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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.

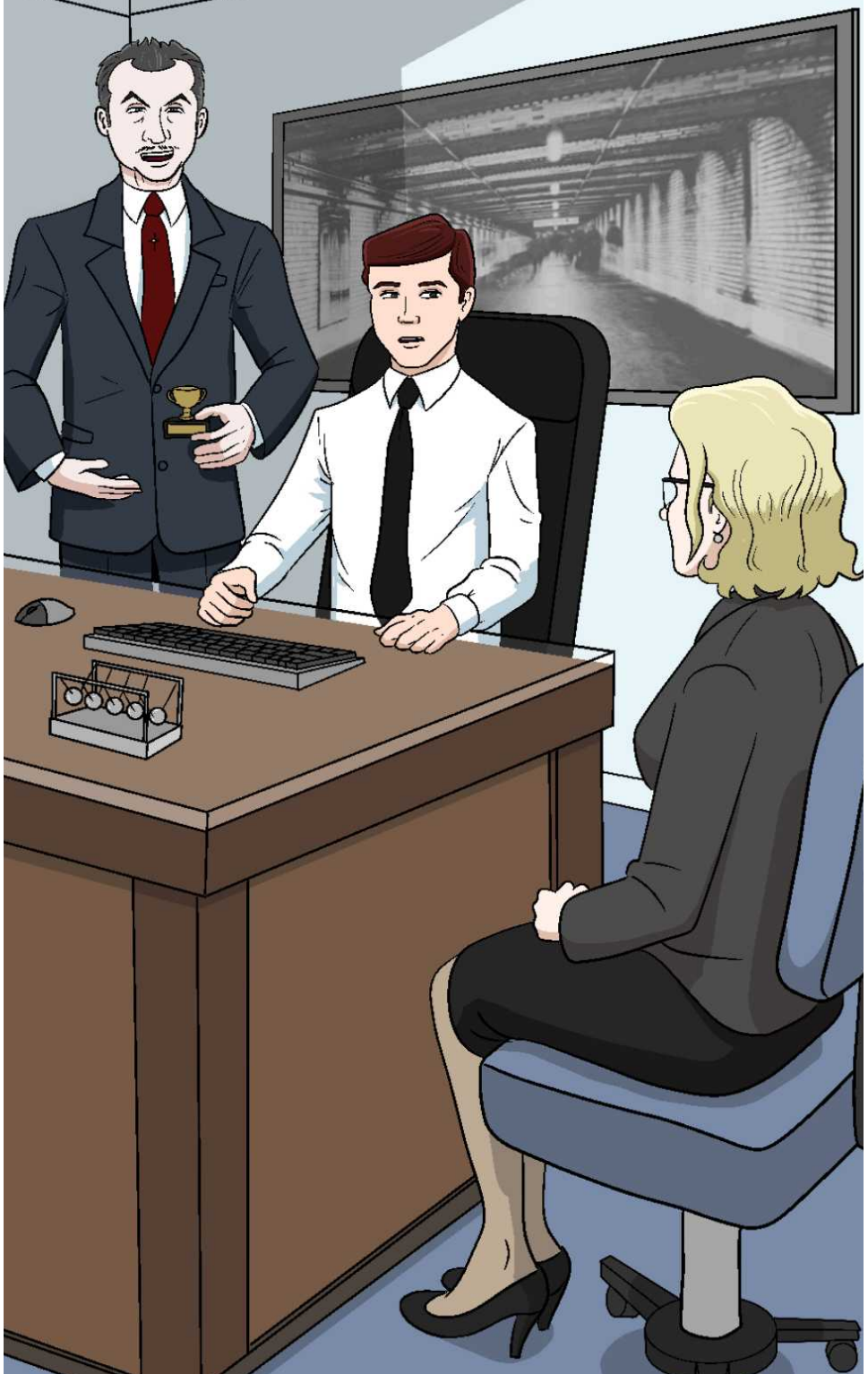
“Oh, she’s taking the bus,” Mr. Kendrick said with a smile. “Budgets, you know. Besides, it’s a great way to see the country.”

“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.

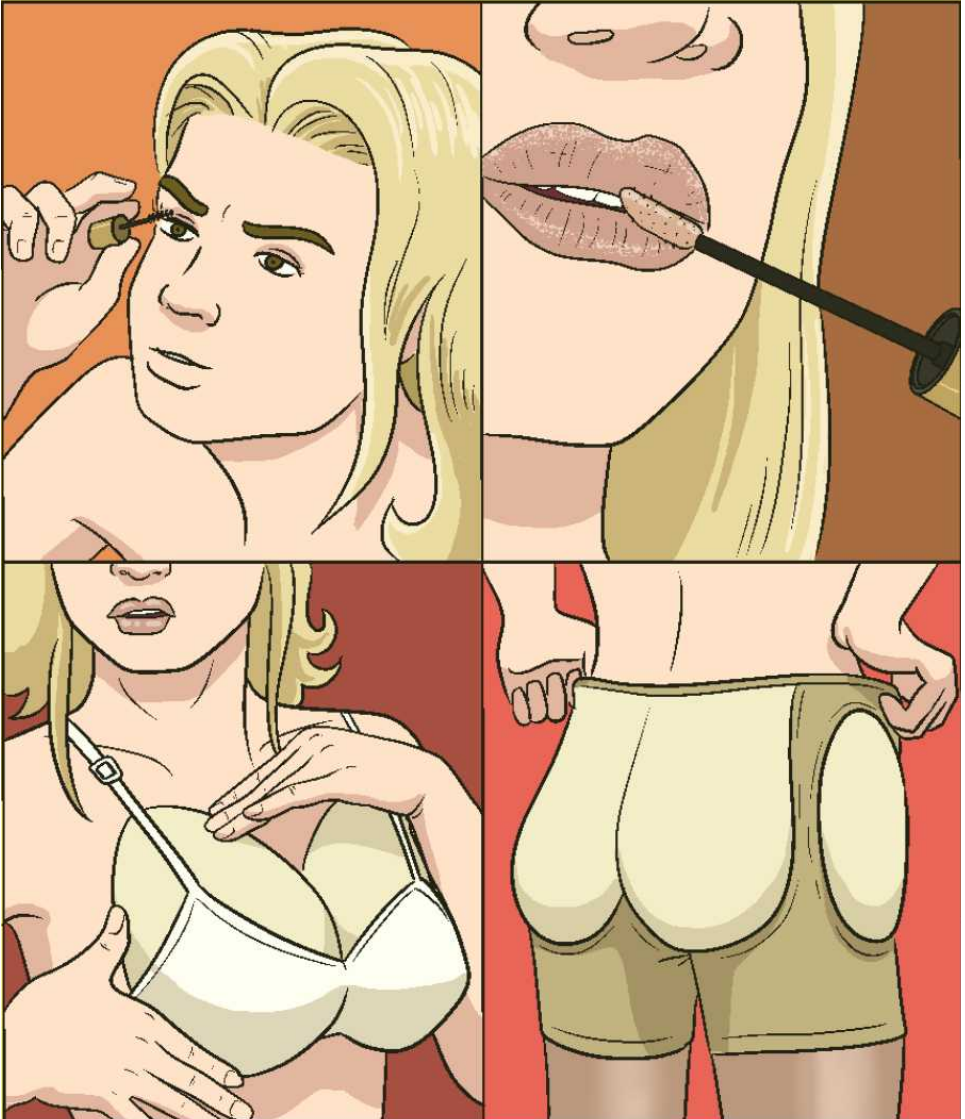
Fortunately, there was a razor and foam in the overnight bag, and shaved his legs. It was more awkward than he would have thought, and apparently his amnesia extended to his leg-shaving skills.

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.

That's when it hit him that he had no ID of any kind on him. It was the sort of thing a woman kept in her purse, and he had no purse. Was he that bad at being a woman? No, he must have lost it in the scuffle last night, he concluded.

"Ma'am, I need to see a badge!" The security man said, far more forcefully.

Mick backed away, unsure what to do. "I don't... I don't have a..."

"No badge, you're trespassing!"

Mick felt the first signs of a panic attack coming on. "I'm not trespassing... I work here... I think I lost my badge and..."

"ID! Show me some ID! You have ten seconds to comply!" The security man obviously took his job very seriously.

Mick was practically falling to his knees, cowering in fear. Tears were streaming down his face. "I told you... My purse is missing and..."

"Hold it, hold it," Rod Johnson said. "Back off, Kenny. She's okay."

The executive was also arriving for work, and fortunately was just a few people behind in the security line.

"Yes sir, Mr. Johnson, sir!" Kenny the security man said, deferring to the high-ranking executive. "I still can't let her on the premises without proper ID, sir!"

"I know the protocol," Mr. Johnson assured Kenny. He turned to Mick. "It's okay, Lori. It's all right." He helped him to his feet. "It's just a misunderstanding."

