



Dr. Jean stands at the edge of discovery—and danger. Her own DNA holds the key to reshape humanity itself. But there are those who would bury her discovery before it ever sees the light.

Pursuit of Jean

by Jerry W. Lennon & Mary Ann Tobar

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PURSUIT OF JEAN

A woman in a light-colored lab coat is sitting on a glowing blue DNA double helix. She is holding onto the top of the helix with her right hand. She has a serious expression. Around her, four men in dark suits and hats are reaching out their hands towards her, as if trying to catch her or the DNA. The background is a dark blue with faint, embossed patterns of scientific equipment and laboratory glassware.

HER DNA HOLDS THE FUTURE. THEY WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO PREVENT HER FROM GIVING IT TO HUMANITY.

JERRY W. LENNON & MARY ANN TOBAR

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Disclaimer:

We mean no offense or malice to any resemblance of any person living or dead to the fictional characters depicted in this novel. Acknowledgment and gratitude to all who have worked behind the scenes to keep literary arts alive.

PART ONE

Chapter 1

Jean sat in the Jomo Kenyatta Airport café, staring out the window that overlooked the main runway, watching the planes jockey for position before slowly gathering speed and fading into the distance. She checked the heat before sipping a cup of what was said to be the "world's best coffee," produced just a few blocks away on the outskirts of Nairobi. Jean tasted only bitterness and felt no pain as the extra-hot liquid touched her lips. She usually enjoyed the warmth of the coffee and kept the cup raised to her lips. She was trying to feel anything to block her memories of how she got here. Her thoughts returned to the other café in Berkeley, where it all began. *If I had only turned the page.*

She remembered she was truly just happy. It had been a long time since she felt she didn't have to think about anything - - the pressure of school was gone. It was a day she could never forget. She had just received her Master's in Genetic Engineering. She sat in the Union Hall, taking in her classmates. She chuckled as she mentally corrected herself to comply with the home where PC was born -- "upper graduate." She felt a

sense of relief as she watched the undergraduate students scurry to their classes, no longer having to join in their mad rush. She now had more important priorities to focus on -- obtaining a Ph.D. in biological engineering. Thanks to "Auntie," her only obstacle was securing the remaining funding to pursue her goal. Jean knew it was just a matter of time before the right grant came through. Meanwhile, as she waited, she would find a job on campus that would fit her skill set.

She nursed and stirred the steaming, extra-hot 180° coffee to make it tolerable as she read through the campus want ads. She quickly scanned the typical calls for help from those seeking an assistant to aid with ongoing research studies and interpreted the ads as "bottle washers" to fill the positions vacated by students who had graduated and now held their degrees. More power to them, she thought. She flipped through the pages and knew what field and entry-level she would consider. Besides, she had the luxury of being a picky, choosy "biotech bitch" as some classmates called her, because of her ability to always get the best assistant positions due to her knowledge and hard work ethic.

Jean was taught that something is only real when you can see results you can count on and cling to. So, she buried herself in her studies, which got her through her parents' death when they died in a car accident. That was always the answer

whenever she asked about her family. Professors who paid well chose Jean because of her work ethic. Her peers accepted her on a work level, but she was socially outside looking in. Jean had a few classmates who wanted to partner with her because her work ethic intimidated everyone. She was a natural scientist. Jean didn't take anything at face value. She didn't believe any result until she knew the reason and the facts behind the finding. Her way of looking at the world made her a throwback to a few generations where everyone was like her. After the second year of college, Jean resigned herself to the fact that she was a nerd. *If I have to deal with it, so does everyone else.*

She stopped turning the pages and stared at an ad, "Wanted Master's Graduate for Genetic Research. Call 510 947 Key Quantum Key Institute". Without hesitation, Jean dialed, thinking she would leave her number and a quick bio, but on the second ring, an actual voice answered, "Hello?"

Surprised to hear a voice on the other end, she said, "Um, hi! I believe I meet the requirements for the position posted in the *Daily Cal*. My name is Jean Moria. I just graduated from ..." A familiar voice cut her off.

"Jean? Jean Moria? Hi! This Bill, Dr. Jameson. Remember me? I was your faculty advisor in Bio Genetics MCB140L."

