

July 31, 2025
Chapter 6

According to the inscription in the foyer, the Baltimore Museum of Art was one of the first in the country to obtain a collection of African art. The masks and headdresses are impressive, both in size and color, but I am all about the ceremonial weapons and the notion that weapons can be used to show power and status instead of just for combat. But by far, I am most blown away by the staggering collection of art amassed by Etta and Claribel Cone of Baltimore. These sisters began collecting the art of ‘radical, disreputable artists,’ unappreciated artists such as Picasso, Degas, Matisse, Van Gogh, Renoir, Cezanne, and other, at the time, not yet famous artists of the early 1900s. Many leading art collectors at the time thought the Cone sisters were nuts and criticized their judgment for buying what would later become one of the most influential collections in the world. I do love a story where in the end, it’s widely accepted that the underdogs, who are often women, end up being the much slicker players!

I check my watch, see that it’s close to 4:30, and realize that if I don’t get a move on, I’ll blow any chance to catch Addison at work since the labs close to students at 5:00. The rain has let up some, but it’s still cold, and it’s beginning to get dark as I leave the museum. Not that the Eulenspiegel Puppets wouldn’t inspire conversation, but after this visit, I’m feeling urbane and cosmopolitan, and convinced that now, finally, I have at least one nugget of artistic trivia in my back pocket if an opportunity to discuss the arts with anyone ever presents itself. My mood fades, however, as I recall the Adderall in the plastic baggie that Dory and I found among Addison’s makeup. She’s certainly allowed to take meds, but she’s never given me any clue that she isn’t 100% focused all the time on her own. And she’s certainly not required to tell ME about all her habits. But something about her taking somebody *else’s* meds doesn’t feel right to me. It doesn’t fit her image. Not to mention all that bold print on the labels that warn you not to take it

if it isn't prescribed for you. She's too smart to mess with her body, and her mind, that way. Also, I wonder about Jacob. Did his death have anything to do with Adderall or was it some other drug? These are my thoughts as I picked up two lattes and two chocolate chip muffins at the on-campus coffee shop on my way to the research labs. I figure food is as good a peace offering as anything, and, if I don't find Addison, with two lattes in me, I'll be wired enough to study late.

The Genetic Resources Core Facility at Johns Hopkins University is comprised of 6 divisions: Cell Center, Core Store, DNA Analysis Facility, Fragment Analysis Facility, High Throughput Sequencing Center, and the SNP Center. When I enter the Blalock Clinical Sciences Building, I realize that I have no idea where, not to mention if, Addison might be working. Considering the topic of her work, I venture a guess and take the elevator to the tenth floor, room 1005, DNA Analysis. The receptionist who greets me asks for my student ID card and noticing that it hasn't been validated for access to the research domain, asks if she can help me. It occurs to me that this may be a high security facility.

"I think my roommate may be working and I have a message from her parents." The ease with which I can lie never fails to amaze me. She checks her log-in for Addison's name, has me sign in, and, with some hesitation, directs me down a corridor to the third door on the left.

"Don't forget to sign out when you're finished," she says. "You can pick up your ID card as you leave."

The Worthington Suite has double glass doors that open to reinforced double steel ones, and neither set will open until the other set is firmly shut. This place looks like something out of a James Bond movie, and I make a mental note to tell Dory about it. As I wait for the glass doors to fasten, I consider what to say to Addison. I'm struck dumb, however, when I see what's on the

other side of the internal set of doors. Three of the four walls are crammed top to bottom with cages. The fourth wall appears to be an oversized “Smartboard” where various formulas and equations are scribbled. Most of the cages are multileveled with running wheels and house small brown mice. A large island sits in the middle of the room, and it is there that I spot Addison hunched over a microscope. Before I say anything, she looks up.

“Hey! What are you doing here?” Her voice exudes genuine surprise and affection. I hand her one of the lattes and a muffin. She seems to appreciate the gesture, though I soon realize that neither one of us will be eating muffins in this room.

“This is quite an impressive place,” I say. “Are you allowed to talk about it?” Addison laughs and places the muffin (thank goodness they bagged them separately) directly in her backpack. She immediately goes into detail about her work, and her commitment is unmistakable.

