

Parallel

Written by

MK McFadden

1215-202 Stoney Pointe Drive
Rock Hill, SC 29732
803.984.7795
mikita.mcfadden@gmail.com

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE ROOM - DAY

Doctorate candidates crowd in front of a closed door. They push and shove to see a taped piece of paper on the door.

Some students mope while others smile.

One student stands away from the fray.

She watches the spectacle in front of her. Her leather jacket sticks out among the cardigans and khakis.

DANA BENOIT (29), a Black burnt out doctorate candidate, grouchy in her genius. She's one of the few non-white faces in the crowd and isn't expecting good news.

The crowd slowly clears and Dana scans the list. Various classes are listed.

Her finger slides down to the list titled "Von Schmidt Independent Study".

It's a short list.

Her eyes lose the little hope she had.

Except- her name is there. At the bottom.

Right above hers is two names: Thomas Jetson and Parker Lawrence.

She grins and stalks out of the building.

INT. DANA'S APARTMENT-LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dana opens her door to a greeting of VIDEO GAME MUSIC.

The living room looks like the spread in an IKEA catalog. The furniture is slick and looks to be underused.

She slams the door behind her.

DANA

My genius has finally been
recognized by the department.

The MUSIC stops and the inhabitants of the room turn around.

Thomas Jetson, better known as JETSON (26), is a long and lanky Asian man whose laissez-faire attitude reads as lazy.

Next to him, PARKER LAWRENCE (30), a petite Black woman whose cardigan is twisted with her T-shirt due to active game play and general exhaustion, sighs.

PARKER
You got in? Congratulations! Should
I call my mother and drown in the
Jewish guilt, yet?

Parker reaches in her jeans pocket to receive her phone.

DANA
You got in too. And Jetson too.

PARKER
Jetson? Thomas Jetson?

JETSON
Just because I am not as far along
as you in the program doesn't mean
I'm not eligible.

PARKER
Did it say anything about what we
would be working on?

DANA
Nope. Highly classified. I need to
know what to prep for.

PARKER
I'm going to have to switch around
my tutoring schedule. Again.

DANA
I think what Von Schmidt has
planned for us is more important.

Parker glares at Dana.

JETSON
I heard no one reads in these
classes anyway. Pure theory and
work.

Dana collapses on the couch.

DANA
I still don't know why you are
taking it.

JETSON
I need to actually work on my
physics degree.

PARKER
I thought you decided to switch to
animation. It makes you happier.

JETSON
I'm still contemplating that if you
don't mind.

PARKER
Whatever.

JETSON
Or I just want to be near you.

Parker gags.

Jetson curls his arm around Parker and starts the game. Dana
watches the screen.

INT. SEEDY BAR - NIGHT

Clusters of students sit as a large sign says "Thirsty
Thursday Everyday!" Today is Thursday.

The crowd is thick and CHEERS. A woman lies on the bar and a
man takes a shot off of her stomach and ROARS.

Jetson and Parker sit off in a corner, confused at the scene.

PARKER
I'm too old for this.

JETSON
I'm not drunk enough.

Parker glances around for Dana in the crowd.

PARKER
Where's Dana?

JETSON
Researching our professor.

PARKER
After she says I need to get out
more, hypocrite.

JETSON
Do as she says, not as she does.

Jetson drinks his beer with an eye roll and sees a tall
statuesque woman glide by.

He ogles her before Parker clears her throat.

She shakes her head.

JETSON (CONT'D)

What?

PARKER

Don't be that guy.

Jetson sulks before the woman notices their table and strides over.

HELENA (26), a statuesque woman, with long flowing hair and a dancer's body, stops at the table. Her confidence overpowers Jetson and Parker.

HELENA

Hi.

Parker and Jetson jerk up and notice her.

HELENA (CONT'D)

I noticed-

JETSON

Look, I'm sorry, did I make you uncomfortable? I'm sorry.

HELENA

No. Just saying thanks but no thanks.

JETSON

Got a boyfriend?

HELENA

Don't want one.

JETSON

Really?

Helena smiles mysteriously.

JETSON (CONT'D)

Have you met my lovely friend Parker Lawrence? She's an underachieving genius.

Parker waves nervously.

PARKER

I wouldn't say underachieving.

HELENA

Of course not.

Helena sits down next to Parker.

HELENA (CONT'D)

Helena.

Helena offers her hand. Parker shakes it.

JETSON

On that lovely note, good night.

Jetson disappears in the crowd.

INT. UNIVERSITY LAB ROOM - NIGHT

The room is empty and cold.

Dana sits at a station, working on her laptop.

