

*I should never have agreed to this.*

Jordan was more familiar with radio studios than she wanted to be. The one she now occupied was definitely the nicest she had experienced. Not that niceness took away any of the distaste for having to be there. Jordan didn't even listen to the station the interview was for. That should have gotten her out of the interview. She missed the anonymity she'd had before the GenPhage story. If this was what success looked like, she wasn't sure she wanted it.

The icing on the cake was getting to do the interview on a Sunday. Nothing like starting a long-overdue week off by having to rehash old news. When she pressed her editor Tom about why it was necessary to still talk about a story that was months old, he advised Jordan that she shouldn't turn down an opportunity to get her name and face in front of the public. It could always lead to another story. So here she was.

This particular studio, enclosed in a large glass room, was centered around a white oval table that had to be at least ten feet wide in diameter. The surface of the table just in front of Jordan and her interviewer was clear of equipment, only the boom microphones being in their general vicinity. An engineer sat on the opposite side of the table with an array of computer screens and audio equipment at his fingertips.

The host—Jordan thought her name was Paige—sat beside her, about three feet away. Based on her attire, one would never know the interview wasn't for TV. A tight black skirt and a white silk top with a faint floral pattern graced her not-so-slim figure. Long painted nails, sporting the sheen of a fresh coat of gel polish, matched her yellow pumps. Paige's look contrasted sharply with Jordan's white tank top, ripped jeans, and leather boots.

Paige sat in her chair with perfect posture, looking through her notes, probably reviewing the sequence of questions. Slouched in her chair, Jordan looked at one of the several large clocks in the studio. They had less than five minutes until airtime.

Following the publication of the GenPhage story, the media had inundated Jordan with interview requests. The story had shocked the city, triggering the downfall of what had been hailed as the latest jewel in Boston's crown of biotech superiority. Too bad for them someone had gone rogue and hidden the testing of a biological weapon within a clinical trial program. Among some other nasty and illegal actions.

Poised to do what was going to be her fourteenth interview, Jordan had had more than enough of GenPhage. She almost wished she hadn't broken the story. Almost.

In the end, taking out the criminals at GenPhage was worth the torture inflicted on Jordan's introverted personality by interviews. But she was now at the end of her rope. This was going to be her last one. No one, especially neither of her editors, was going to make her do another interview.

In Jordan's mind, there was no need to revisit the GenPhage story. It was officially old news. But it seemed that every major event in either the dismantling of the company or the array of investigations triggered renewed interest. In both the story and Jordan.

The latest trigger event was a large pharma company's withdrawal of its offer to purchase the GenPhage technology. The rumor was that some key components of the technology couldn't be located. So, naturally, someone thought it was a good reason to drag Jordan through the whole mess one more time.

"Can we get this over with?" Jordan said.

Paige looked annoyed. Jordan had gotten a vibe from her that Jordan should be thankful for the interview. That somehow Paige was helping her. As if Jordan wanted any more help that involved having to talk in front of the public. She had definitely had her fill.

"I'm almost ready. I just want to make sure I'm not missing anything. We still have a couple of minutes. Relax. I'm sure you'll do fine."

Condescension. Paige had no idea how much Jordan hated that. In her defense, how could she? But if Paige thought such an approach was, in some way, going to help, she was mistaken.

"I'm not worried about doing fine. I could care less how I do. Since the story was first published, I must have answered a thousand questions about it. I can't believe there's anything new I could add."

"We'll see. I'm sure I have a question you haven't seen yet. Even if I don't, it doesn't really matter. People still want to hear from the woman who destroyed a company. And it's my job to give them what they want."

*I didn't destroy that fucking company.*

"Is that what this interview is about? To talk about destroying a company?"

Paige looked at Jordan, apparently confused. "Well, that's what happened, right? You did your exposé, and the company more or less collapsed. Maybe 'destroyed' is too strong, since it still technically exists. But that won't last long."

Jordan leaned forward. Either Paige didn't know what had really happened, or she didn't care. Neither was acceptable.

"Your facts need some adjustment," Jordan began. "First, I didn't do some exposé. It was a thorough investigative report. Second, the purpose wasn't to destroy a company. It was to uncover the facts around the death of a worker, which led to the discovery of much worse than that. Third, GenPhage destroyed itself. The actions of a few of their leaders guaranteed that. I was just the one who caught them."

For the first time since they'd met, Paige looked flustered. Jordan looked at the clock. One minute to airtime.

"All right, I get it," Paige said. "We're about to go live. Let's just settle in for the interview. I won't make a big deal about you destroying GenPhage."

"No, you won't." Jordan got out of her chair and grabbed her bag.

Panic formed on Paige's face. "What are you doing? Sit down. We're about to start."

"Not anymore." Jordan turned and left the studio. She heard people calling after her as she walked down the hall. She ignored them. Just like she'd ignore every future request for an interview on GenPhage. It was time to move on. And moving on would start with a week off, Jordan's first real vacation since she started at the *Boston Courant*.

On autopilot, Jordan headed to Darcy's Pub. She almost regretted having her car. The afternoon was so nice that the hour walk would have provided an opportunity to unwind. Instead, she took half the time to fight through late-afternoon traffic, increasing her stress instead of reducing it.

As was the case every Sunday, in fact, almost every day, period, Travis was behind the bar, working hard to make the business a success. He had been co-owner and manager for three years and seemed to know what it took to keep the place in the black.