In a few minutes time, Rod had arranged for a new company ID badge to be issued for Lori Chambers, with a pic of Mick on it. The ID people weren't happy to have to skip the usual Drivers' ID verification, but Rod outranked them by quite a bit.

"Thank you, Mr. Johnson," Mick said, as he put the new badge in his jacket pocket. "You're always saving me, it seems."

"It's all right, Lori. I'm just looking out for my pal Dave's best girl." Mr. Johnson patted Mick on the shoulder. "Now, I have to get to the office. Are you going to be okay?"

"Oh. Uh. Sure."

"Good, good. Do you know where to go?"

Mick had no clue. "Of course. It's um... down the hall." This was a safe bet, as they were in a building where everything is at the end of a hall.

"Excellent."

"I'll... See you around, then."

“Yes, probably,” Mr. Johnson said as he began to turn away. Mick hadn’t moved in any direction at all.

“All right then.”

“Yes. Thanks again.”

“Listen, Lori,” Mr. Johnson finally had to do something. He couldn’t just leave the poor thing here, lost. “My personal assistant just quit, why don’t you come with me and help me out for the day, all right?”

“For the day?”

“Sure. Just for the day.”

“But I probably have some orientation thing to do or something…”

“Never mind that. I can clear it. Come with me.”

Mick couldn’t help but smile. “I hope I can be of help, Mr. Johnson.”

“I’m sure you will. But if I get word that you need to be elsewhere, I’m going to send you on your way.”

“Yes, Mr. Johnson.” Mick followed Rod through the hallway, a few steps behind, grateful that he had a place to go, and something to do.



“I’m sorry, that badge is terminated, ma’am,” Kenny the security man said to Lori Chambers.

“Terminated?” Lori said, in shock. With the new Lori Chandler badge being created, the old one had indeed been deactivated in the system.

“I need you the exit the property immediately, ma’am.”

“But I work here... Or, I *am* going to work here... I’m an employee!”

“Immediately, ma’am.”

“But...”

Kenny the security man put his hand on his holster. “I *will* use all necessary force.”

“I’m just a secretary!” Lori said, backing away. “Please, I don’t know what’s going on.”

“This is your last warning!”

Like a startled deer, Lori scampered out of the lobby and back to the parking lot.

“Vacate the property, ma’am!” Security yelled after her.

She ran again, this time all the way to the sidewalk, breathless and frightened. She had no idea what had happened. If they had terminated her badge, she wasn’t sure if that meant that they had terminated her employment.

Without her phone, she didn’t have any way of calling someone to check. She paced back and forth on the sidewalk, wishing she could just come back in and talk to someone, but that wasn’t realistic, especially with such a secretive company as PolyCon Corp.

The only thing she could do was go back to the hotel room and make some calls, hoping she still had a job.



“Mr. Simmons!” Yelped a middle-aged man when Mick and Rod got to Mr. Simmons’ offices. He practically accosted them. “I have sixteen messages for you!”

“Calm down, now. Steady on, Neil. Did you get their contact info?”

Neil, a thick, aging man, was very clearly was not a man who was used to acting as a secretary. He looked at Mr. Simmons with despair. “I was really busy,” he said.

Mr. Simmons sighed. “All right, Neil. You don’t have to answer the phones anymore. We’ve got that covered.”

“I can get back to my real job?” The man asked, hope in his eyes.

“Yes, Neil.”

“Hallelujah!” He said. Then he looked pensive again. “Oh, uh... She’s in your outer office.”

“Who?”

“*She.*”

“Oh,” Mr. Simmons said, knowing who he was talking about just by the emphasis. “Can I have the messages?”

Neil handed off a short mixed-up stack of small pieces of paper with scribbles all over them.

“Hello, Mia,” Mr. Johnson said when he got to his outer office.

A young woman was packing item after item into a cardboard box. “Oh, hello, Mr. Simmons,” she said. She was extremely pretty, but was dressed in a very casual outfit of sweats and jeans. She had short black hair and wasn’t wearing any makeup. “Just clearing out my things.”

Mick noted that the sweatshirt had a “visitor” badge pinned to her rather impressive chest.

Mr. Simmons paused. “I could still cancel the...”

“No. Absolutely not,” Mia said. “I said I quit and I meant it.” She picked up a pair of hot pink four inch pumps from a drawer and dropped them in the trash. “I’ve moved on.”

“I understand,” Mr. Simmons said. “Let me know if you need a referral.”

“I’d sooner die.” Mia hoisted her box of possessions into her arms and walked past Mick and Mr. Simmons in a huff.

“Hate to lose her,” Mr. Simmons said. “She used to be the very best secretary I ever had.”

Mick was a bit dazzled by the woman’s obvious attractive features and the fact that she dressed like a lesbian in boot camp. Why would a girl who dressed like that hide so much, and why did she have fuck-me heels in her desk drawer?

“Why did she quit?” Mick asked.

“She got a haircut,” Mr. Simmons replied. “Since no one is using the desk, you can have a seat there.”

“Oh, yes. Thank you.” Mick swiveled his butt into the office chair.

“I’ll be in my office.”

Mick had never been in a place like this before, in an office, as an employee, sitting at a desk to do a job. It was so clean, so not-smelling like beer and piss. It was bare and spartan, and it felt practically antiseptic. He liked it, despite his personal history. In fact most of Mic Van Helsten’s life had been in service of avoiding just this sort of place. His songs ridiculed becoming a sell-out, a cog in the machine, a lemming throwing themselves off a cliff.

Yet Mick didn’t actually know that. He had no memory of his usual way of living, just a very distant, foggy sense of having some kind of past he wasn’t very happy with. At the moment, he was absolutely convinced that that this was

where he was supposed to be — at a desk, working for a boss and doing as he was told. Thus was what he was born to do, he believed.

The phone suddenly rang, scaring Mick. He didn't know what to do. There were so many lights blinking all at once. The ring itself was terrifyingly persistent, and wouldn't stop. He had a notion of pushing it right off the desk.

Inside Rod Johnson's office, he noted the phone wasn't being answered, so he picked it up himself. "Rod Johnson," he said.

"Rod, it's me, Dave Simmons," said the voice on the other end.

"Dave," Rod replied. "Good to hear from you. Things calming down out there?"

"Business as usual. Life goes on. Say, I wanted to just make sure you had a chance to check in with Lori."

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I did," Rod said. "Good call on your part, too. When I showed up she was fighting some sicko who was trying to grab her."

"Holy smokes."

"I won't lie. It got kind of serious there for a minute, but your girl is safe and sound. Took her home and made sure she was okay."

"Thanks, Rod. It means a lot to me. I knew I could count on you."

"My pleasure, Dave. In fact, I have her just outside. She seems a bit frazzled, so I have her helping me out in my office today."

"I think she's supposed to be in the office pool, so you may want to let them know about that, just to make sure she doesn't get in any hot water."

"I'll take care of it."

"Thanks for everything, Rod. Keep in touch and I'll see you out there in a few weeks, okay?"

"Looking forward to it. We can go fishing again, like we did in the old days."

"I'll bring the brewskis."

A minute later, Rod poked his head out of his office. "Just was on the horn with Mr. Simmons," he said to Mick. "Told him everything that went down, and he's glad you're ship shape and no worse for wear."

"Oh, yes?" That name sounded a little familiar. Mick was thinking that might be the name of his boss back in San Diego. "Thank you."

"Glad to do it. Oh, and, Lori?"

"Yes?"

"If the phone rings, answer it, could you?"

Mick was very sure that meant he was going to be Mr. Simmons assistant for the day. He wasn't quite sure he had been asked of he was willing to do that. "Of course, Mr. Simmons," he replied, with no hesitation.

That little thrill he had been feeling when he knew he was helping Mr. Simmons was getting a little bit stronger.



"Well, what did the police say?" Ace asked Lars.

"It's the fuckin' police, asshole. They don't fuckin' care! Not unless you're payin' them, like the corporations do. Dig?"

Ace contemplated that answer. "They didn't say anything about Mick?"

"They said no bodies had turned up. That's all." Lars was back on his tour bus couch, teenage girls flanking him on both sides. "Pigs."

"Where the fuck did he go?" Ace asked aloud.

"He'll be back," Lars said. "Jimmy Laxton once disappeared on me for a whole month during the '85 tour. Came back with a tattoo on his face and missing a testicle. They always come back."

"You told them that he just vanished without telling anyone, right?" Ace asked. "It could have been a kidnapping."

"They think he's OD'd or some shit like that. Said they wait until there's evidence he's really missing. Maybe they'll look for him, maybe they won't. You know the cops."

"OD'd? You think that's true? It's probably true."

