

That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore – Chapter 6

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CHAPTER 6

Mickie had walked two blocks before the rain fell. She could risk running into that new boutique that had just opened down the street for shelter, but thought that her wallet couldn't take such hardcore shelter. A cab would be better, and surprisingly cheaper. She hailed one as her cell phone beeped.

The cab pulled smoothly to the curb and she sat in back. "Lucky I caught you." She joked to the driver. "Looks like its really coming." Mickie peered at the ID on the security divider. It wasn't the guy that she'd talked to earlier. That would have been too easy.

"What d'ya expect when you're not far from the depot?"

Mickie shrugged. It had been meant as joke. She sat back in the seat and stared at a rivulet of water coming down the window. The less than friendly cab driver was still staring at her via the rear view mirror when she turned to him, realising that they weren't moving.

"Where to?" He asked.

"Sorry." She said.

"Makes no difference to me," He hacked something up in a handkerchief. At least he would have done if there had been a handkerchief present. He examined whatever it was, and then wiped it on something Mickie couldn't see. "It's your dime." He said finally.

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Mickie nodded in agreement, feeling a little too nauseous to say anything. She would down and took in a gulp of Manhattan air. There was a hotdog cart nearby. She couldn't see it, just smell it. It wasn't helping.

The cab driver, or Marv Richard Michael, as his licence displayed continued to stare at her. He shifted around in his seat. "Are we gonna sit here all night?" He ran a hand over his balding head. "It's fine if we are," he continued, "I'll just get my Sudoku out and we can make a night out of it." He blinked for several seconds. "You a cop on a stakeout?" He chuckled.

"Yes."

The chuckle stopped. Mickie's nausea had subsided as much as it was going to in the present environment. "Sunset Cab Company" she said finally.

"You're kidding?"

"No. I need..." She trailed off. "Look, it isn't important why I want to go there, just that I do. So let's go."

Marv pulled out into traffic without checking his mirrors. That's what she loved about this city. You could get into a cab at anytime – day or night – and be nearly killed.

The cab ride took less time than the conversation and within two minutes she found herself standing on the curb outside of Sunset Cabs, staring up at the fading brickwork. Marv pulled away in search of the next fare, again without looking at his

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mirrors or using any turn signal. Foot to the floor, balls to the passenger seat. All that jazz.

“You gotta admire that.” Mickie said to a passing woman. The woman didn't respond or even break stride and in a moment she was gone.

“Yeah, you do.” A familiar voice behind her said.

She turned. A smile crept across her face before she realised it. “Detective Lyndon.”

“Officer Chalmers.” Lyndon said. “What are you doing here?”

Despite herself, she lied. “Looking for a cab.”

Reece Lyndon chuckled to himself and coughed a little. “I don't think you are.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Cause I saw you pull up in a cab.” He motioned to the curb as though Mickie had forgotten where she had left the cab.

“Okay officer, it's fair cop.” She raised her hands. “I'll go quietly.”

Lyndon laughed. “I don't think that'll be necessary.” He looked at her. “You were curious weren't you?”

Mickie said “yeah.”

“And that's a good trait to have. You'll be a detective soon if you keep that up.”

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Mickie smiled. “Well it would mean that I got paid.” She paused. “What are you doing here anyway?”

“I was looking for a cab.” He patted his jacket for something. “You mean honestly?”

“Yeah, honestly.”

“I was as curious as you.” He produced a stick of gum, put it in his mouth and began to chew. “Only I’m here to be curious officially.”

“I guess this means that I’m off the case, huh?”

Lyndon tapped his foot on the sidewalk as he thought. “You could tag along, I suppose. Give you a head start on the detective training. Just hang back and let me do the talking.”

Mickie took an overly theatrical step back, inviting him to lead the way. “After you good, sir.” Mickie suddenly felt she’d been transported back to Medieval England and was suddenly very aware of herself.

Lyndon laughed and walked on. “Yeah, just like a real detective.” He said.

Mickie followed and wondered if she should be playing a lute and then thought better of it. The cabbies probably would take kind to that. And she didn’t remember seeing that many lute playing detectives on TV. It would probably give the wrong idea to the perps. Not gritty enough and would be trying too hard for a laugh.

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Lyndon and Mickie entered the Sunset Cabs Garage. His shoes squeaked on the flooring as he moved, she followed closely behind looking at various cabs lined up in rows being repaired and rebuilt. She tried to look for the cab numbers on the bodywork, but couldn't see number 804, the one they were looking for.

Lyndon's shoes seemed to attract the attention of the natives to strangers in their midst. Not for their look, though they were very nice, but for the noise they were making. A group of drivers playing cards at a makeshift table made from an up-ended fruit crate stopped and stared.

"Is he here?" Lyndon asked Mickie, but she wasn't listening to him. He stopped to turn to her but before he could she bumped into the back of him.

The cab drivers laughed uproariously before returning to their game. "Raise you twenty." One of them with his back to Lyndon said.

Lyndon peered over one of the Raiser's shoulder and looked at his cards. Just a pair of twos. The detective shook his head, only slightly but the sign was picked up by some of the competitors. The Raiser wasn't about to bluff his way to this pot.