The door CREAKS open.

HUGH (28), a big hulk of a guy who belongs on a football field, lumbers in. DOUG (29), trails behind him, just as big.

HUGH

Oh. We thought the room was empty.

Dana glances up and around.

DANA

It's fine. There's room enough for all of us.

DOUG

Are you in the independent?

DANA

How'd you guess?

Doug's eyes flicker at the large stack of books around Dana, all written by a Dr. Von Schmidt.

HUGH

I'm Hugh and he's Doug. I read his dissertation last night.

Dana's eyes cut to the stack of papers next to her.

DANA

Dana.

Hugh smiles at her.

DANA (CONT'D)

I just wish that we could have an idea of what is going on.

DOUG

Same here.

Hugh and Doug finally sit down near Dana and begin to work.

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE ROOM - DAY

The room is sparse.

Hugh and Doug sit down in the front while Jetson, Parker, and Dana sit near the back. Various other students sit around.

DEAN WILLIAMS, the ultimate pencil pusher, stands in the front of the room.

DEAN WILLIAMS

Hello students.

The room quiets down to a murmur.

DEAN WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

If you haven't turned in your Non Disclosure, don't forget. Now, if you could follow me.

Dean Williams takes the back door out of the room. The students follow.

INT. UNIVERSITY HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dean Williams leads the students through various underground hallways before he stops in front of a door.

He presses in a key code and opens the door. He leads the students in.

INT. UNIVERSITY BRADBURY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

This room is so obviously top secret. It's barely able to hold five people, let alone twelve.

A small window is covered by a piece of cardboard.

Dean Williams eyes the room to make sure everyone is comfortable.

DEAN WILLIAMS

Good Luck to you all.

Dean Williams shuts the door.

The students look around as the door lock CLANKS.

They are stuck in there.

INT. UNIVERSITY BRADBURY ROOM - LATER

Jetson, now on the floor, nods off, his head on Parker's as she sleeps on his shoulder.

Dana paces in a small square.

Other students sit in various phases of exhaustion.

Hugh and Doug play cards.

The key code BEEPS outside before the door creaks open.

The CLACK of a cane is heard before VON SCHMIDT (late 60s) fully enters the room.

A cranky and argumentative white German man whose smirk says that he is smarter than you and knows it and you should to.

VON SCHMIDT
Hello everyone, I'm Dr. Von
Schmidt.

All of the students stand at attention. Dana stops moving entirely.

Jetson wipes drool off of his chin as Parker fixes her hair.

Von Schmidt limps further into the room.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)
Welcome to my course: Physics and
Time.

Von Schmidt eyeballs the room to look at the young faces. He lingers on Dana before moving on.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)
There will be no tests, no essays,
and no actual course work. You will
all receive an A so do not worry
about your precious GPAs. You will
be only here to help me with my
life's work.

Von Schmidt moves over to a large machine covered by a white cloth. He yanks on it to reveal The Bradbury.

The Bradbury is a glistening metal machine that looks similar to Scotty's beam pad from Star Trek.

Four arms seem to curve inward to the standing pad, creating a skeleton that would protect someone.

A small control pad sits between the two front arms. Its input screen waits for someone to touch it.

The possibilities are endless. A Time machine that is otherworldly, the gateway to a plethora of potential.

The students all inch forward to caress the machine with their eyes.

Von Schmidt slowly moves to stand inside of The Bradbury.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

In 1952, Ray Bradbury wrote a short story about Time Travel. Average men went back in time whenever they wanted. We are here now to make his story a reality.

The students all stare in awe. Dana gapes at The Bradbury.

INT. SEEDY BAR - NIGHT

Jetson, Parker and Dana sit at a table nursing beers. It's thankfully not Thursday night and the crowd is thin.

JETSON

He doesn't seem so bad.

DANA

Have you read his journal entries? He thinks women are inferior beings who have no business in science.

PARKER

Then why did you make me take this crazy class?

DANA

He's a visionary. You need to be around visionaries in order to get your spark back.

PARKER

Who says I want to be like Henry Von Schmidt?

DANA

What's the point of getting the degree if you don't?

PARKER

Well, then I must be screwed.

Parker slams her head down on the table while Jetson pats her on the back.

JETSON

I don't know what to say for you to feel better.

DANA

I thought you wanted to be a physicist.

Parker lifts her head.

PARKER

I don't know what I want.

JETSON

And that's okay. I'm worried about me. How am I going to pass this class? I didn't think this through.

DANA

That is a good question. Considering you aren't a hard core physics student.

PARKER

You should just audit it.