"I never saw that pansy-ass choir boy do drugs. Hardcore stuff at least. I think I saw him smoke weed, but he never shot up or snorted anything." Lars sneered. "Guy was a boat anchor. We'll have better parties with him gone."

"We've never had a party that I can remember."

"Ace, if you can remember it, it wasn't a good party. Now go make sure you know the guitar parts, 'cuz you're playing tomorrow night in Raleigh if Prince Charming doesn't show up."

"Yeah, yeah," Ace said. "I know all the parts."

"Well fucking learn 'em again!" Lars said, throwing a KFC bucket at him. "I'm not gonna get booted off the stage because the guitar tech didn't know what the fuck he was doing when he got his big shot at stardom!"

“Fuck!” Ace said as he dodged. “Did you treat Mick like this? No wonder he left.”

“Get the fuck out of here!” Lars shouted. “And gimme that bucket back, it still had a drumstick in it.”



“Office of Rod Johnson,” Mick said, answering the phone in a very pleasant tone of voice. “He’s in a meeting right now, I can take a message.”

It had taken most of the morning, but eventually Mick tamed the wild beast that was the Nortel Norstar T7316E desktop office phone. It wasn’t unlike working his guitar pedals, quickly moving to the right button to send people to voicemail, transfer a call to a desk or put them on hold, so his skills were surprisingly translatable.

“I’ll pass that along,” Mick said and hung up the call. His phone voice was very soothing and professional, a product of his singing abilities.

He quickly typed up any messages and emailed them to Mr. Johnson, even though he was just fifteen feet away. It seemed to be what he wanted.

Overall, Mick had experienced the most marvelous day. He had learned how to work the coffee machine. In addition, he had learned coffee came from a machine. You put a little plastic cup in a thing, closed the door and in seconds, fresh coffee came pouring out a spout. It was amazing.

At ten, a man came up and asked what kind of sandwich Mick would like. Two hours later, there it was, delivered right to his desk. It was incredible. Not the sandwich. It was mostly mayonnaise. But merely being asked what he wanted and then having it appear like that was magic. Although he couldn’t remember it, he was used to eating whatever was left on a backstage catering table and being happy no one had thrown up on it.

He had a desk full of items to arrange and play with. Staplers, staple removers, post-it notes, pens, white-out, legal pads, letter openers, shiny tape, not shiny tape, rubber bands, paper clips and highlighters in a rainbow of colors. He had to find the perfect arrangement of them on his desk. It was all very neat and tidy. He knew that Lori liked things neat and tidy. A place for everything, end everything in its place.

In addition to that, the computer in front of him had so many little games installed. From solitaire to minesweeper, it was too much fun. He barely knew what to do with himself, there were so many choices.

His day had been just packed with activity.

All too soon, the clock ticked over to 5:00, and the various employees in the office started to stand up and collect their coats.

“Already?” Mick said as he looked at the clock.

He sighed and got up, but felt a sense of pride at all the things he’d accomplished today. There was still more to do. He needed a new cell phone to start with, and he needed to unpack those boxes in his new apartment.

When Rod emerged from his office, he saw Mick putting things away in the desk, bending over and thrusting his padded, but very pleasingly shaped butt in his direction.

“Um, Lori...” The executive said. “I think you did very well today, and if I were to grade your job performance, I’d have to say it was exemplary.”

“Thank you... Sir.” Mick said, standing up and folding his hands in front of him.

“I was hoping I could talk you into sticking around here for a while longer,” Rod said. Truth be told, he had never had a secretary that was actually competent. He had a habit of hiring his PAs based on looks, and not abilities, and dealing with actual proficiency and a lack of drama was new to him — and he liked it. “That is, unless you had plans to work somewhere else in the company...”

Mick had no idea what his plans had been, assuming it was another thing he had forgotten. “Well, I suppose I can.”

“Good, good.” Mr. Johnson put his hand at Mick’s back and pointed to the way out. “Why don’t we head out?” he said.

“Yes, Mr. Johnson,” Mick said, feeling the warmth of his bosses’ guiding hand.



In the chief executive’s office of PolyCon Corp, Dick Thornheart watched the display on his monitor, showing security camera views of Rod Simmons escorting Lori Chandler out of the building.

He knew where she was, at least, and he had time. Upon further reflection, this little change in plans would benefit his goal to sell the molecular adhesive formula. He could still field offers and make inquiries. Washington DC, with the plethora of foreign ambassadors and agents was the ideal place to find a buyer for the molecular glue formula.



Without the formula actually in his possession, he'd be safe from any attempt to steal it or charge him with espionage. As long as he had quick access to the chip, and knew it was safe, he was indemnified and could work with impunity.

Not only did he know where the little gold trophy was, he knew it couldn't have been in a safer place. Lori Chandler would never lose such a precious token, and never dispose of it. She'd protect her little treasure until he needed it. Lori Chandler was going to be Dick Thornheart's unwitting pawn for a little while longer.



Lori Chandler was a mess of nerves. She had spent the entire day in utter frustration, moving from one disaster to the next.

After being kicked out of her new workplace, she had gone back to the hotel, and wanted to call her boss Dave Simmons to get some help for her situation, but she didn't know the direct number by heart. She had it set in her phone — her broken phone — and could only dial the main PolyCon Corp number and ask to be transferred to talk to him.

Before she could do that, however, she had to give her name, and it came up in the operator's database as an ex-employee, which technically she was, but only in that office. Still, she interpreted that to mean she had indeed been fired, as did the operator, who informed her that it was company policy that ex employees were forbidden to contact current employees while on the job.

That left her both exasperated and frantic, in that she now appeared to be jobless. She had just moved across the country for her job, and before she could even start it, she had lost it.

Then came getting a new cell phone. That proved far more difficult than she would have ever assumed, as it involved paying out for a new phone out of contract, which was a cool \$600, and then committing to another two-year agreement. Even then, she couldn't sign in to her cloud account and download everything, because she hadn't done it in years, and all her passwords were written on a note in a planner that was resting in a box in her new apartment.

As for her apartment, she called the property manager and was told that the apartment was not available yet, as it needed to have a final inspection from the county due to some re-wiring of the electrical system.

So at the end of her very long and very frustrating day, she was still stuck in her hotel room, without a job, and unable to call anyone who could help her.

"Nuts," she cursed.



After spending the night unpacking, Mick had more questions than he had before he started. It was a furnished apartment, and it was very nice furniture too, so the boxes contained mostly clothing, some decorative knick-knacks to put on shelves, kitchen utensils, bathroom essentials, and a small library of books.

Personal effects were few and far between. Mick had been hoping that some photos or old yearbooks might kickstart his increasingly stubborn memories, but there wasn't anything like that in these boxes.

Of course, Lori Chandler had plenty of things like that, but when she moved, she had dropped off most of her memorabilia at her parents, as she didn't want to have to ship it from one coast to another.

Its absence, though, deflated Mick's hopes. When he did finally get his memories of his life as Lori Chandler he'd look back on this and laugh, he hoped, but for now, he was just getting frustrated.

His second day as Lori was far less eventful, and he came to work in a fresh new outfit... That looked almost exactly like yesterday's outfit. Black jacket, long black skirt, black flats and a white blouse. Lori owned a lot of these kinds of duplicate items, as Mick learned from hanging them up. He must be a fan of consistency.

What had changed was his addition of a simple bracelet and a pair of earrings. Mick had pierced his ears when he joined his first band as a teenager, being told earrings were "totally metal" by his mates. Seeing the holes only further convinced him of the path he found himself on.

"You are going to love working here!" Said a woman who was behind Mick, waiting to brew her coffee. "They're just the nicest people. I used to work at Amalgamated Materials, and let me tell you, they did *not* know how to treat their employees."

Mick really didn't feel like interacting, but he knew he couldn't avoid it. However, the millisecond he turned his head the social contract had been sealed in blood. "Hi..."

"Hi, I'm Julie!" The woman said. She was probably around thirty, obviously a bit extroverted, and dressed in a similar outfit as Mick was. "How was your first day?"

"Oh, I actually transferred from the San Diego office."

"San Diego! I hear the weather is wonderful there! Is it nice?"

Of the four world tours he had been on with DëthWÿsh, there had been five shows in San Diego, so he did have a very good idea of the weather there. Remembering that fact, he was sure his memories were coming back to him.

"It is," Mick said.

"Oh, I should go there with the boyfriend. We haven't had a vacation in years, it feels like." Julie said. "Actually, we just got back from Puerto Vallarta, so I shouldn't complain. I guess I'm just ready for another vacay. What about you? Don't you wish you could just live on a beach somewhere?"

Mick had never considered vacation for a day in his adult life. As a touring musician in a world famous rock band, the concept of a vacation kind of

worked in reverse for him. He looked forward to days where he was busy, not relaxing. He had more relaxation than he could ever handle, drunk on a tour bus or plane for days on end.

