

A Sudden Attack of Conscience

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A Sudden Attack of Conscience

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

Summary

Ms. Li wrestles with her conscience as she makes an important decision prior to graduation.

Notes

This is part of an abandoned story I had written that would have concentrated on Quinn's senior year. It also has some elements of a lost story of mine which looked at Angela Li and Anthony DeMartino in the 1960s before these characters became who they were in the series and was something of a tragic story in that it began with Angela Li being a happy and vivacious young woman who suffered a tragedy which caused her to switch from dance to education and then at how she gradually became corrupted--selling her soul a piece at a time until she became who she was in the Daria series. As she changed the inner and outer beauty that she had become corrupted as well until we see the woman she became in the series.

Leaning back in her high-backed office chair, Angela Li grunted as she stretched. “Too much work...not enough sleep...and only a week until graduation...” The principal of Lawndale High groused as she got up and poured a cup of coffee. “And not one word of thanks for all I do!”

“Ohhhh...poor baby!”

Ignoring the familiar sounding voice, Ms. Li muttered under her breath as she returned to her seat. “Instead, I get that witch Helen Morgendorffer constantly bitching and moaning about my ‘violating the civil rights of the students’—yeah right—and if I didn’t keep a constant eye on them, those same students would be snorting, shooting, sniffing, drinking or smoking themselves into a stupor—and when they’re not doing that, then they’d be screwing each other silly in the stacks of the library, the bathroom stalls, the locker rooms, under the bleachers or wherever else they could get away with it. Doesn’t she see? I’m doing this for their own good!”

“Yeah—and I’ve got roses growing outta my ass!”

Gritting her teeth, Ms. Li once again ignored the voice as she continued her tirade. “And if it’s not Helen Morgendorffer, then it’s Tony DeMartino whipping the other teachers into a frenzy over their pay; or the Lawndale Boosters demanding even more perks for the football team; or the students led by the Morgendorffer girls and Jane Lane always trying to slack off.” Then, her shoulders drooping, she sighed mournfully. “It never ends...”

“No...” This time the voice sounded vaguely sympathetic. *“It never does...well...it will one day—just ask Stephanie—you do remember Steph—don’t you?”*

Brushing back a tear as memories of her old friend briefly resurfaced, Ms. Li shook them off and, in an effort to silence both the memories and that increasingly annoying voice, turned her attention to the security monitor. “Well, I see Pavlov decided that he’s done loafing for the day and is heading home.” That means it’s just me and all this crap.” She sighed melodramatically as she regarded the flickering monitor screen and pile of paperwork on her desk. “Where to begin...”

Yawning, Ms. Li regarded the printout lying on the desk before her. It was a roll of the senior class, listing their GPA’s, discipline flags, and extracurricular activities. Beside that sat a letter from Ditronics Ltd., advertising modifications to the GR-13 cameras that she had bought last year with the school’s ‘discretionary’ funds. Lying underneath that letter was an envelope with the Lawndale High Booster Society letterhead. “Probably concerning Kevin Thompson.” She groaned as she debated on whether to open the envelope now and get it over with or to wait until later. “I’ll do it later.” She sighed as she turned her attention once again to the class roll. “Final graduation check...” The now tired principal remarked softly as she pinched the bridge of her nose.

“Landon, Jodie...3.9 GPA; Served as President and Vice President, Student Council, President, Editor, Yearbook; Young Businessmen and Women’s League; President, Lawndale High French Club; Homecoming Queen for three consecutive years; Tennis team; interned

for Congressman Sack...no real discipline problems to speak of...Accepted by both Crestview and Turner.” Flashing a rare, warm smile, Angela Li said to the empty room, “I’m going to miss her...”

“Kinda reminds you of someone—doesn’t she?”

Scowling, Ms. Li then spoke aloud to the empty room. “Go away! I’m busy...I don’t have time for this right now.” Then, her eyes falling upon the next entry, she gritted her teeth.