"Dr. Jameson? You remember me from third-year undergrad?"

"How could I forget that accent and the student who marched into my office asking for an independent study on a subject that I would not have tackled until I had earned my Master's." Jean was silent as Jameson continued, "Jean, are you applying for the position at Key Institute?" He quickly added, "Are you on campus so we can meet?"

So completely caught off guard, all Jean could manage was a monosyllabic answer, "Yes."

"Great! Let's meet at the South Hall coffee bar. I'd love to have one last scone. Okay? It happens that I am closing up shop here. We, I should say, Key is moving to the Stanford U area. If you're still interested in the position, let's meet in an hour, okay?"

"That would be great, Dr. Jameson."

"Call me Billy. See you in an hour."

She sat stunned, staring at the ad. One of the world's top genetic researchers would meet her in an hour. Her mind raced. *I am not prepared for this.* She said to herself as she glanced at the time. She had maybe 30 minutes to research the Quantum Key Institute. She knew it as one of the most low-key players in the field of genetic research. Dr. Bernard Mayzor, a two-time Nobel prize winner, ran The Quantum Key Institute. He was also from her native home, South Africa. Rumors about the Quantum

Key Institute's project circulated on campus and in trade magazines, but the details were strictly confidential. Not even a patent existed.

She remembered the proposal she submitted to conduct an independent study project in place of her bio laboratory classes for her master's thesis. She glanced at the library clock. She had lost all sense of time and had ten minutes to return to the South Hall. She had to end her background check at the Institute. As she entered the hall, she recognized two men: one, only by reputation, and the other, a tall, lean black man a few years her senior. He stood there, mobbed by students as if he were a rock star. He was signing yearbooks while the older, middle-aged man, the real rock star of the bioscience world, sat paging through a binder, ignoring the crowd clamoring for his attention.

When Dr. Jameson, Billy, looked over in her direction, he stopped signing yearbooks and pointed to the door leading out of the café. He then yelled to Dr. Mayzor and pointed to the blond, pale woman walking uncertainly toward the exit. The two-time Nobel Prize winner looked up, nodded "yes," and stood up. He followed Dr. Jameson out the door, flanked by campus security. Jean waved to Billy, who pointed to an SUV. She nodded, and a chauffeur opened the door and helped her inside—the two men piled in after her.

Dr. Mayzor smiled and greeted her in a language she hadn't heard since she was a teen, except in movies, and beckoned her to sit in the Mercedes GLS's back row. The car sped away from the curb, exceeding the speed limit for vehicles allowed on campus.

Jean had barely buckled her seat belt when Dr. Jameson said, "Sorry for the change in plans, but Dr. Mayzor overheard our phone conversation. He asked more about you, so I pulled up your CV. He remembered reading your master's thesis and said he'd like to meet this lady and ..."

The older man finished Dr. Jameson's sentence. "And here we are. I am Dr. Bernard Mayzor, Miss Moria." In Afrikaans, he added, "My pleasure to meet you."

Jean smiled and replied in Afrikaans, "Danke." Switching to English, she continued, "However, I am a bit uncomfortable using Afrikaans since I haven't used it since leaving South Africa."

Dr. Mayzor smiled and nodded; in English, he said, "Me too. I didn't want to offend you, knowing I was Afrikaans. It seems every Afrikaner I meet introduces themselves in Afrikaans. So, no worries. Sorry, I barged in on Billy's interview, but he never seemed as engaged and animated with any other candidate as he was with you. When he got off the call, I invited myself, not realizing the commotion I would cause with the science

graduates. I completely forgot this is their and your big day. So, to make amends, let me pick up the tab where you two decide to finish the interview and meeting."

"Jean ..." he started to say, but the doctor corrected himself, "Miss Moria, as far as I am concerned, you have the position. Dr. Jameson will provide you with the details. Our only concern is that we relocated to Stanford. The position is yours if you're willing to make the trek." Dr. Mayzor's phone rang; he said, "Mmm, very good. Hold a moment, Victor." He looked at the rearview mirror and saw the driver looking at him. "Larry, you will take me to the airport after we drop Billy and Jean in midtown at the Benu." Turning toward Billy and Jean, he said, "And remember, the bill is on me. See you all bright and early on Monday." He then returned to his phone call, slipping into German.

