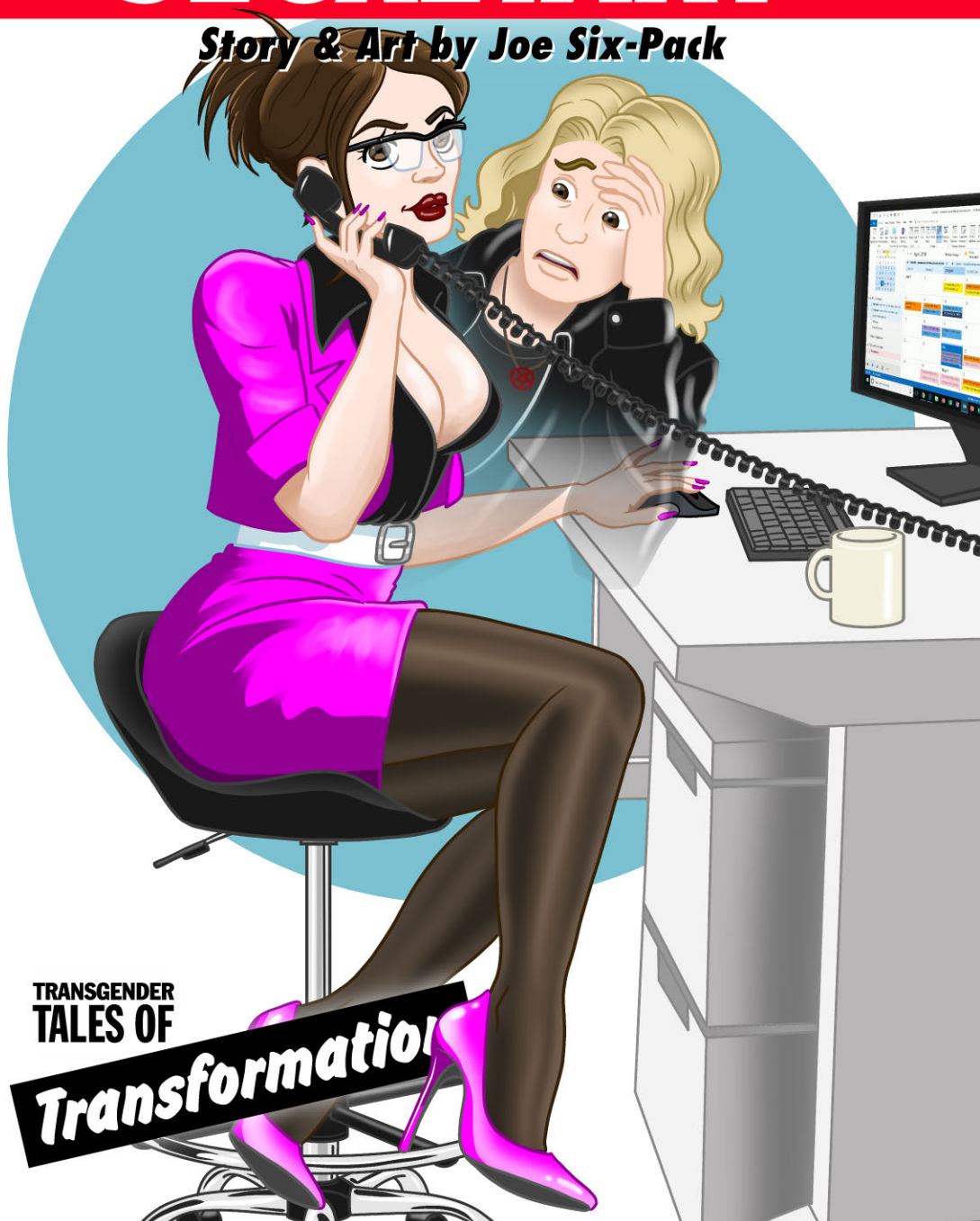


**ADULTS ONLY**

**133** pages **30** illustrations

# **SUDDENLY A SECRETARY**

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack**



**TRANSGENDER  
TALES OF**

**Transformation**

**J O E   S I X   P A C K**

# ***SUDDENLY A SECRETARY***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack**  
**A Tales of Transformation story**



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## SUDDENLY A SECRETARY



“Whoever left the mess, please clean out the microwave in the break room,” said the message. “It’s truly disgusting and a potential HR issue.”

“Yeah, fuck them,” Mick said.

“What the fuck are you doing, motherfucker?” Asked Ace, the guitar tech. He was sucking on a bottle of tequila he’d been carrying around the tour bus since yesterday. He spilled a little on his bare chest where it pachinko’d around his scraggly chest hairs as it fell.

“I dunno,” Mick said, tousling his shiny blond hair. There was a lot of it, too. He had a mane of hair that was the envy of a lot of people. Millions, as a matter of fact. That was because Mick was the lead guitarist in DëthWÿsh, the legendary glam metal band that had been blasting hot licks since the seventies. The lead singer Lars Strychnine had been on stage forever, and was a legitimate rock God of the highest order. Mick had only joined the band a few years ago, replacing the dude who used to be lead guitar but died in an unfortunate laser-tag accident.

“Huh?” Ace said, in a drunken haze. “Don’t fuck with me.”

“It’s inter-office messages,” Mick explained. “I guess this one fan emailed me a few months ago. The email had their business contact info in it, and my phone automatically downloaded an app that’s been getting their messages ever since. I get all their messages they send to each other. It’s all kinds of shit. Complaints, meetings, schedules, petty bullshit, rumors — it’s wild, man. You ever heard of “Bagel Wednesdays?” It’s like a whole different world.”

“What the *fuck* are you talking about, dude?” Ace asked. He picked up a guitar, one of Mick’s, and began to strum it. Ace was the guitar tech for the band, and was in charge of keeping Mick’s instruments in tune. He did a good job, but often Mick found it difficult to get his guitars out of Ace’s hands.

Mick put his feet up on the bass player’s butt, as he had passed out overnight in the aisle and hadn’t moved much since. He had a very plush ass and Mick’s feet had never been more comfortable. He picked up an open half-full beer with his free hand and began to gulp it down. It was four in the afternoon, too early for anything else, in Mick’s opinion. One had to have standards, unlike the rest of his bandmates.

Ace paused his strumming. "Aren't you fuckin' bein' all Big Brother and shit, reading other people's messages? That's dirty shit, dude."

Mick just had a twitch of his lower lip to indicate how unsure he was. "I don't do anything. I just read them. They're not private or anything."

"Yeah, okay. I bet that's what the CIA says when they read our stuff."

"Get your feet off my husband!" A girl Mick had never seen before said. She was wearing a leather miniskirt, a black halter top, a white veil and sunglasses. She picked up Mick's feet and tossed them to the side. "He's in your band, asshole!" She said. "You treat all your friends like this?"

Truth was, no one in the band was really his friend. It was a gig. A gig that had lasted several years, but just a gig. He watched as the girl dragged the bass player down the aisle face-down and away from Mick and Ace.

"Who's that?" Mick asked.

"Who the fuck cares," Ace replied.

Mick kept scrolling through the phone with a sour look until he found something that made him excited. "Oh, fuckin' righteous, it's Lori!"

"Who the fuck is Lori?"

"Somebody who works in this office," Mick explained. "She's my favorite."

"Everyone has been so great! I'll really miss everyone at the San Diego office!" read Lori's message.

"So she's gonna fuckin' do it," Mick said to himself. "Awesome for her."

"I'll never forget all the friends I've made. Your support has meant everything to me!" Continued the message. "It's the biggest decision I've ever made, and I guess there's no looking back! Ha Ha. And the going away party was so great! Thanks to Emily for bringing the cup cakes!" Finally the tag on the message read "Posted by Lori, 4:28 PM."

"Lori, I wish you the fuckin' best," Mick said to his phone.

"What?" Ace said, in a drunken haze.

"She's finally going to take a risk and go for it."

"Huh?"

"She's moving out east to Alexandria, Virginia."

"Oh," Ace said. "Isn't that where our next gig is?"