“Lane, Jane...2.5 GPA; ran the 1.5 K run and the 3K relay for the Lawndale High Track Team for one month during sophomore year; attended Self-Esteem Workshop six times before finally passing test; Suspended for one week, freshman year for putting green dye into the girls’ gym shower heads. When asked why she did it, replied that she was making an ‘artistic statement’. Incident concerning vandalism at Lawndale High regarding defacing her entry in the ‘Student Life at the Dawn of the New Millennium’ poster contest during sophomore year—cleared of all charges along with her alleged accomplice, Daria Morgendorffer...” Barely repressing her anger as she remembered her humiliation at the hands of the two girls, and then Helen Morgendorffer’s threat to sue should they be punished, Angela Li forced herself to continue to read, “Suspected, along with Daria Morgendorffer in January incident concerning the rewiring of the security cameras placed in the girls’ bathrooms...Letter of recommendation from Ms. Claire DeFoe to Boston Fine Arts College.” It was all Ms. Li could do to keep her temper in check as she read Ms. Defoe’s glowing letter. “Jane Lane possesses a remarkable talent, especially as regards capturing the hidden torment and angst that lies within us all. I firmly believe that the addition of Ms. Lane to your program would be of benefit to both you and her...”

“You know...she sounds like a real gas! Sorta reminds me of Stephanie. Too bad I didn’t go to school with her...we’d have had a blast!”

Barely repressing a snarl, Ms. Li growled a low, “Get lost!” to the still empty room as she checked off the ‘approved’ box next to Jane’s name. “The sooner she and that Morgendorffer girl are out of here—the better!” She spat out as she continued down the list.

“Mackenzie, Michael J...” She read, smiling again. “3.5 GPA; Captain—Lawndale High football, baseball, and basketball teams; Member, Lawndale High African American Club; Letters of recommendation for a scholarship from A. DeMartino, T. O’Neill, and...” Ms. Li’s eyes grew wider as she read the name of the last teacher, J. Barch. “I’ve GOT to find out how he managed to get a good letter of recommendation out of her!” Quickly checking off her approval, her eyes narrowed to angry slits as they fell upon the next name.

“Ooooooh...looks like someone’s got your panties in a wad...”

“I told you to go away!” Ms. Li snapped, raising her voice. Realizing once again that she was the only one in the room, the tyrannical principle closed her eyes and, taking a deep breath, counted slowly to ten before continuing to read. “Morgendorffer, Daria...” She snarled as she read out the information, “3.9 GPA; Participated in Yearbook Staff; acted as emergency substitute teacher for Mr. T. O’Neill during recent teacher’s strike...” Forcing herself to continue, Ms. Li read aloud, “Received favorable reports from students and Mr. O’Neill for her conduct of the class.”

She then cringed as she read the discipline report. “Took and passed Self Esteem Workshop conducted by T. O’Neill during sophomore year. Surly and insubordinate, Ms. Morgendorffer is suspected in organizing and/or participating in numerous acts of defiance. However, due to either lack of evidence or other factors, no charges have ever been substantiated. Nomination letters for both the Diane Fossey Award for Academic Achievement and for class valedictorian signed by A. DeMartino...” The principle shook her head, her short helmet styled hair remaining perfectly coiffed. “You’re doing it to me again, Anthony...” She groaned and then read the supporting letters from Mr. O’Neill, Ms. Barch, and Ms. Bennett.

Perusing Daria’s record once again, Ms. Li came to a decision. “While I can’t keep you from getting the Fossey award, Ms. Morgendorffer...I can make sure that you’re not the valedictorian!” Then, with a vindictive smirk, she signed off on the award, checked her approval for graduation, and then wrote in Jodie Landon’s name as class valedictorian. “Ms. Landon’s GPA is close enough, she’s also got several letters of recommendation, and her involvement in extracurricular activities makes her a better choice anyway.”

“You know—I think I like her too. Okay...yeah...she can be a downer sometimes, but...I think she’s a real groovy chick.”

“I’m not listening to you!” Ms. Li muttered as she reached yet another name that she had been dreading.

“Thompson, Kevin...0.33 GPA—well...at least he passed gym.” She then opened the letter from the Lawndale Boosters: “Greetings, Ms. Li. We would like to once again thank you for your loyal support of the Lawndale Lions and for all you have done for Lawndale High. As you are well aware, many of the members of our Association are also members of the Great Prairie State University Boosters Association. We feel that Kevin will provide the missing spark that will lead to a national championship for the GPSU Mudskippers and are sure that you will help Kevin in taking the next step in actualizing his full athletic potential. As always, you will have our most heartfelt thanks and please accept this donation to the Lawndale High Discretionary Fund. We’re sure that you will know how best to use this contribution to further the honor and glory of Lawndale High.” As she finished, she noticed the light blue check. Reading the dollar amount, she let out a low whistle, “That’s a lot of zeroes.”

