

# IDENTITIES

By

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## Chapter 1

*Oh, how full of briars is this working day world.*

**– *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)**

“I fought for you, Dave. I really did.”

Dave Locke held the phone at arm’s length and gave it an obscene gesture before putting it back to his ear. “Don’t lie to me John. The only one you’ve been fighting for is yourself. After all these years, couldn’t you at least have stabbed me in the front?”

“But Dave, I had no control over that. When the merger was approved we knew people would have to go. No one should be surprised.”

“Then why am I surprised? You told the execs last month that everyone above vice-president level was safe. You’d see to it. Well, here I am. Oh, excuse me, there I *was*—the president of the largest company within the Technicom group. Isn’t that higher than vice president? I figured I was safe. And then I get summoned this morning to meet with some guy calling himself a ‘group vice president,’ who says he works for you and who I don’t even know because he’s been brought in above me, telling me I now report to him and, oh, by the way, I’m out of a job. Really classy, John.”

“It’s complicated, Dave. There are subtle trajectories we have to be sensitive to. You know. Shareholder expectations. Things like that.”

“Who else got a mystery call?”

“What do you mean?”

“Who else did you fight for who got a call like I did?”

“Uh. That’s confidential.”

“You know I can find out. Just save me the trouble by telling me.”

“I’d really rather not.”

“Come on, John. I’ve been with the company for most of my career. I’m your number two. Doesn’t that entitle me to a little courtesy?”

“OK, Dave. I’m sorry to tell you. You’re the only one.”

“Just me?” Dave paused to make sure he wasn’t getting shrill. “How’d I earn that distinction?”

“It’s like this. The analysts were looking at the management team. They didn’t think it fit with the merger strategy. It wasn’t consistent with the branding image we’re trying to portray.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Well, you know how it is. This merger is supposed to redefine the telecommunications industry. A marriage of the top technical and top marketing powerhouses in the world. The analysts think the management team was too skewed to the technical side. And let’s face it, Dave—you were our top technical guy. So. You know.”

“And how are those marketing experts going to bring technical solutions to the market if there’s no technical focus?”

“Don’t say that. Think of the team you’ve built.”

“Oh, I forgot.”

“No need to be sarcastic, Dave. You’re a shareholder. You should be happy. This is a move with the welfare of the shareholders in mind. Anyway, my hands are tied. Expect a package from HR. It describes your, uh, package.”

“What’s negotiable, John?”

“Basically nothing. It’s already been approved by the Board.”

“Well, John, since you’re chairman of the board and you’ve fought for me, I imagine it’s a pretty sweet package. Care to share or you going to keep me in suspense?”

“Don’t be bitter, Dave. I did fight for you. They wanted a five-year noncompete. I got them down to three.”

“Gee, thanks. Now I’ll only be unemployable for three years instead of five.”

“And we’re fully vesting you in the top-hat pension plan.”

“John, I *was* fully vested in the top-hat pension plan.”

“Yeah, technically, but we’re adopting Logicom’s employee benefits, and you wouldn’t have been vested under their plan. So we sort of reverse-grandfathered you.”

“Well, that’s something. Thanks.”

“One more thing.”

“What’s that?”

“In about five minutes, some security guys are going to be coming to your office. They’ll help you pack up.”

“Help? You’ve got to be kidding.”

“Dave, it’s company policy. You know that.”

“Yes, John, I know it’s policy that I be watched to make sure I don’t steal or sabotage anything and that I be escorted out of the building. They are coming to help me out of the office, not to help me pack up. So could you just lay off the bullshit for once?”

“I’m trying to make this easy on you.”

“No comment.”

“Keep in touch, OK?”

“Yeah, right.”