After three seconds of processing, Mick shot up off the bench he was seated on and jumped to the beaten-up tour schedule taped to a wall. He checked the



date on his phone, which was probably the first time he'd done that in months, and looked at the schedule. Ace was right.

"Fuck me, man," he said. "We *are* playing Alexandria! In three days!" He then looked at his phone again. Lori was arriving in Alexandria on the very same day.

He would finally be able to see her. He knew where she would be, and when. Mick had been following her messages for a long time, and kind of had a weird little crush. She seemed so well-mannered, so quiet and so nice.

“I don’t think this is beer, man,” Ace said, having grabbed the bottle Mick had been drinking from.

It would be nice if he could get away from the tour bus for a while, Mick decided.



“I just wanted to tell you, Ms. Chandler, how much I appreciate you coming with me to Alexandria,” Dave Simmons said. “Well, when I go, that is. A few more weeks and I’ll be out there.”

Lori Chandler was sitting in the office of her boss, her legs tightly held together and her arms glued to her side. She looked like she was trying to fit in an imaginary tube. That was just the way Lori was, though. She was a little tightly wound when it came to reporting to her superiors.

“Thank you, Mr. Simmons,” Lori replied. She was naturally thin and short and had a knack for hair styling, makeup and picking just the right clothes for her body. She looked adorable in her business-appropriate outfit. “I’ve really enjoyed my time here. I hope it doesn’t cause too much disruption.”

“It’ll be hard to replace your dedication to the office, Ms. Chandler. Personal assistants don’t grow on trees,” Mr. Simmons, laughed. “That would be something, wouldn’t it? A tree with a bunch of secretaries hanging down like fruit.” He laughed again. “But enough frivolity. I asked you here for more than just a speech, Lori.”

It was very quiet in the executive office of Dave Simmons. The clacking of keyboards and the trill of phones couldn’t be heard in here. It was really very peaceful, except for the claustrophobic undercurrent of tension one felt when talking to their boss.

“I can’t thank you enough for coming with me to the new office, and furthermore for going ahead while I finish up things here in San Diego.” He smiled. “It’s a formidable challenge.”

Mr. Simmons pressed the intercom button on his phone. “Would you come in, Jerry?”

The door to the office opened, and it was Jerry Kendrick, the Vice President of Global Operations himself. To Lori, it was like being visited by a mystical

creature of the forest. She had only seen portraits of Mr. Kendrick on the walls, never in person.

“When I mentioned to Mr. Kendrick that the office was losing our best employee,” Mr. Simmons explained, “and you were going with me to our headquarters, he wanted to stop by.”

“Lori I want you to know you’ve been a valuable asset to this organization,” Mr. Kendrick said. Lori felt faint. The Vice President of Global Operations was talking to her. He knew her name! “I hope you understand, your proficiency and professionalism has not gone unnoticed. Your contributions to our Alexandria office will surely be invaluable.”

“Y-y-y-yes s-s-s-sir,” Lori responded, in stutters. She did that when she was nervous.

“We wanted to give you this,” Mr. Kendrick said, holding a small trophy in his hands. “San Diego Office MVP,” it read. It looked like it had set the multi-billion-dollar company back at least four dollars and ninety-nine cents and was made of sturdy space-age plastics.

“Oh no...” Lori said. “You shouldn’t have,” she said, taking it carefully from Mr. Kendrick’s hands. “You’re going to make me cry,” she said as she removed her glasses. She dabbed her eyes with a tissue. “Look at me, I’m a mess.”

“That’s how we all feel about you, Lori. I hope you’ll display that proudly at you new desk in the Alexandria office.”

“Y-y-y-yes s-s-s-sir,” Lori said, choking through her tears. “Of course I will.” She clutched it to her chest, as it was the most precious thing in the world to her in that moment.

“Well, I wouldn’t want you to miss your flight,” Mr. Kendrick said.

“Oh, she’s taking the bus,” Mr. Kendrick said with a smile. “Budgets, you know. Besides, it’s a great way to see the country.”

“Ah, I see. Well.” Mr. Simmons nodded. “Everything’s taken care of, correct?”

“Oh, yes. The company has been so generous. All my things have already arrived in Alexandria in the new apartment.” Lori made some dainty sniffles into her tissue. “I just have my overnight bag with me. Otherwise, I’m all set to go.”

“I believe the car is waiting outside to take you to the bus depot, so we don’t want to keep it waiting.”

“Yes, of course, Mr. Kendrick.” She put her glasses back on and headed to the door to leave. Just before she did, she turned and smiled. “I’ve really enjoyed working for you, Mr. Simmons.”





“Good luck in the new office, Lori,” the boss said. “When you get there, let me know you’ve arrived safely.”

“I will,” Lori said. She smiled at her boss, wistful and emotional. “Good bye.”

“Good bye, Lori,” Mr. Simmons said.

She turned to Mr. Kendrick, still in awe of his very presence. “Good bye Mr. Kendrick.”

“Oh, I’ll see you in Alexandria,” Mr. Kendrick said. It was where he was based.

“I suppose so,” Lori said. “Well...” She had no more to say so she just turned and left.

As Lori walked down the main aisle of the office she got polite and cheerful waves from the various employees. “Good luck!” Sharon from sales said with a smile, as she turned her head from her computer for a second.

“Miss you!” Gwen in accounting said, as he covered the mouthpiece of the phone she was talking on for a moment.

Lori stopped at her empty, bare desk and picked up her small overnight bag. “Good luck!” Fran in marketing said as she hurriedly walked by. Lori then continued on her way.

“Have a great time!” Nora in administration said as she walked through the aisle carrying a stack of files and binders to the conference room.

“Don’t forget about us!” Kyle in IT said as he poked his head out from under a table, clutching some Cat 6 cable.

Mr. Kendrick stood and watched as his employee left the office for the final time, and then he watched through the glass doors as she got into the car waiting for her. Jerry Kendrick then turned away, found a quiet spot and opened his phone.

“Well?” Asked the voice on the other end of the call.

“She’s in the car and on her way,” Jerry responded.

“She has the package?”

Mr Kendrick nodded. “In her bag, yes.”

“Good, good. You’ve done a great favor for the company, Jerry.”

“Thank you, Mr. Thornheart.”

“We won’t forget this. *I* won’t forget this. Well done. Now, I think you’ll be quite pleased with the surprise I’ve arranged for you in the parking lot. Why not go take a look?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Thornheart. You didn’t.”

“Go see for yourself, Jerry. You’ve earned this.”



Mick plucked the head of the drummer out of the toilet and checked to make sure he was breathing. He was. He had a glazed look in his eyes and was completely non-responsive, but he was alive. Once he was sure, Mick pushed him aside and took a piss.

That was the third time since Dayton that he had opened the bathroom door and found the drummer trying to drown himself. He was probably too whacked out to know what he was doing, so it wasn’t his fault, but sooner or later that fat roach was going to dunk his head in the toilet and no one was going to get to him in time.

“Lars,” Mick said when he got back to the front lounge. “You know a lot of good drummers, don’t you?”

“I know a lot of drummers,” Lars said as he laid back on the bench couch of the bus, watching the satellite TV. “There’s two kinds, Mick. Fucked-up ones who are trash and fucked-up ones who don’t suck.”

The tour bus was going to pull into Alexandria soon, and the band members of DëthWÿsh would split up for a little while as they stretched their legs before the gig that night. The crew was already on site doing the set-up, and they’d do a sound check if they felt like it. They never felt like it.

Mick sat in the only available spot, as the seats were occupied by girls who were in various states of dress and undress. That was the way of Lars Strychnine, a sixty-one year old man who had his choice of teenage girls putting out for him every night. He was a legend, and that’s what he had chosen to use his status for. To each their own, Mick often rhapsodized.

As he relaxed in his chair, he noticed one of the girls giving him the “I’m interested” look. He quickly diverted his gaze. He didn’t need that kind of trouble. He instead focused on the bottle of whiskey he’d been keeping company for the past few hours.

