you guys not have Soju? I need to return to Norfolk. We have Soju there,” Jane was extremely drunk as she sat at *Juarez’ Bar*.

“You don’t need anymore,” Diego was sitting a few stools away from Jane.

“Can you answer a question for me, sir? You’re handsome by the way. Ooo. You’re really handsome. How does a guy get a new girlfriend after being with one for over four years?” she was delighted with Diego as she asked.

“The same way a woman can do the same thing. It’s called free enterprise. Just like a store can choose not to carry a product anymore, it can also replace it with a new one.”

“You’re an asshole!” she threw her drink on the table as she looked at him, “This guy is an asshole!”

“What guy broke your heart?” Diego asked.

“Christopher Dresden.”

“Oh, Chris. Oh...you were the girlfriend! It really took him a while to get over you,” Diego smiled.

“Of course, you know him. Damn, that guy really gets around. He didn’t waste anytime to start dating my cousin.”

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“Sydney. Is your cousin?” Diego was further intrigued as he sat beside Jane. She leaned her head up against his shoulder as she closed her eyes.

“Yes, my dad is her uncle but enough about her! I’m more interested in how many drinks you can take. I’ll pay for our uber! Please drink with me,” Jane then passed Diego her bottle.

“Oh, what the hell.” Four drinks later....

“Sydney is your cousin!!!!” Jane couldn’t believe it as she looked at Diego.

“Yeah, her grandfather, my grandfather.”

“Wait you are!! Oh God..I’m so embarrassed please don’t tell your father. He’s such a great man!”

“Wait, you are the White Phoenix, aren’t you?” Diego laughed.

“The White Phoenix? I have a nickname?”

“Yeah, he talks a lot about you. You are quite the genius.”

She completely dismissed him as she continued her rant.

“It’s crazy, the conversations we’ve had over the phone about her guy. My guy. How did I miss the memo?” Jane asked Diego as she smiled at him.

“No but your father is a great guy. Really good person. He is. She is not. She isn’t. She took my guy. She broke the code. She broke it.”

“Code.”

“Carr girls don’t take Carr men.”

“How could she have gotten that memo, Jane?”

“Damnit, you’re right. You are. You heard me. I said it. You’re right.” He laughed as he held her up.

“Sydney is a good person,” Diego explained.

“I know. That’s why it hurts. I know. That’s why I hate her.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself,” he said as he smiled at her, “You love them both.”

“I do. What am I going to do?”

# FIRST CONTACT

“You do what you came here to do. Don’t focus too much on them.”

“How?”

“You let yourself mourn for a little while and then you put his happiness before your own and let him go. It’ll take you a while but you’ll get there,” Diego explained.

“You’re right,” Jane smiled and Diego escorted Jane back to her dorm. It was the following morning when Jane pulled Chris aside to finally settle things.

“Listen, I don’t want us to be this way with each other anymore so if you are willing to put our differences aside and be friends...I’m all for it.”

“*I can respect that,*” Chris smiled.

It was awkward for them at first but they did it. Chris, Jane, Sydney and Diego, all four, maintained two great years of friendship but the relationship between Chris and Jane was too visible for Sydney not to acknowledge it. It was a year and a half once Chris, Jane, Diego and Sydney graduated. Each of them wanted to pursue separate paths.

Diego and Jane maintained a great friendship and chose never to pursue a relationship with one another. Especially, due to the fact that Jane was his dad’s right hand. Chris and Sydney were still going strong but Sydney’s opportunity to enter Columbia’s MBA program would pull them apart.

“I have to do what is best for me. I don’t think I should sacrifice this opportunity. Not for you,” Sydney suggested.

“How could you say that?” Chris asked.

“Because you still love her and I need someone who is going to look at me the way you look at her. I need someone who will love me the way you love Jane,” Sydney explained.

“I love you, Sydney.”

“Not the way you love her.” Chris and Jane did not begin a relationship immediately after Sydney left Chris and though they

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both successfully entered in *Harvard Business School*. It took a few months at a time but eventually, they found their way back to each other.

Chris was at the top of his class at *Harvard Business School* with Jane as his salutatorian, she was still working for Eduardo and occasionally would travel with him around the country to assist stores. Once they both graduated, during dinner with both their parents, in Norfolk, Chris got on one knee and proposed to Jane.