“I suppose it’s nice, but I really like... Working,” Mick said. As soon as he said it, he knew it to be true. “I like being... busy and... having a tight schedule... I like knowing what I’m doing for the day.”

“Oh, you’re one of *those*,” Julie said. “Well, don’t worry. I don’t judge.”

Mick wasn’t sure what she meant by that. If you didn’t want to work in an office and be busy, why would you be here? He was a little puzzled by the implications of her statement.

When the coffee was done, that released Mick from the contract, and he headed back to the corner of the building where Rod’s offices were located. As he did, he looked around. The greyish-blue walls, the clean environment, the overhead lighting. It all looked so artificial and modern. He did love being here. He felt lucky to be here.

He sat down at the desk that was now his, and put his mug down. He arranged the things on his desk just the way he liked them, and felt a kind of fulfillment in doing so. He wanted things perfect. Just perfect. Orderly and perfect. Neat and tidy. This new life, diametrically opposed to his old one, was luring him in ways he’d never experienced before. The more time he was spending as Lori Chambers, office worker, the more he wanted of it.

“Lori, could you come into my office?” The intercom on Mick’s desk phone said. In other news, the desk phone had an intercom feature. He got up and headed to see his boss, Rod Johnson.

“Yes?” He said, looking in.

“All the way in, Lori. And shut the door.” Mr. Johnson waited and then continued. “I’ve talked to my superior, and he’s agreed to let you be a part of my division until Mr. Simmons sets up his new office. I just wanted to make sure you’re okay with that.”

“Work here? For you?” Mick was worried he sounded a little too eager.

“That’s the proposal. It would come with a slight dip in pay, as I don’t have the same kind of budget Dave Simmons has, but It would still be around 48,000 dollars a year, so I...”

“I’ll take it!” Mick said, too quickly. “I mean, it sounds good.” He had never been allowed to actually have real money before. Record contracts promised him money, but it always went somewhere else, into a lawyer’s hands usually, and he’d be given stipends to spend. Having a salary seemed positively decadent to his instincts.



“I hope it doesn’t interfere with whatever you were planning to do while Mr. Simmons wrapped things up in San Diego.”

“Honestly, I... I can’t even remember.”

“Fine, fine. The other thing to mention is that you’d be working as my assistant, and I’m a little... Traditional, I suppose. I tend to call my assistants secretaries. I hope you don’t find that offensive.”

“Why would I find that offensive?” Mick asked, genuinely puzzled.

“That’s what I wanted to hear. Now, one last thing is that as my secretary...” Mick felt that funny little thrill inside of him again, now even stronger than before. Being called “my secretary” was some kind of trigger for him. “You represent me. And I do have expectations for your personal appearance.”

“You said something about Mia losing her job because of a hair cut.”

“She’s a very beautiful girl... Woman... And she decided one day to come to work with her hair cut like a man and dressed like she was going to do an oil change.” Mr. Johnson sighed. “I was not pleased. I have no problem in people making changes in the way they want to live their lives, but I was honest with her from the very beginning as to what I wanted, and she decided to go her own way.” He took a deep breath. “I may have been a little too vocal in my objections, though.”

“Well, I don’t mind a few suggestions, sir... I’m not all that confident about my appearance.” Mick, being a man in disguise, definitely wanted to hear about any of his shortcomings in looking feminine.

“Then I think we have an agreement,” Mr. Johnsons said. “Welcome to your new workplace.”

Mick found himself involuntarily sighing and smiling. It felt special, this moment. “Thank you. I’ll do my very best.”



“I *am* Lori Chandler!” Lori said, pleading for understanding. “Really! I... I... I’m not trying to cheat you! It’s all just a misunderstanding!”

“Miss, regardless, I need you to vacate the suite and leave the hotel immediately,” said the manager. He was standing in the doorway of Lori’s hotel room, with large, large men on both sides of him. “We will be escorting you out.”

“Please let me call the property mangers. I can straighten this all out.”

“I’ve spent several hours on the phone with them already, Miss,” the manager said. “They are quite adamant that Lori Chandler has already moved into her apartment, and they aren’t going to pay your bill. Unless you’re prepared to cover the six hundred dollars you owe us, you must leave now.”

“What? I’m Lori Chandler. Really! I know this looks suspicious, but can show you my ID and everything.”

“Ma’am, I not saying I don’t believe you. What I’m saying is that this is a service business, and we need to be paid four our services. Regardless of who you are.”

“I can clear this up with the apartment people, I just need time!”

“And we are *out* of time,” the manager said. “Please gather your things.”

Lori had more than enough to cover the debt, but she didn’t understand why. Obviously something weird was happening with the rental people, and if she could talk to them, surely she could figure this out.

“Please, I need you to understand.”

“I’m at the end of my patience, Ma’am.” He turned to the men behind him. “All right boys, you know what to do.”

Lori squeaked and cowered, embracing herself for the worst. The two men were huge and had the meanest looks on their faces, and came right for her, pushing her aside. They quickly got to work making the bed.

The scared young woman opened her eyes. “Huh?” She saw the two cleaning the room and sighed. “Oh. I thought...”

“What?” No,” the manager said. “Do you think we would resort to those kinds of neanderthal tactics?”

“Well, I was...”

“Arrest her,” the manager said, talking to the cops Lori hadn’t yet seen outside the door. “Trespassing. Defrauding an innkeeper. You know the deal.”

Lori screamed. “What?”

Two policemen grabbed Lori by the arms and pulled her out of the doorway, swiftly handcuffing her. She was then escorted down the hallway, the police practically carrying her as her legs had gone limp.

“But my things!”

“Held until you pay your debt,” the manager said.



“All right, Lori, you’re with me,” Rod Johnson said to the new secretary as he emerged from his office. It was about 2:00, and from working on Mr. Johnson’s calendar, Mick knew that there was a budget meeting — whatever that was — and his new boss was due to attend. He did not know that he was expected to go as well.

“Uh, what?” Mick asked, startled. He had a good game of solitaire going.

“I have a meeting, I need my personal assistant,” Rod replied.

“What do I need?”

“I don’t know. Mia used to bring a notepad.”

“Should I do that?”

“Up to you.”

“Do I keep notes?”

“Mia usually drew pictures of cats.” Rod tapped his watch. “We’re running late, Lori.”

“Oh, sorry.” Mick grabbed a legal notepad from his desk drawer and a pen and followed his new boss as he left. He wasn’t sure what his role was, and had questions. “So, what am I supposed to do?”

“Do?”

“At the meeting.”

“You don’t do anything. All that’s required is attendance. That’s how budget meetings work.”

“Um, okay. Do I have a budget? Am I getting a budget? What’s a budget?”

“What’s a budget? It’s an allocation of fiduciary assets made on a scheduled basis to...” He could see Mick’s lash-lined eyes blinking in confusion. “It’s a limit on spending. I feel like you should know that.”

“A limit on spending?” Mick had never even heard of this kind of thing. If he ever wanted something, he’d just ask his agent or the record company, and they told him if they were going to get it for him or not. Office life sure was wild.

“You gals just don’t know the value of a dollar,” Mr. Johnson said.

They got into an elevator and headed upstairs, Mick staying to the side and slightly behind his boss. It just seemed to be the place a secretary should be, in his thinking.

Mick and Mr. Johnson arrived at a large room with a huge, ridiculously sized table running down the middle of it. Mick recognized this kind of room. He had signed his last three record contracts in this kind of room. He had heard hilarious speeches from executives lecturing him on good behavior in this kind of room. He had fallen asleep listening to marketing people in this kind of room.

He still couldn’t remember the details, but Mick felt calm and relaxed in rooms like this. His good feelings were bolstered even more when he saw the array of donuts and pastries laid out against the wall. This was a little slice of heaven, as far as Mick was concerned.

Everyone had been seated and endured a prolonged wait for someone to get the meeting underway. Again, Mick positioned himself at the side of his boss, and held on to his legal pad, just to have something for his hands to do.

“Ah, a new face,” said the man standing at the far end of the table. “Introduce yourself, please.”

Mick shrunk a few sizes, uncomfortable with the attention. “Me?” He said, quietly.

“Yes!” The man said.

“Uh, I-I-I-I’m...”

“Lori Chambers,” Mr. Johnson said, taking charge. “She’s my new secretary, helping out until our new general supervisor gets here from San Diego. I’m kind borrowing her from Dave Simmons.”

“Dave Simmons?” The man said. “She works for Dave Simmons?”

“Well, she did, and she will when he...”

“Get her the fuck out of here!” The man said, pointing to the door. “What the hell are you thinking, Johnson?”

“You’re right, of course. My mistake.” He turned to Mick. “Lori, honey, I’ll see you back at the office, okay?”

“Did I do something?” Mick asked.