"Hey, Travis," Jordan said as she approached the bar, noting that her usual seat wasn't available.

"Sorry I couldn't hold your spot at the bar. If you want a table, you can take the one by the kitchen door with the 'Reserved' sign on it. I'll swing by in a minute."

Jordan looked toward the kitchen door and saw the table. Definitely not as nice a spot as her usual place at the bar. But Travis was right. She was late. "I guess it'll do."

One of the staff came by with her drink, no doubt sent by Travis. Jordan ordered a grilled-chicken salad and tried to enjoy her drink as she watched the staff cycle in and out of the kitchen. It felt like forever before her food arrived, but in actuality, it had been only ten minutes. Travis brought it himself.

He sat down opposite Jordan. “Sorry for the shitty table. I figured you weren’t coming in tonight and had to let someone have your spot. Didn’t you have that interview today?”

“I did. But the interviewer pissed me off before we were supposed to start. So I left. Besides, I’m done with the GenPhage shit. I’ve got nothing more to add.”

“Tom’s not going to be happy. Did he call yet?”

“He tried. I let his call go to voice mail.”

“Not a good move for job security.”

“Maybe not. Hopefully, it will make him think twice before he asks me to do an interview again.”

“I get that you’re done with the story. But it was big news. And you along with the story. Get used to it. Unless you don’t want the big stories.”

“Part of me thinks I should stick to boring little stories that don’t generate a lot of attention. Being in the spotlight sucks.”

Travis sat back and crossed his arms. “You don’t mean that. I remember how excited you were about that story. You were on fire and kept pushing ahead, no matter what those GenPhage guys did to try to stop you. You were in your element, even if it didn’t feel like it.”

This triggered a strong memory of Emma. What Jordan thought could have become a good friendship was really a setup. “It wasn’t just GenPhage ‘guys.’ The GenPhage girls, at least one of them, did a pretty good job as well.”

“Yeah, but you came out on top.”

Jordan smiled around the edge of her glass. “I suppose I did.”

Jordan and Travis sat in a momentary bubble of silence, Jordan eating her salad and Travis taking advantage of the break from slinging drinks. “Shouldn’t you be at the bar helping your staff keep up?”

“Yeah, I should. But I want to run something by you.”

“You really don’t have to,” Jordan said. “I don’t want to have to make any decisions or give any opinions.”

“Just hear what I’ve got. I promised someone.”

“I already don’t like whatever it is. Can’t it wait until I finish my week off?”

“Not really. There’s a situation you should take a look at. You know, maybe for a story.”

Jordan stopped eating and set her fork down on her plate. “Let me rephrase my earlier comment. Can’t it wait until never?”

“Come on. At least hear me out and then decide. You’ve published little since the GenPhage story. You need to keep the momentum going.”

“Says you. I’m quite happy letting the momentum come to a complete standstill for a while.”

Travis put his forearms on the table and leaned in. “Jordan, it’s been long enough. GenPhage was last November. It’s practically July. Don’t you think it’s time to move on to the next big story?”

“Damn, Travis, if this is so important to you, do it yourself or find someone else. I’m not interested.”

“How can you say that without even knowing what I have to tell you?”

Jordan threw herself back against her chair and crossed her arms. “If I give you two minutes, will you leave me alone?”

“Deal.”

“Spill it.”

“No need to be so hostile. I’m just looking out for you.”

Jordan uncrossed her arms and resumed eating. “OK, sorry. Tell me.”

Travis smiled, probably because he knew it was a rare event for Jordan to apologize. Even sarcastically. “A guy I know from college called me this morning. His younger sister, Kasey, works at a marina in western Massachusetts. A place called Copper Lake. Apparently, one of the water-sports instructors at the marina came upon a whole mess of dead fish washed up on the shore. The local police were informed, and according to my friend’s sister, they did nothing.”

“That’s it? Some dead fish the local cops didn’t want to deal with is supposed to be some big story? Sounds like a lot of nothing to me.”

“Well, the guy who found the dead fish said he’s never seen anything like this before. He grew up on the lake and knows it inside and out. He said there had to be something wrong for so many fish to die at once.”

Jordan stopped eating and leaned back. “Sorry, Travis. I just don’t see much here. It’s probably just some random event that caused this. Hell, maybe some rednecks went fishing with dynamite.”

“Don’t you think it’s worth a quick visit? You could go up there, talk to my friend’s sister and the guy who found the fish. Just poke around a bit and then head back. Just a day.”

“Shit, Travis, I’m at the start of my first whole week off in more than a year. I’ve been looking forward to the break for months. I won’t piss it away chasing some dead fish. Thanks but no thanks.”

“All right. I know you’re looking forward to some downtime.” Travis pulled out his phone and typed something. “Just in case you’re interested, or would consider changing your mind, I texted you some stuff. Pictures of the dead fish, the address of the marina, and Kasey’s mobile number. Just in case.”

“It doesn’t hurt to dream, but I’m not going.” Before dismissing Travis, something came to Jordan’s mind. “Travis, why did your friend call you, anyway? Were you just catching up, or was it about the dead fish?”

“It was mostly about the fish. A while back, I had told him about the GenPhage story and how you nailed them. I guess he remembered and figured that if he told me about the dead fish, I could get you to investigate. You’re kind of famous.”

Jordan groaned. “That’s just great. Now, if you’re not too busy wasting my time, could you get me another drink?”

“No problem. At least one of us will do our job.”