

Waiting for Corbin

By [Daniel Mallock](#) (April 2019)



Riders of the Dawn, Hongbin Zhao

All the red flags were there. I didn't care. I wanted it to be true.

It was a beautiful sunny day, I'd been doing yard work cleaning up leaves. Inside the house for a few minutes on a break, the doorbell rang, then an insistent knock. That's unusual.

When I opened the door there were two young kids, a boy and a girl. They were about ten years old. The boy was holding a laminated, red notebook folder. I could see their bicycles strewn on the front lawn behind them.

Me: Hello!

Young Boy: Would you like to buy some bracelets? They're handmade!

Me: Are you selling them for some organization?

Young Boy: No, me and my sister just want to make some extra money. Oh, and we're going to give 20% of everything we make to save the turtles.

Me: What's your name?

Young Boy: I'm Corbin, and this is my sister, Maggie.

Me: Okay, Corbin. What have you got?

Corbin: We have a starburst bracelet for a dollar-it's got black on the edges, and we have striped ones; and this one, but you won't like it because it's pink and blue. It's really for girls. And this one for 50 cents, too.

Me: Yes, I'll take a starburst bracelet. Do you have one I can see?

Corbin: No.

Me: Do you have a picture of the bracelets?

Corbin: No.

Me: You wouldn't be wearing one of these bracelets, would you?

Corbin: No.

Me: You and your sister live in the neighborhood?

Corbin: Yes.

(I didn't ask where in the neighborhood.)

I could see that Corbin had a nice stack of ones and fives in a little pouch in his open notebook from which he was showing me a hand-written menu of bracelets. It all seemed just almost legit.

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(I give Corbin a dollar bill—the cost of the starburst bracelet.)

Me: Are you going to write down my name and address so you know where to deliver the bracelet that I'll buy?

Corbin: No. We'll just remember the houses and come back.

Me: Alright, when do you think you'll deliver?

Corbin: We'll go home and make the bracelet and be back in 25 minutes.

Me: Okay, Corbin, sounds great. I'll be in the back yard by then so just come on back when you come around.

Corbin: Okay, thanks!

I returned to the back yard and cleaned up leaves; 25 minutes

passed, then an hour then another one. I had already planned the compliments I would give to Corbin and his sister for their go-getter, entrepreneurial approach, his excellent salesmanship, their integrity. I was going to compliment Corbin and his sister and tell them to tell their parents what great kids they are. But Corbin and his sister didn't come back.

This almost-comical grift of ten-year-old scamola artists ripping people off is a bit much, honestly. I speculated as to what it could be about, that "Corbin" and his "sister" probably don't live in my neighborhood. I thought about how happy I'd been to see such a normal thing as two little kids selling "stuff" door to door, and how delightful they both seemed, happy, cheerful, hardworking-normal American kids.

Last night I watched the [HBO documentary](#) on Elizabeth Holmes and her massive Silicon Valley long con at Theranos. I'd read WSJ reporter, John Carreyrou's excellent investigative book on Theranos "[Bad Blood](#)," so that for me much of the documentary was review. She suckered lots of powerful, wealthy people with her [fake deep voice](#), ridiculous Steve Jobs-style black turtleneck outfits, and disturbing, unblinking, piercing eyes. She was the whole package, just like "Corbin" and his "sister."

Perhaps Corbin is a bit of Elizabeth Holmes! She scammed so many smart, influential people (Mattis, Kissinger, George Schultz, etc.) who should have known better. They invested and supported her because they wanted to believe (but had no evidence). It didn't matter that she wouldn't, or couldn't, explain how the Theranos technology worked; it didn't matter that she ran a tyrannical culture of strict secrecy and

control at her company shop, it didn't matter that she had no background in the field at all. It just mattered that she was a "visionary" (you know, like Steve Jobs), promising to disrupt a very slowly changing world of blood testing, with just a few entrenched players, and flip it on its head. There was a great deal of money to be made and many, many people who would benefit from the promised new tech. But it was all a great sham, a long con, a grift—a shiny starburst bracelet with black on the edges.

As I write, I glance out the front windows now and then hoping to see Corbin and his sister ride up to the house on their bikes. They never arrive.

It's quiet here now as the sun is setting and past time for little kids to be home and eating dinner. So, no starburst bracelet with black trimming for me.

I'm surprised about Corbin and his sister. I'm surprised that I'm surprised.

The pitch from Corbin and his sister was perfectly timed. Exhausted from weeks and months of political crisis, cultural collapse, controversies, talk of revolution, and events of cruelty and violence and hate so vile and horrible that one can barely process them in the mind or heart, I was a perfect mark. Corbin and his sister were a promise of something special: that there are young people (and their parents, apparently) who are good and decent and have a strong work ethic, kids who embrace integrity and the political and cultural system that we have in this country that allows and

encourages such things.

When I had answered the door many hours earlier, I immediately smiled. I was looking forward to Corbin and his sister returning with my new handmade starburst bracelet with black edging. I wanted to tell Corbin and his sister how superb they are, and how happy I was to have a new handmade Corbin-and-sister bracelet.

The sun is falling in the sky and night is coming on, and I am still waiting for Corbin and his sister.

I never knew until today how much I really need a new starburst bracelet with black edging.

I hope that nothing has happened to Corbin and his sister that prevented them from returning. Maybe they forgot which house was which, maybe they forgot who ordered what. I hope they are alright.

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Now, I'm just waiting for Corbin. I know he'll come back. He'll bring my new starburst bracelet with black edging, it'll be fantastic and he'll bring his sister, too.

Addendum: The Next Day

I'm sore from picking up leaves. I'm having a small breakfast in the kitchen, it's mid-morning. It's chilly and cloudy today, not as sweet and bright and warm as yesterday. I'm on my second coffee now and the doorbell rings, then an insistent knock. Whoa!

I run to the door, it's Corbin! *Holy !@#\$!*

Me: Wow! Corbin!

Corbin: Here's your bracelet. I'm sorry I'm late. I know I said I'd be back in 25 minutes.

I'm speechless.

(Corbin gives me the bracelet. It's fantastic. Kind of a woven, stretchy plastic.)

Me: Wow. This bracelet is awesome!! Dude, you have to come back later in the week so we can buy more bracelets.

Corbin: Well, you can just call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Me: I'm sure I'll forget your number, Corbin. Can you just come around on your next sales cycle? You know, sometime later in the week?

Corbin: Yes.

Me: Where's your sister today?

Corbin: Oh, she's at home.

Me: Oh! Ok. Great. Corbin, you are fantastic. Tell your folks I said so, too.

I put on my new bracelet, I can't stop smiling.

I'm now overwhelmed with surprise, and guilt for having been so cynical and negative.

I make another coffee. I have to write an addendum. I think, am I too cynical?

I drink my coffee. After some cogitation, I conclude that somehow, somewhere, this is all Elizabeth Holmes's fault!



Bracelet made by Corbin, 3/24/19

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Daniel Mallock is a historian of the Founding generation and of the Civil War and is the author of The New York Times Bestseller,