Jean and Dr. Jameson sat silently until the car pulled up in front of the Benu Restaurant. Without saying a word, Larry, the intern, jumped out of the car and smiled as he opened the door and helped Jean out. Dr. Jameson followed. She turned to thank Dr. Mayzor. He waved and said, "Enjoy your meal. This is one of my favorites," while nodding toward the door. "See you both on Monday, I hope," he said, looking over his glasses and smiling at Jean. The car swung into traffic.

Chapter 4

Jean tossed the covers off, saying, “Hey, guys. I am getting bits and pieces of your conversation. I am here too, you know. How about telling me what happened?” The Key group around her backed away as if she were a zombie.

“I remember the alarms going off, and the lab flooded with whatever the hell was used to neutralize the lab. Can you bring me up to date? For the seal to go, that means the worst happened. But how quickly did you take action? How long did it take to clear the lab and get me out?”

Finally, a soft voice in the crowd around her said, “Jean, we moved as quickly as possible, but had to keep you in the lab. You were in there for a good 24 hours. How do you feel?”

Jean said, “I heard everything you said. Sorry, Beth. I didn’t know you took my critique as criticism. I was trying to improve your work effort.”

“Doctor. Jean. I am sorry you heard that. You pushed my buttons when you found something I missed that I should have gone over again.”

“It’s okay, Beth. We are all overworked with deadlines the Institute has placed on us,” Tomas said. “None of this matters.”

“What are we to do for Jean? How about a gamma bath?” Beth suggested.

“No, we have to keep her isolated and wait. Maybe she didn’t get hit by the stuff. As Dr. Mayzor said before running out here, he had to nip this thing in the bud. He has to appease Berlin”, said Billy.

Yeah, right, got to cover his ass. What better way than to blame the dead girl?” Jean said to herself as she shut down the terminal after having copied the documents.

Chapter 14

The sunburned, middle-aged, imposing Afrikaner smiled as she jumped out of the bucky, followed by two old Ridgebacks wagging their tails excitedly. She scooped up her niece like a bale of hay and twirled her around, almost knocking down the hounds, trying to avoid Jean's swinging legs. She stopped and lowered Jean to the ground, noticing Tookie carrying the bags. "Mr. De Beer. Nice to see you again. Porter went into town to book your hotel. I don't know why. There's plenty of room here," pointing at the Dutch white gabled house surrounded by high thorn bushes.

"Agnes, that would be nice, but we must catch a plane to the USA after Jean finds her parents' notebooks."

"Well, I figured you were in a hurry, so I put the lot on Jean's bed."

Tookie's phone rang. "Hi, Porter. You know this? How? Get back here. We will head to George. How many? Three? Think it's the same men from Berlin? See you in a while." Tookie turned to Jean, "We have to move. The three guys we spotted in Berlin were seen at Jan Smuts. We will fly out of King Shaka and connect to the USA. We can't take a chance. Agnes, you come with us to George. We will call when we know you can go back home safely."

"Nee. I will be fine here with these fellas," nodding towards the hounds. "If you're not here, there is nothing they want. Am I right?"

Jean said, "Auntie, you come with me."

Pursuit of Jean

“No, Jeanie. It was good to see you and know you’re safe with Porter and Tookie.”

Porter pulled up in the rover. A fit middle-aged Boer jumped out. “Hi, Agnes. Like old times on the border, nee?”

“Pack your things, Jean.” Agnes directed.

As Jean ran to her bedroom, the hounds followed. Agnes pulled Tookie aside and quietly said, “When will you make my niece an honest woman?”

“You know I love her, but since the CMV virus, there is no way I am passing it on to anyone.” Just then, Jean ran out, holding a box. Tookie grabbed the box from her and packed it in the rover.

Jean said, “I will return when this is all behind us. I promise.” She hugged and kissed her Auntie.

“Your parents would be proud of you,” she said in a quivering voice. Turning to Tookie, “You take care of my girl.” Agnes turned quickly and walked into the house, flanked by the two hounds.



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