The wedding of Chris and Jane was the event of the season at the *Founders Inn* in Virginia Beach. With the help of her bridesmaids notably Anisa, Alexis, and Sydney's older sister *Celine*, they planned on of the most beautiful weddings outdoors ever. Chris' groomsmen were Diego, Andrew, Zach, Harris, *Jamison* (*Jane's younger brother*), Thomas, Kareem Jr., and Louis. Her white six thousand piece embroidered *Eugenia* gown was designed by none other than her sister Allegra, for three months. She could not be there but her spirit was completely veiled in the dress.

“If a man is uncertain. If you are uncertain. If there's any uncertainty, do not marry him,” Jane could feel her mother's words weigh on her heart as she remembered her recording.

“I can't do this,” Jane was frantic as she walked back and forth in her wedding gown. It was already enough her sister couldn't attend.

“I thought you said the dreams were all good,” Anisa explained.

“It doesn't matter! It won't erase what I saw!”

“What's happening here?” Celine asked Jane.

“Jane, I know you're scared, but there are over three hundred people outside waiting for you to marry this man,” Anisa explained, “What could have possibly happened in the last forty-eight hours that would make you like this?”

“Is there something you're not telling us?” Alexis asked as she looked at her friend.

# FIRST CONTACT

“He kissed her. He kissed her!” Jane threw her bouquet across the room as she grew more frustrated.

“Slow down, honey! What, Who, When?” Alexis asked as she tried to sit her down.

“Jesus!” Anisa began to tear up as she looked at Jane. She was so beautiful. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“Sydney.”

Celine couldn’t believe what she’d heard as Jane mentioned it.

“When the hell did this happen? A few months ago? Last year? Last week?” Celine asked as she couldn’t believe her sister, “Wait you’re telling me this shit happened last week! Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Shit!!!” Jane took off her stiletto and broke the mirror in front of her.

“It wasn’t her fault. He kissed her but she didn’t reciprocate it.”

“That’s bullshit. She should’ve told us,” Marisa said as she walked through the door, she was completely disappointed as she listened.

“But he loves you, Jane,” Sydney walked into the room as the women surrounded her.

“Speak of the devil, This is why I didn’t want to be a bridesmaid,” Marisa wasn’t happy to see Sydney.

“You should’ve told us about Chris, Syd,” Alexis was disappointed in Sydney as she brought it up.

“Look everyone. I can’t do this. Not right now. Sydney...as furious as I am with you. I know it wasn’t your fault,” Jane insisted, “Everyone get ready to go out. Sydney and Anisa, stay.”

“Are you sure about this?” Marisa asked.

“Yes, I love you guys now go!”

“We are going to talk about this shit later,” Celine insisted as she looked at Sydney.

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As Jane and Sydney looked at each other, the tension grew the longer the seconds flew by.

“Listen, I think you’ve misinterpreted what you saw. In all respect, Jane,” Sydney explained.

“His lips were on yours what else was there to see?” Jane replied.

“His intentions were stupid and completely unfair towards you. Particularly, his reasons,” Sydney continued, “You know about our history but Jane we hadn’t been together in years.”

“What were his reasons then?” Jane asked as she listened to Sydney.

“He told me the kiss was due to his uncertainty,” Sydney was gentle as she looked at Jane, “He wanted to know if he still had feelings for me.”

“So you’re saying you let him kiss you. Is that what I didn’t see?”

“No, but afterwards he explained himself. Listen, Jane, you will never have to worry about me interfering in your marriage. Not only did I respect you as a person but also as a woman. I could never do this to anyone. I am still your cousin. I love you,” a tear came down Jane’s eye as Sydney spoke.

“I know you do but it still doesn’t stop me from hurting,” Sydney left the room in tears as Jane broke down.

“What do you want to do, Jane?” Anisa asked her as she held her shoulder.

“I don’t know. How can I expect him to be faithful if he can’t even do it for 48 hours?” she threw her head up as she said it.

# FIRST CONTACT

“What he did was foolish and it probably meant nothing to him. But I’m sure he didn’t anticipate you finding out. Not right now. Do you think men sometimes feel how much they hurt us?” Anisa wondered.

“How did you forgive Harris, Anisa?”