He would have much preferred to be checking out the inter-office mail from Lori and see how she was getting on with her big move, but his phone didn’t get a signal out here, wherever they were on the road to their next gig. He was not ashamed to admit to himself he was an addict when it came to reading the seemingly confidential emails and messages of the employees of PolyCon. He felt empty and lonely without knowing how Lori Chandler was doing.

“Somethin’ got you down, Mick?” Lars asked.

“Just the dog days of the tour,” Mick replied. When he was a kid, he would have jumped out of his skin with excitement to talk to a rock legend like Lars Strychnine, but after being in the band for as long as he had, the awe had long since faded. “Gonna be glad when it’s over.”

“Oh, yeah might as well tell you, we’ve got another leg added. Two more months doing Europe. Gonna rock the old country, man!”

Mick just looked at Lars, unwilling to believe what he had just heard. He gave the bottle another swig. “You’re not serious, are you? Cuz you’re shitting me, right?”

“Nope!” Lars said with a smile. “You girls don’t mind another two months, do you?” He asked the girls surrounding him. It really didn’t matter what they



thought, as they'd be gone tomorrow, replaced with a new set, as they were on every stop.

"Lars, we talked about this..." Mick said. "I told you eight months was my limit. We blew past that four shitty months ago. I can't fuckin' do another two."

"Can't or *won't*?" Lars asked.

"Both."

"Doesn't matter, Mick. The contract you signed says you play when I say you do." He looked into the eyes of one of his teenage acolytes. "And we're playin' Europe."

If he had been in his twenties, maybe Mick would have started a fight by throwing his bottle at Lars. He was 34 now, and just wise enough to know he couldn't start a fight on a moving tour bus. Besides, it wouldn't accomplish anything.

"I'm gonna read that contract, Lars. I don't think there's anything in there about me being forced to play." Mick was using the neck of his liquor bottle to point at his bandmate. "And I'm pretty sure I get to negotiate my price."

"Mick, buddy, when you have a band like DëthWÿsh, you get the best lawyers you can afford. A contract only means what my lawyers say it means. You'll play." He tossed a ziploc full of cocaine at Mick's head. "This'll take the edge off," Lars said.

Mick's dulled reflexes were reactive just enough to catch the pouch. He let it drop to the floor. "I ain't got time to get high, asshole. I'm the only thing that actually works in this band, and without me, you haven't got a show."

"Ace can do it," Lars said. "Everyone can be replaced. Except me, of course. I'm fuckin' Lars Strychnine."

Mick sat and pondered exactly how fucked he was. "Lars, didn't you ever want anything beyond being a fuckin' rock star?"

"Brother, there are seven billion people out there who ask themselves the same question — but in reverse." He kissed one of the girls. "So I never have to ever wonder if life can get any better. I'm livin' the dream."

This would have been the point where Mick stood up, flipped the double bird and left, but it was a bus. Where the hell was going to go on a bus? He just looked at the bottle in his hands and figured that maybe he should to crawl into it instead.



The Greyhound station wasn't particularly busy that afternoon when Lori arrived, but it was still a bit overwhelming for her. To be fair, a lot of things were overwhelming to Lori, but she was doing her very best to hold it together. She hadn't ever left California, and moving clear across the country was something she'd never contemplated until her boss had told her he was moving and wanted her to come with him. The Alexandria office was also offering a substantial raise, so here she was.

Oh, and Steph was here, too. She was holding up a sign that said, "Lori Chandler" on it.

Lori stepped up to her. "I'm Lori. Are you from the agency?"

"Yes! Hi, Lori. I'm Steph. How was the bus?"

"I think it was awful?"

"Yeah, that sounds about right."

"We were delayed for an hour to do a security sweep or something. They never explained it."

"That's weird. Any bags?"

"Just my overnight bag and my purse," Lori said, holding up both to demonstrate. "I'm ready to go."

"Great!" Steph replied. She was a short woman with reddish-blond curly hair and a pudgy body. She was from the real estate office, and had been sent to greet Lori. She had sold Lori on the new apartment and arranged for the 2-year lease. "Follow me. We'll grab a taxi."

They headed down the walkway, trying to strike up a polite conversation. "You're going to love Alexandria," she said. "It's full of history and the people are super nice."

"I've heard a lot of good things," Lori said. "To be honest, all I need is a couple of decent malls, a JC Penneys and an Olive Garden."

"Girl, you have come to the right city," Steph replied.

They were briefly interrupted by someone in a brown trench-coat running the other way.

Mick Van Helsten came to the bus stop where Lori was supposed to be arriving, and swore. "Fuck!" He shouted.

He had missed it. She had been here and left.

"Fuuuuck!" He yelled again, attracting the attention of everyone. He turned around every which way, trying to spot her, his trench coat flying around like a

cape. “Stupid!” He grumbled to himself as he tugged the hood of his sweatshirt over his head.

Then he had a thought. Lori should still be around here somewhere, probably making her way to the baggage claim area or something. He headed back the way he came, toward the station building.

“Is the apartment all ready for me?” Lori asked Steph as they got to security. “Everything got here okay, right?”

“Everything arrived, yes,” Steph said. “But they don’t have the apartment ready for you just yet. They still have to change the locks and do some carpet cleaning.”

“Oh, I was worried about that.”

“Don’t worry, we have a hotel room for you. The property manager pays for it.”

“I came prepared,” Lori said, once again showing her overnight bag. “How long until it’s ready for me?”

“It won’t be long. They lose money for every day you’re not living there.”

“Well, if that’s the worst thing that happens during this move, I suppose it’ll be okay,” Lori said. She looked around at the plethora of officers and uniformed people standing around the bus terminal. “Is the security usually this bad in this area?”

Steph shook her head. “No. Not usually. Something must be up.”

In the baggage claim area, Mick was trying to figure out who, amongst the crowd of passengers, was Lori Chandler. He had never actually seen her, but had put together a pretty good idea of what she looked like based on her inter-office messages. She had long blond hair, wore glasses and was a little on the skinny side. She was going to be in office clothes, as she was coming straight from work.

No one matched this description, and it was driving him crazy. There were women in business clothes, but not wearing glasses. There were women with glasses but not with long blond hair. There were women with long blond hair but not wearing business clothes. He knew she had to be here somewhere, but where?

Then he had to consider that she wasn’t traveling with luggage, as she had just come from the office. At least that was what she wrote in a memo. That meant she wasn’t going to be here at all. He dashed to get to the parking garage.

There, Lori and Steph the agent were headed to the taxi area.

“You need taxi?” Said a man with a heavy middle eastern accent.

“We’re headed to the Old Town Sheraton,” Steph said.

“Bags?” the man asked.

“No bags,” Lori said. The two girls got in the car as the driver trotted around to the drivers side door.

Mick, a hundred feet away, finally got his first look at Lori. It was everything he hoped it would be. She was such an... Average person. She looked like her whole world was just being an efficient and proper secretary. He had lived her life vicariously for so many months now, and his heart swelled with warmth and joy to actually see her in person, for real.

It was odd, but the very banality of Lori’s existence was why he was fascinated with her. Yes, her life was bland and boring — yet she enjoyed it so much. According to the messages Mick had read, she worried over picking the proper flower arrangements for employee celebrations and checked five suppliers to find her bosses’ preferred coffee creamer. Lori conducted weekly checks on the number of pens around the office to make sure they never ran out. She had a meticulous schedule of plant watering. It was all so ordinary and modest, and he loved everything about it.

More than loved it, he was infatuated with it.

Unfortunately for Mick, however, he was a fair distance away from Lori and she was getting into a taxi. He had come all this and this was going to be all he got? No, he decided to make a run for it and see if he could get there before they pulled out.

“Hey aren’t you Mick Van Helsten?” said a person who was suddenly in his way.

“No, no.” Mick said, trying to dodge this young man. He was blocking him when he moved.

“No, you are. You’re Mick Van Helsten!” He was continuing to be in Mick’s way.

“Look, what do you want, you fuckin’ motherfucker?” Mick finally had to ask.

“You’re shorter than I thought you would be.”

Mick punched the kid in the face and was finally able to get past him as he jumped over his unconscious body.

“You like radio? Music? News?” The cabbie asked his passengers. “Silence okay too. Leave four star rating!”