There was some gentle laughter amongst the executives.

“You better just go,” Mr. Johnson said.

“Oh. Okay. Sure.” Mick got up, took his blank legal pad and quickly scooted out of the room. “Sorry,” he said, meekly.

He had no idea why he had felt so... deferential. He had the feeling he was not the shy type, but being a secretary just seemed to change his outlook. This was how secretaries behaved, to the best of his recollection, and that was his place.

Once the door was closed, Mr. Johnson looked at the executive in charge. “I don’t...” Rod Simmons was just as puzzled as Mick was.

“It’s a level 2 meeting, Johnson. That means this thing is silo’d, and no one who isn’t building 8 status attends, nor their direct reports! You know that!”

“Well... I... I thought that...” Mr. Simmons steadied himself. “Lori has building 8 status, and...” Then he saw his error. “She’s a direct report to Dave. I see. That’s my fault.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“And,” the executive in charge said, “I may have just wanted to see her ass when she walked out.”

“It *is* a sweet ass,” Mr. Johnson said. All the other executives in the room laughed. They were all white men, by some grand, improbable coincidence.

“Great eye for talent there, Rod,” another executive said.

“Be sure to send her around sometime so I can get a closer look,” said another.



As Mick was making his way back to the offices, his path was interrupted.

“I can’t believe the hypocrisy of this committee!” A woman said, pointing back at the people in the room she had just come from. “I resign! I’ve have enough of this back-stabbing, political dog and pony show! I wash my hands of all of this!” She turned and stormed past Mick, her pumps burning scorch marks in the carpet.

Mick couldn’t help himself and stuck his head in the doorway to see what had caused all this. What he saw was four women in skirts and blouses sipping coffee.

“Is everything okay?” Mick asked.

“Fine. Why do you ask?” Answered one of the women with a nonchalant expression.

“That’s just Vivian for you,” said another. She does that every few days.

“Lori!” Chirped another woman. It was Julie. “This is the new girl I was telling you about,” she said to the others. “Lori Chambers.”



“Oh, Rod Johnson’s new PA?” The woman who seemed to be in control said. “Come on in, sweetie. Come in. I’ve been dying to meet Mia’s replacement.”

Mick took some tiny steps inside, still worried about the woman who had just stormed out. “Are you sure she’s going to be all right?”

“It’s fine. You’re adorable to worry about her, though,” Julie said. “She’ll be back.”

“Is this a break room, or...?”

“No, this is a conference room, honey. Our committee meets every week. 2:15 PM on Tuesdays.”

“What committee is this?”

“The Secret Santa planning committee, of course,” Julie said. “Why don’t you join us?”

Mick had no idea at all what a “Secret Santa” was, but it sounded compellingly mysterious and he could not turn this offer down. He took an empty seat and his eyes widened in anticipation of learning something amazing, new and wonderful. “Secrets? Santas? Tell me more...”



“This is a mistake!” Lori yelled loudly, but not so loudly as to hurt people’s ears. She was in a jail cell at the police station, which was not nearly as awful as she had been led to believe. Still, she would rather not have been there. “I’ve done nothing wrong!”

“Ma’am,” the woman keeping tabs on prisoners in the jail cells said, “this really isn’t helping.”

“I just don’t know what to do!” Lori wailed. She slumped against the wall and started to slide down. “I don’t break the law! I’m a good person... Good people don’t go to jail...” Her eyes were getting watery as she thought of all the times she had been scolded as a child and threatened with being “hauled off to jail” with “drug dealers and mobsters” and how terror-stricken she had been at the thought.

“You,” said a harsh voice she recognized as the detective that had taken her through the booking process. “Get up.”

Lori straightened herself out. “Did you call? Did they clear things up? Can I go?”

“I called your place of business. They said Lori Chambers has been at work for the past two days.”

“They’re wrong! That’s not true! There has to be a mistake... What about my apartment?”

“They say you moved in two days ago.”

“Could it be an identity thief? I’ve heard about those. You checked my drivers license, though, didn’t you?”

“It’s back at the hotel. They’re holding on to it until you pay, which is well within their rights.”

“I’m Lori Chambers!” She yelled. “Honest I am!”

“Listen, lady, if you don’t want to tell me your real name...”

“Lori Chambers!” She yelled again.

“Ma’am, we both know you’re not this Lori person.”

“I am. I really, really am. I’ve never done anything illegal in my life. I don’t even do illegal stuff in my dreams.”

“Then how do you explain this, ma’am?” The detective held up a cell phone with some dried mud on it. “It was in your pocket.”

Lori immediately recognized it.

“I found it in the park,” said the frazzled young woman. “I thought maybe I’d get it back to the owner.” It was the phone that she had stepped on when she was leaving the park. It took a little bit of a search, but she did pick it up and did hope to return it, but she



was locked out from using it.

“The owner — as if you didn’t know — is a missing persons case. A fairly prominent one, as it turns out. So I have a very suspicious situation here. You claim to be the same woman who is currently working in a business with several people who have not identified them as an impostor. You were illegally occupying a hotel room. Further, you were arrested with the cell phone of a missing person.” The detective pointed at her. “I’ve got at least twelve charges against you. Get comfortable. You’re not going anywhere until you start telling me the truth.”

“I’m Lori Chambers... I’m not lying...” Lori said, her voice sounding a bit despondent. She slumped against the wall again.

“You *are* lying,” the detective countered. “You *aren’t* Lori Chambers, you *didn’t* just find this in a park, and you’re not even a *lady*... Lady.”

That last one stabbed Lori right through the heart and drove a sense of fear into her that she hadn’t ever felt before. She was in real danger, and she had no idea what to do, and had no one to help her. She was absolutely alone, and she was in the custody of people who were prejudiced against her... and who she was.



Mick sat at his desk, upon which rested a small blue fuzzy teddy bear with a heart sewn into its’ chest. It was from his boss, Mr. Johnson, apologizing for the embarrassment of the budget meeting. He wasn’t sure how he felt about it. On one hand, it was thoughtful. On the other hand, he had no idea what to do with it. Did he keep it on the desk? For how long? Should he bring it home? Why? Should he throw it away? When?

For now, it just lived at the corner of his desk, turned away, so Mick didn’t have to see its’ beady little eyes staring at him.

Meanwhile, now in his third day of work at PolyCon Corp, he had a new challenge. Earlier that morning, Mick noticed how much of the office rhythms centered around coffee. Everyone had a morning coffee, and it seemed that no one got any work done, or even attempted to get work down until they had coffee.

As such, he had brought it upon himself to get Mr. Johnson’s coffee for him, to help him get started faster in the morning. He seemed very grateful for the effort and was quite complimentary.

“That’s the kind of initiative I appreciate in an employee, Miss Chandler,” he had said.

Considering how much of Mick’s life seemed to be completely up in the air, it was nice to know he was good at something, and making his boss happy.

“A personal question, Lori,” Mr. Johnson asked. “Do you wear makeup?”

Mick wasn’t sure what to say to that. He absolutely did, and he put a lot of effort into it. “Of course, Mr. Johnson.”

The executive gave Mick a long, lingering examination. “Looking closer, I suppose you do. Interesting. Easy to miss, if you aren’t looking.”

So as Mick sat at his desk, his new challenge was to try and make it a little more obvious that he wore makeup. He had a small mirror he had purchased at lunch leaning up against his computer monitor and was trying a bolder look to his makeup. He wasn’t very impressed with the results, however. The shades he had bought and used since... Well, he still couldn’t remember exactly when he had started wearing makeup... The shades were just the ones he had found in his overnight kit.

He did have these blips, or more like snapshots, of memories. He remembered seeing his face in the mirror, trying to do his makeup, but instead of bringing out his feminine features, he was emphasizing his masculine features. Why would he ever do that? He wanted to become a woman, after all. That’s why he was taking the pills and wearing the pads. However, she had this sense he was doing it because people wanted to see him like that. Lots of people.

Anyway, the colors he was using were so muted that he was going to have to try some shades that were a little more striking and forward than what he had. That was something he’d have to get on the way home after work.

He could finally do some shopping now that he had set up a bank account and gotten a credit card. The company had a credit union, and as long as you were an employee, they didn’t need to check ID. So now he had a card and a checkbook with “Lori Chandler” printed on them.

He looked at his latest attempt in the mirror and frowned. The colors just weren’t standing out enough. Mick sighed. He had so much to re-learn about being a woman.



Lars pushed Ace into the wall. “I thought you said you learned the parts!” He pushed him again. “You fuckin’ fuck!” They had just come off stage at their Jacksonville show, and it had gone very badly, even worse than the last one.

Ace was trying to slide along the wall to get away from his angry employer. "I'm really trying, Lars!"