“Do you really wanted to know?” she asked.

“Really, how did you forgive him?”

“I didn’t, Jane. I didn’t. Not right away but I got there. I certainly didn’t see a future for us when I found out about Jamir. I couldn’t understand how he could possibly have a baby on me and we hadn’t been together only a few weeks. It took me a while but when I held Jamir for the first time. I got there. Chris hasn’t given you a Jamir, Jane, but it doesn’t negate how much he’s hurt you,” Jane began to laugh in tears as Anisa wiped her face, “Oh, Sweetheart, I know you don’t want to hear this. You cannot marry him today. If you do, the two of you will never have a chance.”

“I know...but I really wanted to. I really wanted to....I did,” she cried.

“I know... I know....” she cradled Jane and wiped her tears, “Are you ready?”

“Yes. I’m ready.”

“Ok, time to make his ass pay.”

As Kareem began to walk Jane down the aisle. Everyone included was filled with excitement about her marriage to Chris but many were surprised by Jane’s disposition once she stood in front of him. She knew what she had to do.

How could she have allowed herself to marry a man who was uncertain about her much less of a man she spotted kissing another woman a few hours before their wedding. She knew something was wrong with her and she couldn’t fix it not as his wife.

“Christopher, I’m sorry. I can’t be your wife.” The guests were filled with grief as they heard her words. He was in complete

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disbelief as he heard her. He loved her with so much of who he was but for her that wasn't enough.

"I can't marry someone who's uncertain about me. Even now, I realize Chris that even in your uncertainty, I should have been more certain about myself than you were. I'm sorry, everyone. There will be no marriage today. Not for us." Her bridesmaids then picked up her gown and helped her begin to leave the grounds.

"Jane, don't you still love me?" Chris asked.

"I have to find that for myself first before I can give you that," Jane cried as she looked back.

"Oh my God. Is she really going to leave him at the altar like this? What did he do to her?" Lauren whispered to Will. They were in shock along with everyone else.

"Our daughter has just left the building," Kareem said to April as they watched her.

"I've never seen her like this..."

"The last time they broke up," Kareem smiled.

"This time it's Sydney."

"What should we do then?" Kareem asked.

"We clean out your mancave and turn it back in to her old bedroom," April suggested.

"Damnit, I was enjoying being in there. I swear that kid better not show his face to me again asking for my daughter's hand. I even helped him pick out the ring!"

"Those two will be apart for two years, get back together and we all will be here again. I'm telling you that's what's going to happen. Let's just go home, honey. They're adults. Let them sort this out," April replied.

"How much money did we put down for this wedding? What did he do to her?" Kareem asked April.

"Calm down, honey. She's with friends. She'll come to us at home."

# FIRST CONTACT

“Son, what just happened?” Andrew asked Chris. He couldn’t believe what happened before his eyes.

“I fucked it up! I fucked it up!” Chris was pacing back and forth as he looked at everyone. They were then in a private room. Will and Thomas were there. Thomas was one of his groomsmen.

“Listen, man, you’ve got to calm down,” Thomas tried to ease Chris as they stood in a private room.

“I can’t. What just happened?” He was in complete denial.

“Did you really kiss Sydney a few days ago?” Andrew asked his son.

“I wasn’t like that dad, I was so drunk I didn’t know what I was thinking,” Chris explained.

“She saw the two of you, didn’t she?” Will asked.

“How??”

“You just answered your question right there, son. Did you think about telling her?” Andrew asked.

“It happened so fast. I didn’t even realize it happened. A lot of shit happened that night. You know you were there!” Chris explained.

“She’s leaving you, kid!! She’s gone!!” *Zach* joined the man in near tears of laughter as he looked Chris.

“It’s not that you did it. It’s more so you didn’t tell her about it. I think.”

“Because it didn’t matter. I should talk to her parents.”

“Woah. Kid, they’re the last two people you should be talking to,” Zach explained.

“What the hell did you do to my daughter, kid!” Kareem was furious as he stepped into the room.

“Woah, hey!!!” Will, Thomas and Andrew went to his defense.

“I’m sorry, sir. It wasn’t like that!” Chris was sincere as he looked at Kareem.

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“So what you didn’t want my daughter so you kissed my niece? If you wanted to be a part of the family, you’re doing one hell of a job!” Kareem replied.