The news came on the radio as Lori arranged her bags. “...with a high of 52. That’s your WVIX weather update. San Diego police are saying there is no danger to the public after Tuesday’s terrorist attack that claimed the life of Jer-



ry Kendrick, Vice President of PolyCon Corp, a major defense department contractor.”

“Wait... What?” Lori said. “Turn it up!”

The radio continued, “The pentagon sent out assurances that the country was under no imminent threat and suspects had already been apprehended. In local news, city council...”

“Oh my God...” said Lori, who was breathing heavily. “I just saw him that morning.”

Steph was confused. “Who?”

“Jerry Kendrick. He’s my boss. Was my boss. Well, my bosses boss.” Lori put her hand to her forehead in grief. “Mr. Kendrick... Dead?” She was barely able to think.

“It happened a few days ago. Hadn’t you heard?”

“My phone didn’t work on the bus,” Lori explained.

Mick arrived just as the cab left, and grabbed the next one in line.

“Follow that cab,” he told the driver.

“What, are you kidding?” replied the man at the wheel. “This a joke?”

Mick tossed a dozen twenty dollar bills at him, and the cab squealed the tires as it sped away.

“Here, put that away,” Steph said as she pushed the phone in Lori’s shivering hands down into her lap. “You need to take some deep breaths.”

“I... I don’t believe it... Mr. Kendrick killed?” Lori said, and kept repeating the words. “Mr. Kendrick killed?”

“I don’t know what to say, Lori.” Steph patted her on her leg. “What can I do?”

“I need to... I need to... I need to make a call.”

“Uh... Cabbie?” Steph said to the driver. “We need to stop at the nearest park.”

“O.K. Four star review, yes?” The cabbie replied.



Mick kept his eyes glued forward, as he watched Lori’s cab weave through traffic. “They’re fuckin’ gettin’ away!” He shouted at the cabbie.

“What the hell is this shit?” The driver said. “Is this for real?”

Even Mick wasn't sure this wasn't some kind of old movie with a cliché plot. "Just keep going!" Mick yelled.

A few minutes later, the cab stopped at a small park and Lori got out.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay?" Steph asked. "I don't think I should be leaving you alone right now."

"I'm fine. Well, I'll be fine. I just have to talk to Mr. Simmons. I really need to be by myself."

"Here's my office number," Steph said, handing over her business card. "Call me if you need something. And I mean anything."

"I will."

"I put your apartment key in your bag. They'll call when they're ready for you. And for tonight, the hotel is just across the street. They'll be expecting you."

"Thanks for everything, Steph."

"Sure. I hope you feel better."

"I will," Lori said as she carried her bag and purse to the most secluded bench she could find.

Mick's cab pulled into the spot where Steph's cab left. He tossed another fistful of wadded twenties at the cabbie and looked around for where Lori went. He spotted her not too far away, sitting on a bench blanketed by the shadow of a very leafy tree.



Was this the moment he introduced himself? No, not a chance. The man who performed in front of 100,000 people in ridiculous costumes didn't make a sound as he found a spot to observe her. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that he didn't want to break the seal on the world he'd been observing for so long. It was special to him, Lori was special to him, and he didn't want to ruin it.

He did, though, risk detection to make sure he could overhear the call she was making as snuck up behind her and a tuft of bushes.

"I just heard the news, Mr. Simmons! Is it true?" Lori said to her boss.

Having received the terrible news, Lori put the phone down on the bench, fearing she was about to drop it from her shaking hands. She covered her face to hide her tears, but Mick could hear it.

"Lori? Lori are you still there?" The phone said, as she had put it on speaker-phone. It must have been this Dave Simmons dude, Mick guessed. Lori had always looked to her boss for comfort, almost like a father figure.

"Yes... Yes, Mr. Simmons."

"I know it's a shock, Ms. Chandler. But I need you to remain composed. Can you do that for me?"

"I'll try, Mr. Simmons."

"Now, we're all devastated here as you might guess. But what we can't do is lose our heads over the situation."

"How did he die?"

"Decapitated," Mr. Simmons replied.

Lori made a sound of despair and shock that she immediately muffled with her hand.

"He was leaving the building," Mr. Simmons continued, "When he was attacked by two men and thrown into an unmarked van. The police found the van and... Most of Mr. Kendrick the next day."

"It was j-j-just a couple of days ago," Lori said, poorly stifling her sobs. "He gave me that nice trophy. It's not possible."

Executives must be as disposable as drummers, Mick concluded from his secluded listening spot.

"I have a full plate," Dave said, "that's for certain, but I can't do it if you're falling to pieces, Lori."

"Your schedule must be a mess... I can try to move around some meetings..."

“What I want you to do is take the rest of the day and sort out your emotions, Lori,” Mr. Simmons told his long time and loyal employee. “Then, tomorrow morning, get back on that horse and move on. Can you do that for me?”

“Mr. Simmons, please... I...”

“Lori! Focus. Get it together. This is still business, and we all have jobs to do.”

“Yes, sir. Yes, Mr. Simmons.”

“Good girl. Now I’ll talk to you later. I have a lot of things I need to take care of with Mr. Kendrick’s unexpected absence.”

Mick watched as Lori tentatively hit the “call end” button. She was devastated, that much was clear. What wasn’t clear to Mick was why. As far as he could tell, someone at the company had been killed or something, and Lori was taking it harder than it seemed she should. Knowing what he did of Lori, he couldn’t see her being able to deal with such a heavy topic. She was not a woman built to deal with something so traumatic.

Sure enough, Lori sat on the bench, gently weeping for a few minutes, killing Mick with every tear. He so badly wanted to go talk to her and tell her things were going to be okay. He needed to let her know that this was all going to work out. He had to comfort her in some way.

Before he could really come up with some way to help, Lori took her phone and got up, heading for the sidewalk.

The young woman didn’t seem to be going anywhere, and she wasn’t headed for the hotel, that was for sure. Mick pulled the hood over his head a little more and went after her, keeping a fair distance.

She wasn’t doing much more than just slowly walking along, looking at things that she passed by. Her flat shoes were skidding along the cement from time to time as she wasn’t doing very well lifting her feet, and she was gently weaving left and right.

Eventually she started to look longer at the windows as she passed by them, lingering on the things for sale inside. She looked inside the window of a Trader Joe’s for nearly two full minutes before going in, and Mick followed as she stopped to look at the produce section. She picked up a single golden delicious apple, began to cry again, and put it back.

She headed back out and down the street, walking for another block or two before eventually stopping at a clothing store named “Talbot’s.” It seemed to cater to the conservative Washington DC woman, but compared to what Lori was already wearing, these items seemed a bit upscale for her. At least that was Mick’s opinion.

From where he was standing, he could see Lori spending a lot of time staring at a particular window display. She rubbed her arms a bit, looking like she was feeling the cold in her simple thin suit jacket. “This sure ain’t San Diego weather, is it, Lori?” Mick whispered to himself.

She headed inside the store and began to look around. Mick dashed to get a look for himself, peering through the window. A sales person gave him a funny look, and he diverted his attention to the window display. He had a tough time trying to look interested and intrigued by a display of low-heel leather loafers for the modern woman, but he tried. Soon enough he could see what Lori was up to, as she was putting on a few different coats.

“I’ll take this one,” she said to the sales lady.

“Fine. Anything else?”

“No, just that.”

“All right, if you would like to follow me...” The woman looked closer at the coat she had been handed. “Wait a minute, this is missing its tag!”

“Pardon?”

“Are you trying to trick us into selling you an untagged item?”

“No!” Lori said, taken aback by the accusation. “I’m not trying anything! I didn’t even notice! I’m sorry!”

“I’ll call the police right now!” The saleslady said, menacingly.

“The police? No! Please, I didn’t mean anything...” Lori recoiled her arms to her chest. “I don’t want any trouble!”

“I’ll call them right now if you don’t show me what you did with that tag!”

“I’m so sorry! I’m so very sorry! I didn’t do anything!” Lori was gushing tears. She didn’t like confrontation, and her emotions were already beyond the breaking point. “Look, whatever it costs, I’ll just buy the coat, okay? Tell me what I need to pay! Please?”