"What the fuck were you doin' on *Blood Lover*?" Lars shouted. "That song is six minutes long and you never found the right chord! Not fuckin' once!"

"I tried!"

"Shit, we've only ever used eight chords, you fuckin' moron!"

"Back off, Lars," Stormy Summers stepped in between the two. She was the tour manager, a sixty year old woman who everyone was afraid of, even Lars. "This ain't gonna solve anything. You ain't gonna scare talent into him."

"Hey!" Ace said, offended.

"Grow up," Stormy said, a toothpick dangling from her lips. "Go back to the dressing room and treat yourself to some chocolate milk, kid."

Ace grumbled, but left the scene.

"Shoulda' let me tear him a new one," Lars said. "People are too soft these days."

Stormy waved it off, dismissively. "Forget that. The police called. They have news on Mick."

As much as he hated Mick's holier-than-thou attitude, he was the best guitarist he'd ever had in the band. He would give anything to get Mick back. He'd sell his soul to Satan go get him back. Again. "What do they got?"

"They found some of his stuff, and picked up some tranny who had it."

"Mick and a tranny? That explains a lot. Always knew he was hidin' a kinky side."

"They want you to come back and see if you can identify the tranny."

"Why the fuck would I know them? I haven't banged a tranny hooker since the eighties. Back when it was cool."

"Fine. I'll tell them to fuck off," Summer said and left.

"No, no. Hey." Lars stopped her. He gave it a moment of thought. "Call my lawyers see if they can spring this tranny. The cops aren't gonna do shit. I seen this too many times. Unless they have the whole thing dropped in their lap, they ain't gonna move."

"Get them out of custody?"

"Yeah, yeah. Get them out of jail at least. Then let me talk to 'em. I got a way with people."

"I've always said that," Stormy said, in a brilliant deadpan.



“One jacket, one blouse, one phone...” The matron behind the metal grating at the property room was counting out the items taken from Lori when she was arrested.

Lori didn't really know what was going on. She had just been taken from her cell, and told to follow the guard. Now she was being patient and watching as the extremely disinterested and menacingly indifferent matron returned her possessions to her as if it were a personal affront to do so.

“One pair shoes, one bra, one padded panty... two boobs.” The woman dropped the two breast forms on top of the clothes and seemed to dare Lori to take them.

She did, and with all these items in her arms, Lori was forcefully directed to a private changing area that had been designed to provide as little privacy as possible.

While Lori was doing that, she heard all too many whispered and supposedly out-of-earshot comments being made to bully her. If she was getting out of here, she wasn't going to worry about the details. She needed to get away from these thugs. Cops always looked so nice on TV. She then had to wait for a bunch of people to seemingly do nothing before being allowed into smaller room where more people did nothing until she was let out of that one, too.

“Miss Chambers?” A skinny man in a very expensive suit said, in the third room. He was holding a briefcase and had “lawyer” written all over him. “I'm a lawyer,” he said.

“I haven't hired a lawyer.”

“I've been hired by an outside party to represent your interests. Unless you can afford your own legal representation, I highly suggest you take me on as your legal counsel.”

Lori sighed. “Fine,” she said. “What's going on?”

“You're being released on bail.”

It wasn't very long before Lori, dressed in her own clothes but with her hair a mess and without makeup, was outside for the first time in 36 hours. “So I still don't understand,” she said to the lawyer. “Not that I'm not really really grateful, sir, but... What's going on?”

“My client had a vested interest in this... situation. They don’t have a lot of faith in the criminal justice system... I’ll let him explain for himself.” The lawyer straightened his tie and walked away.

“Wait! What happens now? Where do I go?”

“Nowhere,” the lawyer said as he continued on.

“But...” Lori turned around and when she did the door to a large white limousine popped open.

“Hey, get in,” said an old, weathered rock star from inside. “You’re the trans guy, right?”

“Woman,” Lori corrected.

Lars pushed the door open wider. “Awesome! Well, c’mon, I gotta get on a plane back to Florida.”

“I’m sorry, sir... But I don’t understand anything that’s going on.”

“Welcome to Earth, star child!” Lars took a swig from a bottle in his hand.



It was another morning, and Mick was getting ready for the day. He had finished doing his face, with deeper red lips and heavier mascara. He had to admit that the new colors did make his lips and eyes pop, and was vivid and distinctive. He felt like an old black and white movie star.

Next came choosing his outfit for the day. It wasn’t like there were a lot of choices. He was a big fan of black, with the occasional hit of navy blue. Well, he thought he was a big fan of those colors, at least. He had certainly bought plenty of office wear in those colors, that was for sure.

He had already put on a black skirt when he remembered an exchange he had had with Mr. Johnson yesterday.

“Black again, hmmm?” He said as he walked to Mick’s desk. He turned around the stuffed bear sitting on the corner so it was facing Mick. “That’s better.”

“What’s wrong with grey?” Mick found himself asking, even though he had grown a little tired of it himself. “All the other secretaries wear grey,” Mick said.

“Well, if I wanted a secretary that dressed like all the others, I’d have one of them,” he answered. “Listen, I don’t want to tell you how to dress, but if you feel like experimenting, I’m perfectly okay with that. Bright colors would be particularly welcome, don’t you think?”

“Uh, I guess so,” Mick replied. He wasn’t used to getting suggestions on what he should wear. Maybe this was another part of the feminine experience that he had yet to remember.

“The office can get a little bit dark and depressing all by itself,” Mr. Johnson said. Mick disagreed. He loved the office. There was nothing depressing about it. “Give color a chance. You know I like a team player, Lori,” Mr. Johnson said before patting the head of the stuffed bear and leaving.

As soon as he was out of the area, though, Mick turned that bear away. It was kinda creepy.

So Mick was looking at the closet, containing all of what he thought were his clothes, and finding nothing but black and navy blue. These were his only choices.

“I should at least show Mr. Johnson I’m willing to make an effort,” he said to himself.

So he went to work that day in his usual outfit in navy blue, but added a red ribbon bow tie to add at least a splash of color. He received numerous compliments for the change, and the fact that so many people even cared about what he wore to work was kind of shocking. He never knew so many cared.

He was feeling pretty good about himself until he dropped off the mail in Mr. Johnson’s office. He was on the phone, as he had been all morning, and it looked like we was going to have to spend the rest of his day like that.



“Hold on a sec, George,” Mr. Johnson said as Mick set the mail down. He covered the mouthpiece. “Thanks, Lori,” He said. “I see you still stuck with dark colors.”

“Oh, but...” Mick pulled at the loops of his tie.

“You know that’s not what I meant, Lori. Tomorrow. No dark colors. Challenge yourself. Step outside your comfort zone a little.” He lifted his hand off the phone. “Thanks for holding on, George.”

“But...” Mick said, trying to explain.

Mr. Johnson just pointed to the phone and shrugged, to let Mick know he couldn’t respond right now.

Mick left his boss’s office frustrated. He was thinking that he really had tried, but was limited by his closet. Then again, he really hadn’t tried that hard. He need to show how much of a team player he could be. “I guess I need to go shopping,” Mick said.



As an internationally famous rock star, Mick hadn’t done a lot of shopping in his life. Usually a team of marketing people sent him clothes and he picked out something that matched his preferences closely enough. So he didn’t know it yet, but he was about to do something for the very first time: shop for clothes.

He was optimistic. It was well known that women liked to shop, and since he was becoming a woman, then it should follow that he enjoyed shopping.

It started out badly. As it turns out, shopping is largely a self-serve operation. One does not point out clothes from the displays and then tell the cashier to go get them and bring them back, as he learned the hard way. You were expected to get them yourself.

However, you were allowed to try them on and not buy them, which seemed wrong, but it was far more convenient that way. Mick was sure he was taking advantage of these sales people, but they all seemed okay with this arrangement.

Another remnant from his stage performing life was that he was used to disrobing and changing clothes in a semi-private area. He had spent years and years dashing into dressing rooms, stripping down and dressing again as quickly as possible. Often, he had no idea what he was getting dressed in until he was done. That was showbiz.

What was not showbiz was having to do all the work himself, and even figuring out what size he was. He was shocked that he was a medium waist and a large blouse size. He wore a 10 dress size. He was skinny for a man, that was for sure — but for a woman, he was still a bit big.

When the sales lady moved him over from the nice clothing area with the fun styles to the decidedly less nice “plus size” area, he felt a little bit ashamed. Signs that showed beautiful, fashionable ladies in the rest of the store were instead showing chubby gals in distracting stripes and patterns.

He navigated himself back over to the normal dress sizes and decided that he was going to find something to fit him there, and if it didn’t fit, he’d diet and exercise until it did.

He left that store with three blouses in pastel colors, but nothing else. All the office wear was black or grey. He tried another store, but it, too, only offered black and grey options. A third store had one skirt suit set in a beige color, but it wasn’t even in his size.