Then, after slipping the check into her top desk drawer, she yawned and rested her head on the desk.

“You’re not really going to pass him are you?”

“Huh...Wha...” Ms. Li looked up. “Why don’t you just leave me alone?” She moaned softly.

“I’m not going anywhere.” The phantom, a lovely Asian woman appearing to be about 17-18, with long, luxurious jet black hair that extended all the way down to the small of her back and wearing a tangerine A-frame mini dress and white go-go boots, replied as she looked down on her older self. *“At least not until you get your act together.”* As the younger Angela Li looked about the office, she shook her head sadly. *“I can’t believe you’re going to let that poor kid loose in the world. You know what’s going to happen to him—don’t you?”*

“Yeah.” Ms. Li said with a note of irritation in her voice. “He’ll go to Great Prairie State, play football and major in something useless, take courses from TAs, adjuncts or junior faculty who can be pressured into passing him and who won’t teach him a thing because he doesn’t want to learn anything. Then, he’ll either get injured before he graduates, and they’ll toss him out on the street, or assuming he really does graduate, he’ll be a low round draft choice or will try to get on to a pro team through free agency, but because he’s as dumb as a brick, he won’t even make the first cuts...”

“And he’ll end up on the streets with no marketable skills, a useless degree, and a functional illiterate to boot.” Ms. Li’s younger self said sadly, finishing her older self’s thoughts. *“Is that what you really want for him?”*

“His life—his choices.” Ms. Li replied bitterly. “No one can say he didn’t have the opportunity to learn here—he just never wanted to put forth the effort.”

The younger Angela shook her head sadly. *“That’s not true and you know it. You can lie to his parents...to the School Board...to the media...to everyone else. But you can’t lie to yourself. Every year Tony, Ms. Barch, and Mr. O’Neill fail him and every year you change the records and ‘lose’ their letters asking that he be held back.”* Then, with a sneer, Angela asked, *“So...what are you planning on getting with this year’s Boosters payoff? To be honest, I thought the cameras in the students’ restrooms that you got last year were a bit much.”*

“You tell me.” Ms. Li retorted. “You already know.”

“Yeah. I do.” Angela said as she brushed back a phantom tear. *“I guess I just wanted to hear it from you.”* Then, looking her older self in the eyes, she implored. *“Do one thing for me? Before you turn Kevin loose in the world, open your upper left hand drawer and take a look at what’s in there...I know it’s still there. Please.”*

Doing as her conscience requested, Ms. Li opened her desk drawer and took out the manila folder. Opening the folder, she looked at the contents. Gritting her teeth, she brushed back a tear. “Damn.”

“You’re doing the **right thing**, Angela.” Mr. DeMartino said with a note of pride in his voice as he called Ms. Li by her first name for the first time in a very long time. “Even though it’s going to **cost** me five years of my life having to put up with **another** year of Kevin Thompson, we both know he’s not ready to go out in the **real** world.”

“Well...” Angela Li snorted derisively, “I have a feeling Mr. and Mrs. Thompson aren’t going to feel the same way—nor are the Lawndale Boosters—you do know that many of them are also members of the Great Prairie State Alumni Association, don’t you?”

“**Screw the Boosters!**” Anthony exclaimed, standing up, his eye bulging. “And as for the **Thompsons**, if they’re more concerned with their son getting a **football** scholarship than in learning how to **read and write**—then **screw them** too!” Then, as he exited the office, he offered a final word of encouragement, “**Don’t quit now, Angela. I’ll back you all the way!**”

As Angela Li watched the history teacher depart, she glimpsed out of the corner of her eye the phantom form of the young Asian woman with long jet black hair, a tangerine A-line mini dress, and the legs of a dancer who had been plaguing her dreams and thoughts the past few months. "Happy now?" She asked as she signed her name on to the forms officially consigning Kevin Thompson to another year at Lawndale. Looking in the direction of the phantom, she managed a weak grin as she saw the smile of encouragement on the face of her younger self giving her all the answer she needed.

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