The saleslady showed mercy and only charged Lori twice the posted price for her new coat. She could spot these spineless customers any day and then pocket a few extra bucks for herself. It was her favorite scam.

Lori dashed out wearing her new long brown wool coat which looked thoroughly non-threatening and ordinary. Mick loved it immediately. It was so Lori. He didn’t notice she was red-faced and sniffing, tears drying on her cheeks.

However, he noted something else was wrong. She had left without her bag. Her overnight bag had been left behind in the store.

Sensing his one true chance to interact with Lori with no repercussions, he ran inside the store and looked around feverishly. He spotted her bag leaning against the checkout counter and grabbed it. Returning it to her would be innocuous enough. He just had to give it back to her, she would say thanks, and he'd get to see her nice smile, and then he'd be overjoyed and could go on with his life.

"Hey!" said the sales woman who watched him grab the bag. "That's not yours!"

Mick was blocked as the woman stopped him from exiting. "It's okay," he said.

"It is most certainly not okay!" The woman said in her fussiest tone of voice. "That is theft, I'll have you know!"

"She forgot it! I'm going to..."

"You put that right back where you found it, mister!" he pointed to the desk. "If she did forget it, our lost and found policy will be sure she gets it back."

Having to make a choice, he decided to do what his heart told him to do, and that was to go after Lori. He put a very impressive juke on the woman, told her to go fuck herself and headed out the door.

Problem was, Lori was nowhere to be seen. Figuring she was headed back to the hotel, Mick jogged a few blocks in that direction, but there was no sign of her.

He was still holding the overnight bag, and feeling very, very guilty. If he hadn't grabbed it, maybe Lori would go back and get it. Now, he had it, and didn't know what to do with it — and he was already a half hour late in getting back to the theater.

Mick had to go. Heartbroken, he had to go.



Mick arrived back at the theater just as the band was about to go on, dashing from the ride-share care straight into the back door.

"Where the fuck, Mick?" Lars said as he rushed into the dressing room.

"Mind your own fucking business, Lars. I'm here. Let's just go."

Mick quickly shed himself of his trench coat and regular clothes while grabbing his costume simultaneously. Mick's costume tonight was a blue leotard covered in glitter. He had a pair of glitter silver elevator shoes with two inch platforms as well. This was all very much in line with the "old school glam met-

al” look of the band. In addition, he had the makeup girl do his face, so he was given a clean shave and then his face painted.

“The whole world stops for you, Mick,” Lars said. “We all have to wait for your highness to arrive when they find it convenient to go on stage, is that it?”

“I’m not late, Lars. Fuck off! It’s just a rock show!”

“You nearly fucked us all, Mick!” Lars countered, getting louder. He upended the catering tray and the contents went flying all over the room. “Rock isn’t a fuckin’ part time job! If you’re in the band, you gotta wanna rock! Rock all day long! Rock every moment of every day! Not fuckin’ going sight-seeing!”

Lars strode out of the dressing room, his boots stomping hard with every step. “You think you know rock?” He yelled as he left. “*I am* rock!”

Mick threw his head back in exasperation. He didn’t understand why he put up with this crap. He had such a short life and was spending it in the grip of an aging egomaniac with a power trip.

Ace the guitar tech then wandered into the room, carrying Mick’s most famous guitar, the electric blue Slay-o-tor. He was looking behind him as he came in. “What the fuck is Lars’ problem?”

“Me,” Mick replied. “She ready to slay?” He asked about the guitar.

“Yeah,” Ace said, strumming it. “But you don’t need it. Lars cancelled the show.”

“What? Because I got here so close to the call time?”

“Nah, he cancelled it before you even got here. His hip is acting up.”

“Motherfucker!” Mick shouted with terrifying fury, rattling the clothes racks full of costumes. The lights may have flickered. “Fucking *mother fucker!*”

“I’m gonna go...” Ace said, backing out of the room.

Mick continued to fume by himself in the dressing room. The bus wasn’t scheduled to leave until after midnight, and it was still the evening. He was looking around for things to break and/or throw in anger, but he stopped cold when he saw Lori’s bag. He had brought it back with him, and it was resting, waiting for him to do something with it.

So that’s what he did. He picked it up and put it on his lap. Immediately, he felt calmer. This was Lori’s bag, after all. She never brought anything to his life but good feelings.

Now came the difficult proposition of getting it back to her. He had a couple of options. One, he knew where she was staying, and could drop it by the hotel and hope they got it to her. Two, he could contact her by phone or email and

arrange for a way for them to meet.

It was a very complicated bag, and it had several pockets on the outside for various odd-shaped items. He dared not open the bag up in any way, because he didn't want to be some kind of psycho about Lori. He just wanted to make some sort of positive contribution to her life.

Mick resolved not to open it. At least the main portion. The smaller pockets, well... That was a different category. What kind of secrets could be hidden in the smaller pockets, after all? Testing one of them seemed to indicate a weak snap closure, one that would probably just open up on its' own. He tested it a few times, and sure enough, with only medium-hard pressure, it opened right up on the 22nd try.

Inside was something a bit curious. It was a tiny little trophy. It read "San Diego Office MVP." It must have meant a lot to her if she was carrying it around with her, and in its' own pocket. It was cheap and small, but he could easily see Lori beaming with excitement





when it was given to her. She'd never let something like this go.

Conversely, she'd never want to lose it.

Mick had to return the bag... but maybe in just a few minutes, after he had a chance to just hold it. It smelled so nice. Like lavender.



"It's about this big," Lori said, using her hands to indicate the size of the bag she had lost. She had returned to Talbot's, and fortunately a different sales woman was on shift. "And it's black nylon. It has tons of pockets." Lori looked around hoping to spot it herself, lying about in the store somewhere.

"Oh, we sold that," the woman said with a grin. The immediate drop in Lori's expression told her she'd gone too far. "Just kidding. I'll look in the office."

After five seconds, she returned, leaving Lori with the definite impression she hadn't been looking that hard.

"No, we haven't got anything like that," the clerk said. "Sorry. But if anyone turns it in, you can leave your name and contact number."

Lori scribbled out her cell number on a business card and left it, but she knew it was a futile effort. She returned to the sidewalk, beginning to really worry about her situation.

"Oh God," she said. "I can't live without that bag." She was surprisingly dependent about losing it. "My medications... My spares... Mr. Kendrick's trophy!" She wailed.



He thought about it for a while, but it was going to have to happen. He was going to email her. Mick had Lori's email from the many, many inter-office memos he had read, and this was the best and most direct way to put all this to rest.

"Found your bag. I would like to get it back to you," he wrote. Keeping it brief was the best policy. He signed it "Mickey," his real name.

"You're a life saver! That would be so nice of you!" Came a message from Lori ten minutes later. Mick could feel his heart pounding faster than when he thrilled a festival crowd with a solo.

From there, they arranged to meet in the park near the hotel she was staying at. Mick grabbed his trench coat and he was off.



As the executive in charge of the San Diego office, Dave Simmons had a duty to make sure he maintained an efficient and hospitable work environment for maximum workplace productivity. As such, he made sure that he had access to all of his employee's email accounts, and since Lori was still his employee, he could see what she was communicating.

With the way she had been behaving, he thought it best to monitor her, and when an email came up from a source outside the company, he was sure to check on it.

He read Mick's message to Lori, and it was a bit of a red flag. She was being asked to meet a stranger in a park, alone, and at night. That had danger written all over it. However, he couldn't alert Lori, as she would know he read her email.

Out of an abundance of caution, Dave Simmons decided he needed to call Rod Johnson. Rod worked out of Alexandria, and he had known him forever, both working sales when they started at PolyCon some 15 years ago. They'd gone golfing several times, and even vacationed in Utah once. There was even that time he bought Rod's powerboat. Rod was someone he trusted.

"Rod Johnson. Talk to me," Mr. Johnson said as his office phone rang.

"Rod, this is Dave," Mr. Simmons said.

"What can I do you for, Dave? Hey, did you get that memo on acoustic tile I sent you?"

"Got it. Still reviewing the details. Listen, I need to talk to you about Lori Chandler."