“Can I help, miss?” the sales lady asked.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Mick said, incorporating a sigh into his words. “I’m looking for office wear, but everything seems to be so drab. I was hoping to find some more colorful options.”

The woman nodded. “Let me guess, pink?”

“I guess, sure. That would work.”

“I’d love to sell you something here, but that really isn’t our specialty.”

“Oh.”

“But have you tried the St. Katherine’s store?”

“I... I’ve never heard of it.” Mick hadn’t heard of *any* store for women’s clothing, so he was being honest.

“They sell church suits there which may be just what you’re looking for.”

“Church suits? But I...”

“Don’t let the name fool you. They’re colorful dresses that can be work for church or the office. I’d give them a try.”

With few options, Mick took the sales lady up on her suggestion and would at least drop by and look around a bit. The store was a short walk away, and Mick was there in no time. He found the interior... A little churchy. This was no surprise in a church-focused store, but he still felt it was a little heavy-handed. The giant sparkling gold cross in the center of the store was probably what made him feel that way.



Mick felt like he finally had a bead on what his life should be like as he got up from his desk to leave. The day at the offices of PolyCon Corp had gone so well. He had gotten so many compliments from the guys and tons of questions from the women. All of them wanted to know about his new look. He wore a silky twill skirt set in pink with a purple blouse, and knew he looked dynamite.

He wasn't sure he was in the right place when he had first entered the St. Katherine's store, but the staff there was very persuasive. He left with seven new skirt suit sets and three dresses, all in bright, cheerful colors. Maybe he was an easy mark, but the clothes were exactly what he was looking for, and he bought all he thought he'd need for a little while, as he could mix and match the pieces for weeks to come. He also left with a card for the local protestant church, which he had promised to attend soon. They were a bit pushy about it.

Mick might have let his en-



thusiasm run away with itself, but at the very least he had accomplished the very tough goal Mr. Johnson had set for him, and he was reaping all the compliments he could handle. Even some of the more elite secretaries who worked the top floor asked him where he had found such a great outfit.

Finally, Mick felt like he had found the life he was meant to live. No more guessing if he was really this person he found himself having to be. He was almost certainly Lori Chandler, just without the memories.

“I think you have to admit it, Lori,” Mr. Johnson said as he stood in his office doorway, ready to leave for the night. “You look so much better in bright colors.”

“It’s definitely more my style,” Mick replied. “I’m glad you talked me into it.”

“You look radiant,” Mr. Simmons said. “You’re practically glowing.”

Mick found himself blushing. He didn’t know compliments could make him feel this way.

“Match that with some heels and a miniskirt, and you could rule the world,” Mr. Simmons added. He grabbed his case and turned away. “I’ll see you tomorrow, miss Chambers.”

On the bus ride, all the way home, Mick just stared at his feet. He had just gone way above and beyond to appease his boss, and now he wanted more. It wasn’t fair. How *dare* he?

Mick liked his shoes. They were comfortable. They were practical. He was not about to change into those ankle-breaking death traps that were women’s high heels. Besides, it was entirely unprofessional for a male boss to pressure their female secretary into dressing they way they wanted them to. The law was completely on Mick’s side, he knew. This was just going too far.

He leaned back in his bus seat and focused on anything that wasn’t about heels and miniskirts. There was no way he was going to do anything but enjoy a nice, quiet night at home, unpacking his last few moving boxes.

Mick turned his head to look outside, just when the bus happened to pass the local mall.

“Fudge!” He said. He pulled the stop cord and grabbed his purse. He’d get one pair. Just one.



“There she is,” Julie said as Mick walked into the small conference room. “There’s our little fashion plate!”

Mick had been getting used to the compliments and just smiled bashfully. He made his way to the last available chair and sat, making sure to care for his skirt very carefully as he did so. It was all about being neat and tidy. He then crossed his legs under the table and sat at attention. "Sorry I'm running so late," he said.

"I can't imagine what kept you," said the woman running the meeting. She looked up and down at Mick, his colorful jacket and bold makeup making it very clear that it was all the attention he was getting that was slowing him down. "Anyway, let's get this Secret Santa committee underway."

Mick's curiosity about the group had led to very quickly becoming an official member of the unofficial group, and volunteered to keep the notes.

"Lori, where did we leave off last time?"

"We were assessing which website we should use for our official Secret Santa..."

"I still say we make it mandatory," one of the girls said. "Everyone participates. That way we don't need a sign up."

"And we've been over this, Irene. We can't make it mandatory. It's a violation of employment law. That's what Stan from legal said."

Irene spoke again. "What I heard from Stan wasn't that it was illegal, that it was..."

"Hold on, hold on!" Mick said, still trying to write this all down. He took a few moments to finish scribbling. "Okay it should be mandatory... And then what did you say next?"

"I said it can't be mandatory."

Mick wrote that down, and took a full minute to do so. "And then you said..."

Julie interrupted. "Lori, honey, maybe note talking isn't for you."

"No, I can do this!" Mick said, still scribbling away. "Really I can! I'm a good secretary!"

As the other women waited patiently for Mick to finish up what he was writing, he started scratching out vast passages of what he had already written and began writing again. Then, he scratched that out. Finally, he just ripped the page off his pad and began again.

The four women in the room exchanged irritated glances.

"Lori, it's perfectly okay," Julie said. She actually just took the pad away from Mick to make him stop.

"Perhaps you just need a refresher," Irene suggested.

“Yes,” another woman said. “They do offer secretary courses here at PolyCon. And they’re paid.”

“I don’t need a class!” Mick insisted. “I am a competent and professional secretary. I’m just a little rusty.” It wasn’t just a matter of pride, he really needed to demonstrate secretarial skills to prove to himself this was his job.

Still, when the meeting broke up, Mick decided to just investigate the secretarial refresher courses being offered. He just wanted to see what they were. No other reason.

The employee education offices were located on the fourth floor, so he got on the elevator where there was already a man riding. “Floor?” Dick Thornheart asked as Mick got on.

“Four,” Mick said, and watched the senior executive of PolyCon Corp press the appropriate button. “Thank you,” said the former rock star.

He smiled and turned to the front of the cab. In the reflection of the door, Mick could see the older man staring straight at him, by way of the mirror. It was an odd minute as Mick tried to return the obvious stare with a polite smile, but no return expression came. The man just kept staring. More like glaring, really.

The elevator dinged and the door rumbled open. “I’ll be seeing you,” Mr. Thornheart said as Mick stepped out of the elevator.

“Yes. See you,” Mick said, nervously, and went on his way, stumbling slightly in his new three inch heels, hoping he’d never meet that creep again.

“I heard that there might be some refresher course for secretarial skills,” Mick said to the woman at the counter. “Is that true?”

“Well, we call them office technology courses, but yes, we do offer them. They’re very popular.” The woman smiled. “Would you like to sign up?”

“Well, I mean, I am an experienced secretary, I’ve been doing the job for several years... Would such classes even benefit someone of my *extensive* experience?”

“I’m sure we can find something that might sharpen your skills,” the woman replied, humoring Mick. “You never know.”



“Here you are, sir,” Mick said to his boss, as he handed over the hard copy of the meeting minutes he’d just typed up.



Not unexpectedly, a guitarist who has nimble fingers has a good set of skills to become a touch typist. In addition to that, he'd also learned plenty about taking accurate and fast notes, as well as proper filing and archiving techniques. Believing he was "re-learning" his office skills helped quite a bit, prohibiting himself from giving up. In just a few classes, he had developed the secretarial skills of a long-time office veteran.

Mr. Johnson looked over the pages, seeing them properly formatted, neatly presented and done in a standard business format. "Very nice, Lori."

The praise made Mick want to squeal in delight. He was weak when it came to compliments. "Thank you, sir," he responded.

Mick still wasn't sure about his memories, but the decision to become a woman and choose a career in being a secretary were the best decisions he could have ever made. He loved the simple, transactional nature of this job. Do what you're told to do and be praised. Do well and it was praised more. Be pleasant and pretty and it made people happy. It was simple stuff, but it filled him with joy.

He could think of no better life than one where you helped everyone do their jobs and then went home to curl up on the couch with a book and a cup of hot tea. Was there anything better than that? It was all very neat and tidy. Being a good person had such amazing benefits. Brining a ray of light into people's lives was its own reward.

Just yesterday, he had been at a doctor's office and was being himself, trying to be kind and considerate to everyone and he could tell how much they appreciated it. The clerk at the front desk smiled when he smiled. The nurses were happy when he was happy. The doctor was in good spirits because he was in good spirits.

"I have your records from your previous doctor, Miss Chandler, and it looks like you've been on hormonal therapy for close to six months," the doctor said.

"That sounds about right," Mick replied, unsure what the truth might be, but trusting the records had to be correct.