JETSON

See, this is why I keep you around.

Jetson leans over and puts his arm around Parker. She pushes him away.

Dana just smiles and drinks her beer.

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE ROOM - DAY

Heads are down and hands fly over paper. The numbers have dwindled from twelve to ten.

Various students stop to reference textbooks before starting to work again.

Parker has a slight panic attack as Von Schmidt lurches by her and glances at her paper.

He doesn't stop by and Parker sighs in relief.

Jetson doodles in the margins of his paper.

Von Schmidt limps to the opposite side of the room. The SMACK of his cane strikes fear into everyone's heart.

He leans over Dana.

VON SCHMIDT
That is impossible.

Dana squints up to find Von Schmidt next to her.

DANA
I increased the-

VON SCHMIDT
Not possible.

DANA
It is if we assume-

VON SCHMIDT
Never assume.

Von Schmidt grabs the paper and crumbles it up.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)
Try harder.

Von Schmidt begins to BANG his cane on the floor as he stands next to Dana's desk.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)
Attention students.

Everyone focuses on Von Schmidt.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)
Pack up and go home. You are done
for today.

Various students begin to pack away their belongings as Hugh raises his hand.

HUGH
Why?

A hush falls over the room. Everyone has a look of sympathy on their faces for Hugh's incoming verbal smack down.

VON SCHMIDT
Because you all are giving me the
work of children today. I want
scientific work, not the work of
college freshmen.

Von Schmidt drills lasers into Hugh's eyes.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)
Does that answer your question?

Hugh meekly nods as the students quickly packs up. They all hustle out of the room.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - LATER

Dana sits at a table in the back, surrounded by bookshelves. She glances up to find Hugh standing in front of her table.

HUGH
I hope you don't mind.

DANA
No, of course not.

Hugh takes a seat across from her and begins to pull out his work.

DANA (CONT'D)
I'm not used to seeing you without Doug.

HUGH
He has practice.

Dana looks confused.

HUGH (CONT'D)
Intramural Lacrosse. He coaches. I quit ages ago.

DANA
I assumed football.

Hugh smiles.

HUGH
Everyone does. Why aren't you out doing something you love?

DANA
Who says I'm not? What about you?

HUGH
Solving a problem next a smarter person than me, what's not to love?

Dana smiles at that before she and Hugh silently get back to work.

INT. DANA'S APARTMENT-LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jetson comes in with bags of Chinese food to look at the sight before him.

Dana and Parker parked on the couch, reading about physics.

JETSON
Ladies, it's time to eat.

Jetson kicks the door close before pushing himself onto the couch, between the two women.

Parker reaches into the take out bag for a plastic fork and her carton of food.

PARKER
I've been dreaming about this all day.

Parker munches as Dana keeps working. Jetson and Parker look at her, worried.

Jetson pulls out his order and eats as well.

JETSON
Dana, you gotta eat.

DANA
I'm not ready for this experimentation at all.

PARKER
Who is?

JETSON
Seriously, just gotta go in and B.S. you way through it.

DANA
Do either of you want to travel back in time?

JETSON
No.

Parker chews and shrugs.

DANA
If I don't get to try this, I mean really try, then what is the point? I might as well teach middle school science.

PARKER

What's wrong with teaching middle school science?

DANA

Nothing, just-

JETSON

I know you are in this program because you want to change the world but don't kill yourself. Eat.

PARKER

You can't be a super star if you're hungry.

Dana sighs and grabs her food and a fork. She takes a big bite.

DANA

You two do have a point.

PARKER

We aren't idiots.

JETSON

Contrary to popular belief.

They eat while flipping through their textbooks.

INT. UNIVERSITY BRADBURY ROOM - A FEW WEEKS LATER

The small group of seven students and Von Schmidt stand around the Bradbury. Doug and Hugh stand inside of the Bradbury.

Doug nervously taps the buttons on the machine to invoke a reaction.

Nothing.

Hugh tries for himself.

The machine makes a WHIRLING NOISE before quiet.

Von Schmidt glowers as the men slink off of the Bradbury and moves to the back of the group of students.

VON SCHMIDT

Does anyone else have something to contribute?

The students are silent.

Jetson elbows Dana in the side but she shakes her head.

Parker then raises her hand.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

Ms. Lawrence. If you please.

Parker moves to the Bradbury and places her equations inside of the database.

Parker presses enter. There is a collective breath holding.

Smoke begins to pour out of the machine.

Von Schmidt yanks Parker off of the Bradbury before he tries to fix it.

VON SCHMIDT (CONT'D)

Out. Everyone out!