"Lori Chandler," Rod repeated.

"The girl I'm sending out there before I make the move myself."

"Oh yes! She's due... Holy smokes. She's due here tomorrow. Time flies."

"Well, she's already in town getting situated, and I think she may be in over her head. The whole Kendrick situation seems to have really knocked her off her game."

"That's a shame about Jerry. I was thinking about sending some flowers."

"I'm sure his widow will appreciate the thoughtful gesture. No, what I needed to talk to you about was Lori. I think she's getting herself into trouble, and I was hoping you could drop by and check on her."

“I’ve got a pretty tight agenda at the moment, Dave. Plus, Mia, my assistant quit yesterday. It’s not a great time.”

“It’ll just take a few minutes, Rod.”

“I really can’t, Dave.”

“She’s meeting someone at the park in front of the hotel where she’s staying. Near as I can tell, she lost her luggage and someone claims to have found it. It sounds suspicious.”

“I guess I can drop by for a moment,” Rod said. “What’s she look like?”

“Medium height, long blond hair, glasses.”

“All right, all right. No promises, but I’ll try to check in on her. When is this?”

“Six o’clock.”

“That’s in twelve minutes. Would have appreciated more of a heads-up.”

“I really do appreciate it, Rod.”

“You owe me five strokes the next time we hit the links,” Rod said as he ended the call.



“Bingo,” Dick Thornheart said as he got an encrypted text message.

“She’s leaving,” was all the message said. He straightened his tie. He had been waiting in his godforsaken rental car for hours, sitting patiently. As the CEO and Chairman of PolyCon Corp, Mr. Thornheart had better things to be doing than waiting outside the dumpy Old Town Sheraton, but there was no other place in the world he needed to be than right here and right now.

A second message came in. “She does not have the bag.” According to his informant, Lori Chandler was leaving her hotel room, and that was the moment he’d been waiting ten years for.

Mr. Thornheart made sure his gun was loaded and put it away in his concealed holster and got out of the car. Taking care to avoid being noticed, he went towards the hotel. He sent a text message and waited before he set foot on the property. A few seconds later, he got a text message back. “Security and surveillance disabled,” it read. “All doors unlocked. You have 20 minutes.”

Mr. Thornheart stepped into the lobby and saw the staff running around, trying to fix the problems he had just caused. He rode up the elevator and went straight to Lori’s room. He pushed the now-unlocked door and it sprung open for him.

He looked around the room, but didn't see what he assumed would be there. A small, black, nylon bag with several pockets. He looked in the bathroom. He checked the drawers. He opened the closet. The executive was getting angrier and angrier as he couldn't find the bag. He tossed the mattress aside to check under it. He pulled the drawers out of the dressers to make sure it wasn't hidden. It wasn't here. The bag wasn't here.

It had been such a carefully managed plan. He personally had arranged everything. It couldn't have failed, he reassured himself. Ten years couldn't have come down to this. It had to be here somewhere. The single personal item left in the room was Lori's cell phone, which was the only proof that she actually occupied this suite.

When Mr. Thornheart had planted his mole inside Universal Plastics a decade ago, he was playing the long game. Eventually, when Universal perfected a formula for a molecular adhesive it was time for Dick Thornheart to spring his trap and get his hands on it. Such a material would be incalculably valuable, and essentially the most sought after material on the planet. It could bond anything at the molecular level, which was its original intent, but when used as a weapon, it would essentially reduce any material to atoms upon contact. It could kill and destroy with an efficiency never before seen. Now that he had the formula in the pentagon's back yard, he could easily sell it to back to them for billions — or to other bidders.

Once their mole had smuggled the formula out of the Universal Plastics facility, he had passed it on to Jerry Kendrick, and the mole was... *removed*. Once Jerry had passed it on, he too had been... *removed*. Such was business. It was nothing personal.

However, the authorities knew by now. They knew that the formula had leaked, and a valuable part of national security had been breached. There were heavy security dragnets all over the country to try and find the smuggler, and anyone with any kind of history being involved in plastics and materials development would get stopped and thoroughly searched at the checkpoints. Unless, of course, it was just a lowly secretary who happened to have the data on a chip embedded in a small gold trophy.

Yet it wasn't here. The bag, the trophy. None of it was here. Thornheart knew Lori Chandler wasn't carrying the bag when she left, so where had it gone? In anger, he grabbed a lamp and used it to shatter the screen of Lori's phone.

Well, he had to do the reasonable thing and go ask her in person. He had always preferred meeting people face to face.



In the park, Lori Chandler was waiting patiently. In fact, she was a bit early, as she didn't want to miss the meeting for any reason. If this was her lost bag, and there was no reason to believe it wasn't, all her problems would be solved.

She had been standing in the dim light for about a minute before she realized she might not have been in the safest place in the world at the safest time.

The sky was already dark, and the light was coming from some very sparse and weak overhead lights. Looking around, the benches were not occupied by businesspeople and kids, but by some very scruffy folks who smelled like it had been a few years since they'd bathed. This was not, she came to quickly realize, one of her best ideas. Leaving her phone up in her room was especially not smart.

Thinking better of the situation, she decided to go across the street to the sushi place until it was actually time to meet the person she was supposed to meet.

Mick Van Helsten was, at the very same time, approaching from the opposite direction. He had come right from the theater, not wasting a second on his mission to reunite Lori with her bag.

He had arrived a little early, hoping to see Lori approach. He didn't think it was a very good idea to be out in the park this late, and was worried she might get herself into trouble or something.

The thing was — and Mick was not that aware of the reality of the situation — he looked ridiculous. He was still dressed in his stage costume, and still had a face full of stage makeup on. With lipstick, eye liner, glittery raised-heeled shoes and long hair, one might have gotten a mistaken impression about Mick.

"Lori?" Asked a man who came up behind him.

"Whuh?" Mick replied, turning around. It was a man in a business suit, and he didn't look very friendly to Mick.

"No... I..."

Dick Thornheart was insistent, however. "We need to talk, Lori, why don't you come with me." He had never seen Lori and was just going on her general description, which Mick fit almost too well. Plus, he was holding the bag.

"No thank you," Mick told him.

"Let me hold that bag for you Lori," Dick said. "I heard you won a little trophy. I'd love to see it."

Mick grabbed it back from the older man's hands. "No! This is Lori's!"

"Hey!" a voice yelled in the distance. "Hey you!"



Mr. Thornheart grabbed Mick by the arm. “My car is parked right over here, Lori.” He was able to free himself from the other man’s grasp, but instead, Mick was grabbed by the throat.

“Leave her alone!” yelled the voice in the distance. “Leave Lori alone!”

“Let go of me!” Mick wheezed, barely capable of speaking with the strong hand crushing his windpipe. He was able to squirm and force this strange man to release him, which was enough time to make a break for it. He jumped over a row of bushes and landed on his back, but scrambled to his feet again. Looking behind him, he could see people running towards him, so he kept running, too. However, running with his head turned around proved to have one major drawback, as he ran into a rather large, leafy tree, head-first.

“Goddamn it,” Dick said, breaking into a trot. He hated physical exertion. He made two steps to get to that bag, but before he could get any farther, he was pushed to the ground by another man. He recognized him. That man worked for him.

“Lori! Are you all right?” said Rod Johnson, running past the figure that had been trying to grab her. His priority was with Lori, not the guy who was giving her trouble.

Dick Thornheart made a strategic call and turned away. He couldn’t risk being identified, and if he stuck around, surely Rod Johnson would do just that. He made his escape while Rod was busy.

“Lori?” Rod said, seeing Mick played out on the grass. “Miss Chandler? Are you all right?”

Mick woke up looking right into the eyes of Rod Johnson, dressed in an impressively tailored and expensive business suit. Mick’s made-up eyes blinked to life again, and his lipstick-covered lips tried to speak. He coughed instead.

“Lori?” He asked again. “Lori, are you conscious?”

Mick was coughing hard. The damage to his neck wasn’t bad, but it did hurt quite a bit.

“What happened?” Mick asked, talking in a whisper, which was all he could manage.