“The hell it wasn’t. This is an embarrassment.”

“Here, man. Relax man, here take these, go get her,” Thomas handed Chris his keys, “Be real with her. Chris...Listen to me...Don’t wreck my truck.”

“No, let me drive him. He’s in no condition,” Zach requested.

“Did we really just see Jane walk out on Chris?” Malcolm asked as he entered the room.

“Yeah, in front of three hundred people to be exact and a few news outlets,” Thomas replied.

“Are you really sure about this, sweetie?” Anisa asked as she drove.

“Yes. He’s a fucking liar and I never want to see him again. I knew he still wanted her,” It was a major sore in her heart, she wanted to clean immediately.

“What was he thinking? He seemed so sure of himself the last time I talked to him.”

“Yeah. He was sure alright. Sure, he wasn’t going to tell Jane,” Anisa replied, “We have to get you out of that apartment before he gets back. Sad. This is so typical for a man. They never feel remorseful until their caught.”

“Makeba, look at this. #Runawaybride. #Makeba 2.0.” Lauren laughed as she saw Chris and Jane trending on Twitter.

“I can’t believe you. This is so awful,” Makeba couldn’t help but laugh as she looked at all the tweets.

“Look, our son is a headline, again,” Tatiana gave Andrew her phone.

“He’s gonna make this right, honey. We shouldn’t have to worry. I’m hoping,” Andrew explained.

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“It isn’t. It won’t. It won’t,” Tatiana asked, “Chris has loved that girl since they were teenagers and he just won’t get it right.”

“Do you think he can get her back? What are his chances you think?” Lauren asked Will after he rejoined her.

“Zero out of zero but he should at least try,” Will replied.

“Do you think she’s still at the apartment?” Chris asked Zach as he drove.

“Yeah, she’s there. Will she want to see you, no,” Zach explained.

“So what am I supposed to do? I can’t just let her leave me.”

“Before your aunt and I got married, I took a project with one of her enemies from high school. It meant nothing to me that she hated this woman. In my eyes, it was just business. She told me the woman bullied her profusely and that she nearly committed suicide. She broke up with me. Her exit wasn’t as dramatic as Jane but it damn sure was pretty close to it.”

“How did you fix it?”

“I apologized, got on my knees and begged and she still left anyway,” he explained.

“When did she come back?”

“It took her a year or so to look at me the same but she got there. Seriously, with all respect, son, you have to let her go.”

“Did you hear? It’s not happening!!” the studio audience clapped as Aurora Wright sat in her big chair that afternoon. This was an exclusive.

“Jane Carr just left Christopher Dresden at the altar. Really!!! Here’s the photos. Oh yes!!! Alright, settle down, settle down. Yes, we do. We have the details. You know, we have the inside details. So as you know Chris has a history with two Carr women. He dated Jane since high school but he was Sydney for two years while in college. I said it. I said it. I knew it would be a problem.”

“No!!!” one of the audience members yelled.

## MALCOLM DRESDEN

“Yes!! He did it. Forty-eight hours right before the wedding!!! Chris kissed his fiancé’s cousin thirteen feet away from her. Ugh. This is just awful for both families, really is. You won’t believe how much their parents spent on this wedding. Three million dollars. Yes!!!Yes!! So as of right now, we were told Jane is already leaving their Downtown Norfolk apartment. He’s reportedly extremely sorry about the situation and said it meant nothing but his actions says otherwise. Clap if you would forgive him.” Crickets.

“Sad, sad, story. Well, there you have it. Good luck to you both.”

“Are you ok?” Anisa asked Jane as they stood in the parking lot.

“No but I will be, you should go back and cancel the festivities,” Jane replied. She was stoic as she stood before Anisa. Anisa couldn’t help but be saddened as she looked at how beautiful Jane was.

“Ok, you call me alright?”

“I will.”

As Jane stood in the doorway of she and Chris’ apartment, she stood in silence, she couldn’t believe she was here again. She didn’t know whether she should destroy everything or just leave but deep in her soul, as she turned on her music player, she found her answer. All she ever wanted was to be *happy*.

It wasn’t long before she’d taken off her wedding dress but she kept playing the song. It was her lifeline. *Be Happy* by Mary J. Blige.

