

## Odd Jobs Inc.

### Excerpt from Chapter 1

All it took was one odd day to change us. The way we thought about each other, the problems we faced. The nuances in our expectations as members of a new version of humanity. It was a minor shift. The only difference after was we could pretend we were invincible. Even if everyone knew it wasn't true. Everyone overplays their own power from time to time. But what happened that day, some regular, old Tuesday, proved two things. Some of us were actually more powerful than we once were but not nearly as powerful as we thought we could be. And in the present, we profit off of those truths. Each of us at Odd Jobs Inc. we hired know how to take advantage of the powers we were given that day—our own personal *tics*. And for every person who never wound up with a tic of their own, they're was one of us who did who could help them.

That's what we have to keep telling people anyway, but we can only do so much.

"What do you mean you can't do it?" The young man on the other side of my desk said in a frenzy. "Uh, ma'am," he added, not to seem completely rude. He looked like he was ready to cry, like he'd burned through every other option before winding up here.

"Sorry, kid—what was your name?" I asked.

"Derrek," he said, quick.

"Derrek. Okay, well I can't do it. It's not in my skillset," I told him.

"I read through all the tic offerings of everyone in this branch. You're supposed to be able to get people to like you. Yours is perfect," he said. He leaned into the desk as if getting in closer could make me magically fix his problem. He continued before I had a chance to jump in. "You *are* Terrance Santana?" He asked with weird pronunciation, looking around the room with doubt in his eyes.

"The only one I know. Mamá liked the name." I ran my fingers through the long, tangled mop of my hair just to punctuate the point. I did wish I could throw him a bone, but I had to level with him. He went wistful and silent. "You don't have a tic of your own, Derrek, eh?"

He blinked the question away.

"Well, they're barely useful they have drawbacks so you're not missing much," I

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said but he seemed indifferent to my attempt to cheer him up. “Say I did try and use my tic, and I somehow convince your dad to let you plan your little spring break trip to Mexico, he’ll remember he was against it once the effect wears off—it doesn’t last forever—he’ll probably come to his senses and go right back to being against it. Save your money. I promise, you’ll get over missing the trip next year.”

He let my words stew for a moment before locking eyes with me. One more attempt to change my mind, maybe. I have perfected my stone-faced stare. He’s not the first person to try to hire me for trivial shit that I can’t actually help with. I knew he wouldn’t be the last either. My idle resolve was too strong though. He stood up with a disappointed nod and left without another word.

He was dancing on some dangerous territory anyway. With a tic like mine, I get all kinds of shady inquiries. People wanting to use me for things they shouldn’t or can’t. When I was younger, and unattached to a big, trusted name like Odd Jobs, I was a bit more carefree. But I had a lot of time to learn how to be responsible with a power, however small, as tics are. I mean, gosh, I was six when Odd Tuesday happened.

I sighed. Felt like I hadn’t taken a real breath the whole time I was talking to him, I got lost in my mind on his way out. I took a few breaths once I was alone in my office, a modest little thing that made the heavy sense of entitlement that kid carried feel even stronger. I don’t get any windows in there, just my desk, dead center. Some fairly empty cabinets, and not a lot else. After so long, the florescent lights are enough to cause a headache and it’s just good to take a minute to refocus when you spend your days literally doing odd jobs for almost anyone who’s paying.

I lingered a bit and followed him out. There was another person I was supposed to meet. There’s a few chairs set out along the wall outside of each of our offices. I stuck my head out the door to get a look around. Empty, except for a middle-aged, greying brown haired man sitting by my office door. So pale he could almost disappear into the off-white wall. It was quitting time, but I’d become known to fall behind on things which left me still meeting with people when most other people were done hanging around the office.

“Hi,” I said, trying to keep my tone polite, but I think my voice betrayed me as the word came out and I waved him in. When he checked his watch, I knew for sure I’d given away my impatience.

“Miss Santana, I hope?”

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I took a seat on my desk, not expecting to stay long. He replaced the kid from earlier in the chair in front of my desk. “Yes, and you’re uh,” I leaned towards the note I scribbled in my notebook earlier when he’d called about stopping in. “Mr. Nelson?”

“Gary,” he said with a confirming nod. “I hope I won’t take up too much of your time. I’m from the Newpoint Boys Home here in the city. We’ve got a runaway named Spencer Wilson. This isn’t the first time for him, but each time it seems to get harder to bring him back.”

“So you want me to play private detective and find your missing boy?” I asked.

His face softened. “You know how it is these days with the law. Ever since Odd Tuesday it’s just been...we could use help from someone like you.” He wasn’t wrong. Twenty-six years since that day brought the tics into our lives, but you could tell me it was last week, and I might believe you. Some people can be slow to adjust. And law enforcement seems to be one of the least likely places to find employees with tics, aside from their registration agents who’s only function is the make sure people who don’t have tics register them. They often have their hands full in this city. He must be desperate if they have to resort to getting extra help from Odd Jobs just to get a kid back.

“I mean I’ll do it. I’ve done it before. I’m good at snooping,” I said, even giving him a little smirk. He was unamused. Strictly business, then. “But it puts you at a higher fee than my base one.”

“We’ll pay it,” he said. His features were stern but concerned and exhaustion pulled at him through circles under his eyes.

“Seems like in group set ups like this, kids might run off all the time,” I said.

“As I started to mention, Spencer is... a difficult boy. He’s hard to break through to even if all you want is what’s best for him. He’s sure he knows just about everything—I mean, he’s 12 years old. After looking into you, your tic, it seems like if you’re able to find him, you can have him trust you long enough to get him back safely.” At that point he stood up and extended a hand to me. “Thank you for meeting with me.”

“Absolutely.”

“Perhaps you need some time, but please if you think you’ll be able to help us, give us a call. We’re going to do everything we can on our own, but we just don’t want to run out of time and lose him.” He broke off the handshake and handed me a card

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with his other hand. On it was his number and the address of the home. He gave me a nod and walked out.

I sat with the request for a few minutes. It was a little hard to tell just how much I could really help them with the little I knew. I'd have to see how much information I could get from them, but I didn't want to give them false hope. The man seemed to be genuine, so far, about his work, so I didn't want to accept and then let them down. But there was also a kid out there who could be in over his head, too stubborn to turn to the resources he knows he has for help. And I couldn't help but wonder what I wonder about everyone I see and every person I meet. Because I think it says a lot about someone. Does he have a tic?