“You had someone hassling you. You were trying to get away from them.”

Mick sat up a little more. “I did? I don’t remember.”

“Did you get a look at him?”

“Who? I can’t remember... Where am I?”

“Alexandria House Park, Lori.”



“Lori?” Mick asked.

“Yes. Lori. Lori Chandler. You recognize your own name, don’t you?”

Mick had to think about it. The name was familiar. Very familiar. “Yes. Lori Chandler.” His voice was starting to return to him.

“Do you feel good enough to stand up, Lori?”

“I think so,” Mick replied. He relied on Rod’s guidance as he found his balance. “Thanks. Do I know you?” Mick asked.

“I’m Rod Johnson,” Mr. Johnson explained. “Mr. Simmons asked me to check in on you.”

“I don’t... How did I...?”

“Dave Simmons, your boss,” Rod said to clarify.

Again, the name sounded very familiar to Mick. He was definitely well acquainted with it. “My boss?”

“Do you need to see a physician?” Mr. Johnson asked.



“I think I’m all right,” Mick answered. His voice had come back just a little.

“That’s a girl,” Rod said with a smile. “She’s a trooper.”

Mick wasn’t sure what to make of the situation. The last thing he remembered he was... Well... He had no ‘last thing’ he could remember. His memories seemed to begin just a minute ago. His mind was full of vague thoughts of arguments, walking around Alexandria, riding in a bus, and names. Names like Lori Chandler.

His name? It was familiar, but was it *that* familiar? He wasn’t sure. It was a woman’s name, so why did he not feel like a woman at all? He thought of himself as a he, not a she. However, looking down at himself, he could see the sparkling silver shoes and glittery pants he was wearing and had to conclude that he was in fact Lori Chandler.

“Here’s your bag,” Rod said, picking up the nylon traveling bag from the ground.

This, Mick recognized. He knew it right away. It was Lori’s bag. It was his bag.

“Oh yes, thank you,” Mick said. His voice had settled into a breathy, lighter tone that befitted the way he was being treated. In years of touring with DëthWÿsh, he had performed many, many songs doing back-up vocals in falsetto, and slipping into a more feminine tone was easier than it might be for most people.

“What do you remember?” Rod asked.

“Not... Not much...” Mick replied. “I don’t really remember much at all.”

“Do you remember where you woke up this morning?”

“No,” Mick said, slightly terrified by his lack of memory.

“Looks like you took a knock on the ‘ol casaba there.”

Mick rubbed the back of his head. It was sore, but not swollen or anything. “I guess I did.”

“Let’s get you out of here, okay Lori? My car is across the way.”

“Sure. Yes. Good idea.”

Mr. Simmons gently gripped Mick’s arm, and guided him out of the park, with Mick looking around, somewhat bewildered with his situation.

Lori Chandler, with a sack of fresh sushi in her hands, returned to the park to meet the person who was going to return her bag. After five minutes with no sign of anyone, she began to edge closer and closer to the park exit, worried it was getting far too late to be here on her own. Finally, she had to give up, and figured she’d just send another email to see what the situation was.

Heading back to the hotel, she tripped across something on the ground. It was too dark for Lori to see, but if she could, she would have recognized a phone, Mick's phone, half-embedded in the muddy dirt, along with a lost necklace.



Mr. Johnson helped Mick into the passenger side of his Lincoln Continental like the gentleman he was. He got into his side and brought the interior lights up.

“Why don't you check your bag to see if there's anything to help jog your memory?” He suggested.

Mick was looking at his reflection in the passenger mirror, seeing his lipstick and eyeliner, which was his usual stage makeup, and he wasn't shocked. It seemed common and ordinary for him to be wearing makeup. His hair was a bit of a mess, though.

“Lori?” Rod asked again to get his passenger's attention.

“Oh, yes,” Mick said. He opened up one of the pockets and inside was a small gold trophy that read “San Diego Office MVP.” He had seen this before. He knew what it was.

“You must have gotten that just before you left,” Rod said. “A going away present.”

“Going away?”

“Yes, you just had your last day at the San Diego office and they must have given you that. Now you're out here in Alexandria before Dave himself moves out here.”

None of this seemed familiar to Mick. It rang no bells. The only thing he could vouch for was that he had seen this trophy before.

“I do remember this,” he told Mr. Johnson.

“Good, good. We're making progress. Try another pocket.”

“Oh, some emergency cash,” Mick said, finding \$20 in various bills in the next pocket. “And a prepaid cash card.”

“You're very well prepared. Very neat and tidy.”

“I guess so.” Mick opened up a slightly larger part of the bag, and inside he found some papers and a key. “Old Town Apartments,” he read from the paper.

Rod took them to see for himself. “Looks like a lease agreement for your new place. Below market rate.” He then saw the keys in Mick’s hand. “Those must be the keys. What say we head over there so you can get settled in?”

“Oh. Okay,” Mick said, unsure that any response he gave would be the right one. Mr. Johnson pulled out of his parking space. “Dave, I mean, Mr. Simmons speaks of you very highly. Says you’re the best secretary he’s ever had.”

“I am? He does?” Mick had heard the name Dave Simmons somewhere, but he couldn’t say in what context. Still, he was grateful to hear another thing he was somewhat familiar with. He looked down in the bag further, opening the main pocket. “What the...?” He said out loud.

“What is it?”

Scared, confused and slightly terrified, Mick shut the flap. He didn’t want Mr. Johnson to see this. Not until he understood why it... or they... were in there.

Mick had no answers. “Nothing. It’s... It’s... Nothing.”

“Well, I won’t pry. My mother always taught me to let a woman have her secrets. I’ve found it to be very sound advice. Mother is always right.”

The thing was, Mick couldn’t even begin to explain what he had just seen in there. It defied reality. It had to be a joke. It couldn’t be real.

“Say, this is a nice place,” Rod Johnson said as they walked onto the grounds of the Old Town Apartments. “I like it.” It was a complex of two-story buildings that must have had eight to twelve apartments each. He escorted Mick to the entrance. “What do you suppose the landscaping bill is to keep a place like this looking so neat?”

“I... Uh... I really don’t know,” Mick responded. “My first time here.”

“Ah, of course. Well, I’ll trust you can find your way to your place from here. I have to get back to the office and wrap up things for the night. I’ll see you in the morning, okay?”

“Yes,” Mick replied, his voice getting even weaker and higher with every sentence he spoke. “Thank you, Rod.”

“Mr. Johnson. I am the senior executive here, after all.”

“Yes, Mr. Johnson,” Mick said. Something about saying those words felt stirring to him. The formality was unexpectedly comforting and made him... Happy.

When the door of the entrance shut, Mick exhaled. He was very glad to get rid of Mr. Johnson. Not that he didn’t like him, he had found him to be very helpful, capable and charming.

It was the things he had seen in that bag. They were so outlandish, so strange, that he had to take a much closer look, and by himself.

The key to his new apartment opened the door, and although it had a very strong smell of carpet shampoo, it was nice to have a space to himself. Up against the far wall were dozens of moving boxes, neatly stacked and labeled.

However, what Mick needed to do immediately was to see the contents of this bag. He walked over to the kitchen counter, set the bag down and opened it all the way open.

It was full of things a woman would have in an overnight bag: shoes, a change of clothes, makeup, hair brushes, a tooth brush, and more. It was the rest of it that had given Mick trouble: a pair of gelatinous, wriggly breasts.

Breast forms, to be exact. Very detailed down to the nipple.

He poked at them, and they shimmied.

Then there were the pills. Estrogen, Progesterone, Finasteride, Cyclosporine... These were hormones for feminizing therapy, from what he knew.

There was also a pair of padded panties, and they had this strange little catch in the inseam. It was a gaffe, something to hide the penis.

Lori Chandler was a man.

The trench coat had concealed Mick's upper chest quite well, and he hadn't really thought to feel until now, but sure enough, it was flat. He had a man's chest. He used his shaky hand to touch in between his legs, and there was a penis there. He absolutely was a man.

So since he was Lori Chandler, as far as he knew, and this was his bag, that meant he was a transgender woman. This was a lot to take in.