“Mommy, come and get my things. I’m leaving.” April was in tears as she heard Jane’s few words. She has nowhere to put the clothes so she threw as much as she could on the bed. It took a while but before she could realize it, she was fully dressed in a red lip and a suitcase packed ready for *her* newly bought penthouse in New Hampshire.

# FIRST CONTACT

As Chris approached their apartment, he was filled with grief.

“I told you., I’m not marrying you. Not today,” she explained. She was fighting to hold her composure as she looked at him. He was so broken as he watched her.

“Baby, please stop this,” he grabbed her hand as she stripped it away from him. She could see the vulnerability in his eyes as he looked at her.

“You’re a mess! Don’t touch me! You’re lucky you’re still alive!” Jane replied. She felt her tears pressing through her eyelids.

“Jane!” he was on his knees as he stared at her.

“You know, I would’ve taken you back if you just told me the truth but then I thought about it! What good could that have done anyway? This isn’t about Sydney. You completely disrespected our entire relationship!” she yelled as her tears found their way out, “This is not fucking housewives! Kissing my bridesmaids’ sister seven days before we stand at the altar! I can’t even fucking look at you!”

“It meant nothing! Baby, she’s nothing compared to who you are to me,” He tried to hold as she pierced him with her disappointment.

“So what do you expect me to do? Marry you! You fucked everything up! My life, you fucked up everything! Get away from...”

She couldn’t fight him as she pressed his lips on her. She could feel her broken heart fill with frustration and unconditional love as she kissed him. She just wanted to stay there for a minute and erase the moments but her heartache wouldn’t let her. They kissed for nearly fifteen seconds. She felt her strength return to her after they released and managed to finally distance herself from him.

“Let me go, Chris! Please just let me go!” He couldn’t say another word to her. All he could do was look in her eyes. He just wanted her to stay there forever. The picture was so clear and vivid, he just wanted to look at it a little longer.

## MALCOLM DRESDEN

“This isn’t fair. Jane, if you leave me. I don’t know if I’ll ever forgive you,” his body was weak as he spoke. The many tears from his eyelids had left him at an impasse. His throat was too weak to utter another vow. Her anger stifled him with an overwhelming well full of remorse and regret. Will, Thomas, Malcolm, Zach, and Harris surrounded him when he answered the door.

“That woman nearly killed me. As angry as I was with her. Knowing that she knew the truth. I couldn’t be mad with her,” Chris told David.

“You were surprised when she came back weren’t you?” David asked. They were sitting at Buffalo Wild Wings watching a game and enjoying wings.

“I knew then we were soulmates but I think I was too consumed with her. It was good she left. She broke me and I never believed I deserved her. I was angry at women for a while,” Chris mentioned.

David thought of Sydney as Chris mentioned it. Every day, he was consumed with her.

“I get it. With Sydney, things seemed to always go north for me when I left her. I felt like the world was falling on my shoulders.”

“It’s sad that you pushed her away but I get it. It’s safer but don’t you think life is boring that way?” Chris asked.

David was silent as Chris spoke. “How did you regroup after she left you?”

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“I worked a lot on myself. It took a while but I got there. I ended up in a relationship with this girl who was completely bad for me and it made me come to the conclusion I needed to be alone for a little while. I took a few years or so. I didn’t really know myself or what I wanted. Of course, I had a few relationships but they were mutually short. Eventually, I started to travel.”

“Work on my spiritual life, listen to my mother’s films, write in journals about everywhere I went, did volunteer work, worked out, everything but be in a committed relationship for a few years. I recovered. I discovered I could be alone and still be happy,” Jane explained to Sydney.

“Eventually, Jane showed up in my world again,” Chris laughed.

“Only this time, he was different. Everything about him was different. He was more confident. More mature and certain of himself,” Jane explained.

“More certain of herself. This wasn’t the same girl I dated in high school.”

“I was cool with it,” Jane told Sydney.

“We were now two completely different people and for the first time, we fit,” Chris mentioned.

“Thank you, Chris.”

“Anytime, Sydney.”

Before Chris talked to David, he decided to pay a special couple a visit. He hadn’t sat down to speak with April and Kareem since he started seeing Jane again the last few months but he knew then was ready to see them.