The detective walked a few steps away from the game in progress. He could bust them for gambling but he really didn't want the paper work. Just wanted to go find this driver, have a couple of words about how next time he's involved in an accident he should really stop and then Lyndon could be on his way home. "So did you see him?"

Mickie shook her head.

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“Come on, lets find the dispatcher then we can get the hell out of here.”

“Got somewhere to go?” She said.

“Anywhere that doesn't involve spending the evening breathing in gasoline fumes.”

“Ah, you're going to a bar then.” She chided him.

Detective Lyndon didn't respond, he just walked off towards the dispatcher's office. Mickie waited a second or two before moving off after him.

The door was open as he approached, but Lyndon knocked anyway, immediately following it with a flashing of his badge as he entered the grimy little space. Mickie stepped in behind him, staying close but hanging back enough to get a good look at the room.

The bare concrete walls had various stains on them probably from years of misuse and who knows what. In the wall behind the desk there was a doorway. The desk was a cheap little rundown thing which was also an accurate description for the man sitting behind it. The man's legs were out stretched on the desk as he leafed through some old newspaper. There was sweat on his brow. On the edge of the desk was a silver picture frame, which seemed at odds with the wash of papers that were strewn across the rest of the desk.

“I'm Detective Lyndon. You the dispatcher?” Lyndon asked the man.

He didn't respond directly to Lyndon He just screamed. “Sally. There's someone here to see you.”

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There was a flush of a toilet, the rattle of some old corroding pipes and Sally emerged from the dark doorway behind the desk. “Get your feet off my desk, Burt.” Sally ripped the newspaper from Burt’s hand and smacked him over the head with it. Burt raised his hands around the back of his head for protection against the broadsheet.

“Ow. That hurt.” Burt said as Detective Lyndon smiled to himself.

“It’d weigh less if you used less ink on the paper. It wouldn’t hurt at all if you did what I’d told you to do all those times.” She folded her arms.

“But I...” said Burt.

“But nothin’. And get outta my chair while you’re at it.” Sally looked at the visitors for the first time. “What do you want?”

With encouragement like that it was easy to see why Burt vacated the chair with haste and bolted from the room.

Very polite, thought Lyndon. “I’m Detective Lyndon.” He said. “I’m here about a cab registered to your company.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” Lyndon said. Though it wasn’t the greatest comeback, it was indeed accurate. “We just want to know about cab eight oh four.” He said it slowly so she would understand.

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“What about it?” She said as she picked up a pencil from the desk and tucked it behind her right ear.

“Who was driving?” Lyndon said.

Sally stiffened at the question. “Has there been an accident? Goddamn it.”

“Nothing like that,” Mickie said from her position by the wall. Lyndon turned and glared at her. “Actually that’s not entirely true.”

The chair creaked as Sally sat down. “You know how much damn paper work is going to take?” Lyndon didn’t know but he could guess. He wasn’t exactly sure it was a question as her voice didn’t go up at the end. He was about to make a guess anyway when Sally continued. “A lot that’s for sure.” He had been right, which was always a good feeling for a detective.

“So can we take a look at your records?” Mickie said.

Lyndon let that one slide as it would have been his next question anyway.

“That would explain things.” Sally said, the pencil now clamped between her teeth.

“How so?” Lyndon said.

“We haven’t heard from that one since this morning. New guy I seem to remember. Probably running scared.”

Lyndon watched as Sally put the pencil down on the desk, a little spittle now pooling at the head of the pencil seeping into the surrounding papers. Sally didn’t

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seem to notice or possibly she just didn't care. From over his shoulder Lyndon heard Mickie cough. Whether she was as transfixed with the spittle as he was, remained uncertain. He blinked hard and looked at Sally who was now meeting his gaze.

“Burt get me the info on eight oh four.” She shouted. There was silence. “Now.” She continued after nothing but silence followed by a low moan from presumably Burt out in the Garage area.

A moment later Burt stalked in with a computer print out and slapped it down on Sally's desk. “Eight oh four.” He pronounced and then he left.

Mickie watched Burt go. He wondered over to the makeshift card game and decided to join.

“Fresh meat.” One of the cab drivers chuckled.

By the time Mickie's attention was back in the room she noticed that Detective Lyndon was looking at the print out over Sally's shoulder.

“You got a second?”

She realised that Lyndon had directed that at her. “Sure.” Mickie positioned herself behind Sally's other shoulder.

“That him?” Lyndon said.

“Of course, it's him.” Sally insisted. “We don't just give out cabs to any guy with a fake ID otherwise we'd have half the college students in town down here driving.”

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“Officer Chalmers? Why don't you have a look?” The Detective said, more for Sally's benefit than the Officer's.

Mickie took the print out and looked at it closely. The grainy black and white image didn't give much away. The guy was bald and so was the guy she talked to. “Could be him,” Mickie said. “It's a bit hard to tell with such a lousy image.”

Sally shook her head. “Who else would it be?”

Lyndon shrugged his shoulders. “That's what we're here to find out.”

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