Lori Chandler's night went from bad to worse, as when she got back to her hotel room, she found it torn apart. There wasn't much to steal, but the one thing she had left behind, her phone, was smashed.

She immediately called the front desk to tell them what had happened, dissolving into a blubbery, emotional mess. Their surveillance and security system had failed a few minutes earlier, the clerk explained, and it had likely led to the attempted robbery.

After recovering from her distress, the hotel offered an upgrade for her troubles, but Lori was sensibly afraid it would happen again, and so they offered to give her a new room at the Airport Marriott, which she took them up on.

So in her new hotel room, and much later than she wanted to be up, Lori Chandler was getting ready to go to bed. She removed her jacket, blouse, bra and breast forms. Losing the bag with her spares in it was going to cost her a lot. They were near five hundred dollars a pair, and now it looked like she'd never get them back.

Was it even worth it to try, though? She knew that in just a few months, she'd be ditching the forms altogether, at least that's what her doctor had said. The breasts start to fill in for themselves after six months of hormones, and it was already four months since she had started taking the drugs. She could already feel them starting to grow.

She had been Lawrence Chandler when she started working at PolyCon Corp, but that was when she worked alone in the mail room. As she got promoted, she took on more and more of a full-time feminine lifestyle, and when she got the job working in the executive office, she had presented herself as Lori to her new co-workers from day one. Only the human resources people knew the truth.

Lori undressed carefully, making sure she didn't wrinkle her clothes. They were the only ones she had for now. It was going to be a busy day, tomorrow. First day on the job at a new place, getting a new phone and buying some clothes. She turned out the lights, unsure what the next day would bring.



Mick haphazardly put on a pair of pantyhose and tore through them, then another pair right after that. Frustrated, he realized he had to take it slowly. On the third try, he was much more successful. Once he had them on, however, he couldn't help but notice that they didn't do much to conceal his scraggly leg hair. In fact, it seemed to magnify it.

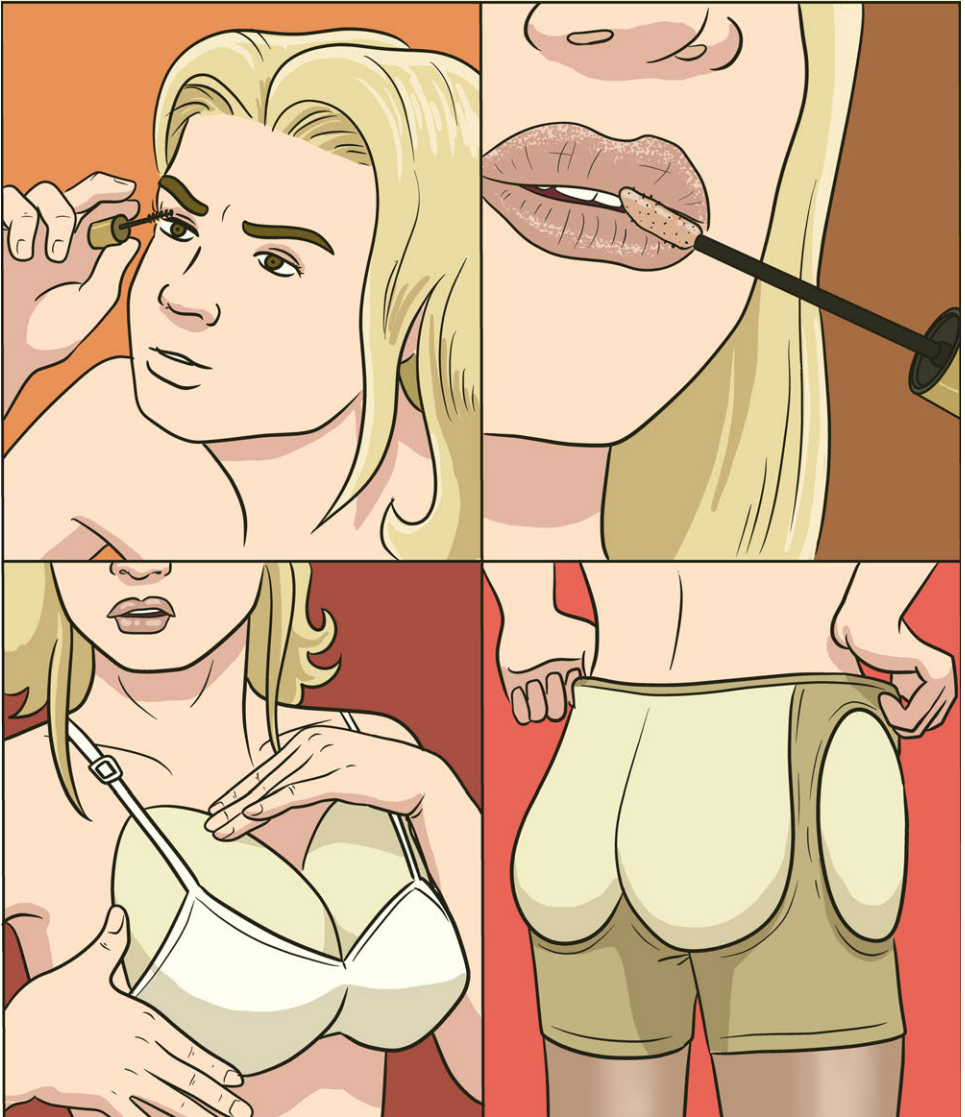
Fortunately, there was a razor and foam in the overnight bag, and shaved his legs. It was more awkward than he would have thought, and apparently his amnesia extended to his leg-shaving skills.

He hadn't been able to sleep so he had an early start on his preparation for his first day in the Alexandria offices of PolyCon Corp, which Mick was going to need every second of.

The process of getting dressed was completely unfamiliar to him, as if he'd never worn a women's business suit before, but he knew better.

*Did he know better?*

Once he had hairless legs, which felt weird, Mick turned his attention to his chest. He had thought about using the adhesive with the breast forms, but didn't want to put glue in his chest hair. Now, though, he was already holding a razor, so off came the chest hair. Now the glue could be used properly. The underarms were next to get shaved, and then his face.



Since most male-to-female transexuals usually had their body hair permanently removed, Mick was a little puzzled why he hadn't done it. Maybe he'd remember his reasons in time, as his memories came back to him.

He followed the directions on the pill bottles and took his hormones as he assumed he did every morning and went back to dressing.

There were a lot of steps to follow. In his mind, he anticipated dressing to be much simpler, but like a lot of things since he'd gotten that whack to the head, his expectations didn't match up with reality.

Gluing the breast forms to his chest was the strangest sensation, as the cold silicone and squishy glue made him shiver. By the time he managed to get the bra on, though, it felt all right, even comfortable. His panties were another matter, as the only way he could get things to work the way they appeared to work was by sticking his penis into a flap that went right between his legs. That did not feel all right in the least, nor comfortable. It did, though, make him look far more feminine, which was what he was trying to achieve.

The clothes in the overnight bag weren't a perfect fit for him, but he got used to them quickly. There was a plain white blouse with a mock bow tie, a black jacket, a long black skirt and a pair of black flats. There were probably earrings, necklaces and bracelets in the moving boxes, and there were probably better choices in clothes in them as well, but he didn't have the time to look. Besides, it kind of felt like he was invading someone's privacy, for reasons that weren't clear to him.

It was only when he got his makeup and hair that things began to click. As a traveling stage performer, Mick Van Helsten had several occasions when he had to do his own makeup. Hairstyling was an everyday thing, too. He finally felt like he was in familiar territory.

Lastly, he put on the pair of glasses that were in the overnight bag, and couldn't understand why he wore them at all, as they seemed to blur his vision. However, there was no arguing with the situation — if he had glasses in his bag, then he wore glasses, and that was all there was to it.

With his phone missing, Mick had to rely on the maps posted at the bus stop to get to work. That would probably be the first thing to do when he got the chance — get a new phone.

Even through all the trials of the morning, Mick arrived at work on time, because that was just the type of person Lori Chambers was, and he was obviously Lori Chambers.

“Badge?” The security guard asked him at the entrance.