“I want to marry your daughter for real this time,” Chris was optimistic as he sat in front of Kareem and April.

## MALCOLM DRESDEN

“How long have you two been seeing each other since she returned to Norfolk?” Kareem asked.

“It’s been a few months but it’s feels like it’s been a few years,” Chris replied.

“It takes about just as long to make a decision this big. You have to understand how we feel. We’ve been through Chris and Jane 1.0, 2.0 and now 3.0. What’s different this time?” April asked.

“You heard the woman, son, what’s different?” Kareem asked.

“Jane is no longer my high school girlfriend from Norview High. She’s a woman. Sir, if you don’t mind me asking. Do you know what it’s like not to want to look at other women?”

Kareem began to hold April’s hand as he looked seriously at Chris.

“I don’t know what happened in the past three years but she fills me up. Her smile, her laugh, every part of her gives me a reason to want to live and I can’t explain why. I’ve never felt this way before. These feelings. You have my word as a man, I promise to never bring a tear to her eye. Please allow me to have her?”

“Do you have a ring?” April teared up as she asked.

“Would you both like to see it?” Chris asked. They nodded as he pulled out the box. As he opened it, they only had one response.

“You have our permission, kid. Now don’t blow it,” Kareem shook his hand and nearly broke it. Afterwards, they both embraced him.

“To give a lot of love is a great thing. Relationships can be great but they don’t sum up completely who you are. You must have vanity above it all for yourself. Save it for yourself. Even it’s just a little. It’s frowned upon often but it is a great tool for pressing past survival into great discovery. For me, the most important thing you girls can ever do is love yourself,” It was her fiftieth time listening to this recording of Eugenia. Jane was smiling as she sat and watched

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her mother. It was the day of her mother's death. Her phone then began to ring.

"Hi, Janie, I'm just calling to see how you are," It was Anisa.

"I'm ok. Just watching one of my mom's old recording. When are you coming down to Virginia?"

"I wish I could this year but I've been quite busy these days with work," she replied while smiling.

"Wait? Are you?" Jane walked towards the front door and opened it.

"Hi, Janie," Anisa laughed. It had been two months since the last time she's seen her. They'd always talked on the phone three days a week.

"I'm so happy to see you. How long are you in town for?" she asked.

"Just a few days. How is your third go around with Christopher?" she asked.

"It's different. I'm supposed to have dinner with him in a few. You should come with me. He'd be happy to see you." Jane then threw on her shoes and went down the elevator with Anisa.

"What is this.." Jane began to smile as she began to walk down the hallway with Anisa.

"It looks like Sakura petals." Jane did not think much of them at first as they continued. Soft music then began to ascend as the two sisters walked close. There was something so familiar about the instrumental as they walked closer. She couldn't remember where she heard it but it was so familiar to her. The cherry blossoms began to double as they continued.

"Oh my God!!!" She began to tear up instantly as the foyer of the apartment building was filled with pink roses and mounted candles. She could smell her mother's *Sakura oil* in the air as Anisa smiled at her in tears.

"How long did you know about this?" she asked Anisa as she was filled with excitement for her.

## MALCOLM DRESDEN

“He’s been planning this since you got back to Virginia,” Anisa replied.

“Chris played this song for me once. He told me his father played this song for his mother when he proposed,” Jane smiled in tears. He played the song for her the night of their prom while driving.

“Are you ready?” Anisa asked.

As she couldn’t believe her eyes. Everyone of their parents were there and nearly half their family and friends. Two cherry blossoms trees were positioned in front of them as they walked out. The petals fell softly before the crowd as everyone smiled at her.

“Hi, Jane!!!” everyone shouted.

“Chris? What is this??” She couldn’t control her emotions as he stood before her. He then got on one knee and pulled out a red velvet box. Anisa went to embrace her husband as they witnessed.

“Will you ride out this life with me?” as he opened the box, Jane was overwhelmed with emotion. The ring was extraordinary and immaculately detailed. He called it *the Eugenia*. It was a *18-carat cherry blossom cut pink diamond*. Chris had worked tirelessly with Allegra to craft the ring.

“Say yes, honey!!” April cried.

“I’m alright with that!.” It was one of the highest moments of her life. Somehow, this time they made it. This time, they finally got it right.