“See, we create these mice,” she begins, “so that we can inject them with diseases.”

“Whoa! ‘Create?’ You mean you *clone* them?!”

“Well, yea. I mean, it’s *therapeutic* cloning, not reproductive cloning, so we only take it as far as to produce new neurons, not the entire animal. Do you really want to hear this?”

I think about this. I almost joined PETA until I heard that they throw blood on people who wear fur. Fanaticism is not my thing. But *cloning*? “I like to hear both sides of an argument before I take a stand,” I say.

“Okay, well, therapeutic cloning is like reproductive cloning, except that the embryos are not allowed to develop fully. The purpose of therapeutic cloning is to extract the stem cells from the embryos and study them. When the egg has been cloned and divided for five days, the stem cells are extracted from it. The embryos are then destroyed.” Addison sees and deliberately

ignores the horror on my face. “The stem cells can transform into any of the 220 cell types that are in the human body. After we target a disease to study, we...”

“Why do you keep saying ‘we’?” I interrupt. “I thought this was your project.”

“It is, but Dr. Ross is helping me, of course.” Addison’s demeanor visibly changes to a blue funk. “And Jacob...”

Crap! I completely forgot that “we” used to include Jacob. “How’re you doing?” I offer. Lame, but it’s a start. Why do I never know the right thing to say...?

“I’ll be alright. I keep telling myself that when I actually get into this field, when I’m actually running my own trials, I’ll have to deal with this...this sort of thing all the time, but I’m just having such a hard time understanding this. I mean, Jacob seemed so healthy - in every way.”

“Yeah. Well, I guess you never really know someone...” Why could I never just shut up while I’m ahead? Addison picks up on my discomfort and gives me a sweet smile and a warm hug. I decide it’s probably time to get back to school and ask her if she’d like to ride the shuttle with me. She says she wants to work a few more hours.

“But the lab closes at 5 pm,” I say.

“Please. I’m Addison,” she says with a smile.

Chapter 7

The only food that tastes good here is the kind that’s really bad for you. Yeah, they have “make your own” sandwich centers and salad bars, but by mid-week, both the meat and the lettuce are a little slimy. Chicken cheese steaks and pizza, on the other hand, have just the right amount of sodium to prevent them from ever going bad (and some of the only foods here that don’t seem to have laxatives in them). Dory and I have decided to forego the dining hall

experience altogether for dinner today and venture a couple streets down to the Mount Royal Tavern. Tuesday is burger day, and the website says they're "as big as your head." Besides, Dory says the art kids rave about it.

From the outside, this place looks like nothing more than a city row home with a simple red neon sign hanging above the front stoop. One peek in through the window has me thinking that somehow one of our Midwest biker bars has been transplanted into Baltimore City. We walk into a dimly lit room equipped with the oddest mixture of old wooden moldings, exposed brick walls, pin ball machines, artwork, beer signs, and... is that the Sistine Chapel painted on the ceiling or am I losing my mind? Holy hell, it *is* the Sistine Chapel on the ceiling, except I'm pretty sure the original piece of art doesn't have an antique chandelier hanging three feet away from a black ceiling fan. Eclectic does not even begin to describe the atmosphere here. A tall, lanky guy in his twenties, with the best damn handlebar mustache I've ever seen, stops when he sees us standing awkwardly like deer. He points to a small wooden table over by the brick wall and tells us to go ahead and seat ourselves. As we wander across the bar, I feast my eyes on fat men with burly beards and beer bellies rocking their ripped jeans and leather vests, and leathered women who look very much the same as their men except with less facial hair. I see businessmen drinking away the phone calls and bustle of their busy city jobs, and of course, the art school kids with their tight pants and ironic tee shirts. This place is so diverse that I'm half expecting to see *Doctor* Ross slugging back beers with the locals. On second thought, maybe that is taking it a bit too far.

We both order cheeseburgers (I somehow don't see myself getting an avocado bacon burger here) and sit for a couple minutes looking around the walls. There is a painting of three pears above our table, but one table over, I spy a photograph of high-heeled yellow Mary Janes