"Well, to be honest, Lori, I have to say that the effects on your body don't reflect that kind of history." The doctor seemed puzzled. "It's almost as if you aren't taking the pills at all."

"Oh believe me, I'm taking them." Mick had absolutely been taking the pills as the labels told him to, and he was sick every morning. "I have the nausea to prove it."

"If your body hasn't shown development by this point, I think we'll need to take it to the next level to get the results you want."

“Like what?”

“By eliminating your testosterone through surgical methods, rather than chemical ones.”

“Which means?”

“A procedure.”

“Oh, my.”

“I’d also suggest, if you haven’t thought about it, breast augmentation. I normally tell my patients to wait 18-24 months after beginning hormones, but I think you could safely do a modest augmentation immediately, because in your case any development is likely to be less than what you’d want.”

“That’s a lot to think about,” Mick responded, thoughtfully. Then he put a smile on his face. “But if you think it’s what I need, doctor, I say we should go for it!”

“Wonderful!” The doctor replied. “My nurse will book the appointments.”

Mick, seated on the exam bench, was looking down at his legs which were in dire need of a shave. Again. “By the way, do you have any recommendations for electrolysis?”

“I know a great trans-friendly salon for that kind of work,” the doc said, merrily.

Mick left his appointment with his new gender transition specialist feeling wonderful. He had a clear direction on where he was going with his ongoing quest to become the woman he was always meant to be. So why did he still have second thoughts? Well, if he was going to back out, he had two months to make his decision, because that’s when his first surgery was going to happen.

Of course, Mick still needed the time off, and he was going to have to sweet talk Mr. Johnson into it. He had only been on the job for a week, after all.

“Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?” Mick asked Mr. Johnson in his sweetest voice.

Rod Johnson put down the immaculate meeting minutes and gave his secretary the most subtle of smiles. “Are you trying to butter me up for something, Lori?”

“Oh, no sir!” Mick protested, unconvincingly.

“Sometimes I think you could get a man to do just about anything with that voice of yours,” Mr. Johnsons aid.

Mick’s body wasn’t particularly feminine, and his face had angles to it that few attractive women had. However, if anyone were to question the authenticity of

his gender based on appearance, all they had to do was to listen to him speak. His years of singing backup had given him the ability to speak in the most authentic and melodious voice imaginable. Once you heard that voice coming from Mick's mouth, you had no doubt as to his gender.

"Now who's trying to flatter who?" Mick responded.

"Actually, I did have a present for you," Mr. Johnson said, opening a desk drawer. "I wanted to thank you for so ably filling in after Mia left. I'd be lost without a girl like you by my side." He picked up an envelope and placed it in front of Mick. "Just a little something I think you'll get a lot of use from."

"For me?" Mick said, picking up the envelope. He fiddled with the envelope, trying to open it for a moment.

"You should grow those nails out, it'd help."

"I'll be fine, thank you," Mick said as he finally got it open. Inside was a folded brochure containing a plastic card. "It's for... A gym?"

"The downtown fitness club," Mr. Johnson clarified. "They have three locations. Perfect for getting into shape."

Mick wanted to bark at his boss for suggesting something so nakedly insulting, that he needed a gym membership to lose weight. Any woman would have slapped him across the face and quit on the spot, which he was tempted to do. However, he had just been telling himself he needed to drop some pounds to fit into smaller dress sizes, and was already pricing out gyms, so it would have been a little hypocritical.

Instead, he took the high road. "Oh, I was just thinking about working out more often," he said. "I hope it didn't cost you too much."

"Money well spent, especially if you look cuter."

His boss being a sexist clod wasn't going to keep him from accepting a free gym membership. He would just roll with it. "That's very thoughtful. Thank you, Mr. Johnson."

"Anything for my girl," he replied.

Maybe it wasn't so bad being treated like a silly little secretary if it meant getting free gifts and a happy boss. "You're far too good to me!" Mick would still need to ask for the time off, so a little bit of extra sugar wouldn't hurt. He put on his very best smile. "A girl like me doesn't deserve such a nice boss like you!"

He had to face the fact that his boss was a bit sexist, very old-fashioned and wanted women to fit into his mold. Mick just had to face facts, that this was his life now, and rather than fighting it, he should learn to just roll with it. He had a

feeling he would be happier if he just did what Mr. Johnson wanted him to do, and be who he wanted him to be.



“Beer?” Ace offered Lori, as she sat at the back of the tour bus, petrified.

She looked at it as if it were a bloodthirsty rabid bat, and made no response. She was seated at the very back bench of the bus, her legs clamped together tight, her arms glued to her sides and her head retracted between her shoulders as far as it would go. She was terrified, and looked like a wreck. Her nerves were frayed and frazzled, and she had no idea where she was in the world, or where she was going.

Ace shrugged his shoulders and put the beer back where he found it, on the floor.

“W-w-w-w-when does the ride stop?” Lori asked.

“Is that a, you know, existential kinda question?”

“No.”

“Oh, well, who the fuck knows? When it does we get out and either take a piss or play a gig.”

Lori sated the obvious. “I’ve been on this bus for th-th-th-three days. I don’t want to be on this bus anymore.”

“That’s kinda up to Lars.”

“Where is he? I haven’t seen him for almost a d-d-d-day. How can someone hide on a bus?”

“Probably on the crew bus. He does that when he wants to hide.”

“Hide?” Came a gruff voice from a few feet away. The curtain to one of the bunk beds fluttered open, and the unwashed head of Lars Strychnine poked out. “I’m just sleepin’ off my headache,” he explained. He then rolled out of the bunk, falling a foot onto the floor in nothing but his tiny man-briefs. He hit with a heavy thud. “Oh, fuck,” he grumbled. “Fuck fuck fuck.”

“I want off the bus, Mr. Strychnine,” Lori said.

Lars fought to get up on his feet and pulled a robe out from his bunk space. “Who are you?” He asked Lori.

“Lori Chandler! You kidnapped me when I got out of jail.”

“Oh yeah, yeah. I remember now.” He slipped into the robe, which was silk and had had an emblem of a dragon on the back, and it did little to hide his

protruding gut. "I was gonna talk to you about Mick." He looked at Ace. "Get the fuck outta here," he told him.

Ace grunted his way off the seat he was sitting in and passed Lars, which was hilariously awkward as he squoze by him, going belly-to-belly in the narrow hallway.

"So you're loving the tour life, ain'tcha?" Lars asked Lori.

"I want to go home."

"Yeah, I never want it to stop. Life on the road can't be beat." Lars picked up the beer from the floor and placed it on a table in front of him. "Now, why would you go and kill my guitar player like that?"

"Buh, wuh... What... Kill?" Lori's eyes went wide as tears began to fill them. "Kill? You think... I didn't kill anyone!"

"They found Mick Van Helsten's cell phone on you, they traced messages between you two, and now Mick's vanished." Lars rubbed the sleep from his eyes with his meaty fists. "Look, I know tranny hookers, and they have a real psycho thing goin' on. So it's kind a cinch that you killed him. What did he do, make fun of you? Call you a faggot?"

"Mr. Strychnine!" Lori objected. "None of this ever happened!"

"Nah, of course not." Lars winked at Lori. "But y'know I had a lot of money tied up in Mick. Replacing him is gonna be expensive. So if you might know where... One could find the remains... Of... Mick... I think my insurance will cover the loss."

"I did not kill anyone!" Lori yelled, as best she could with her naturally restrained voice.

"No one is accusing you of that. So, if one were to go looking for a dead body, where would one find one? That's all I'm asking. It's just between you and me."

"Please, I just wanna go ho-hoome...!" Lori wiled, reduced to tears.

"Hey, there. Don't cry. It's takes a lot of planning and courage to pull off a murder. You should be proud of yourself."

Lori bravely swiped her tears away and hardened. "Let me off this bus! You're insane!"

"Well, see, here's the problem. You've travelled over state lines. So that's a violation of your bail. Which means you're gonna go to jail. And I transported you, so I go to jail. You're not going anywhere, unless you really like jail."

"I should have never left San Diego."

“Well, you’ll have a lot of time to think about that, because this tour doesn’t end for another two months.”



Mick’s heels clicked and clacked on the hard linoleum floor of the office as he balanced a mug of coffee that was filled to the brim. It was a challenge, as the wide, full swiveling hips Mick now sported gyrated back and forth dramatically, making holding a full mug a near certainty for disaster. Fortunately, Mick had developed the necessary talents in his two months on the job as Mr. Johnson’s secretary.

What Mick had also developed over the past two months was the body of a secretary. His gym membership card was smoking hot from all the use he had given it. It had become a new hobby for Mick, as he drove himself to drop his waist size a couple of inches. That goal had been met weeks ago, so his 30-inch waist was now 26 inches and his 165 pound weight was now a trim 138.

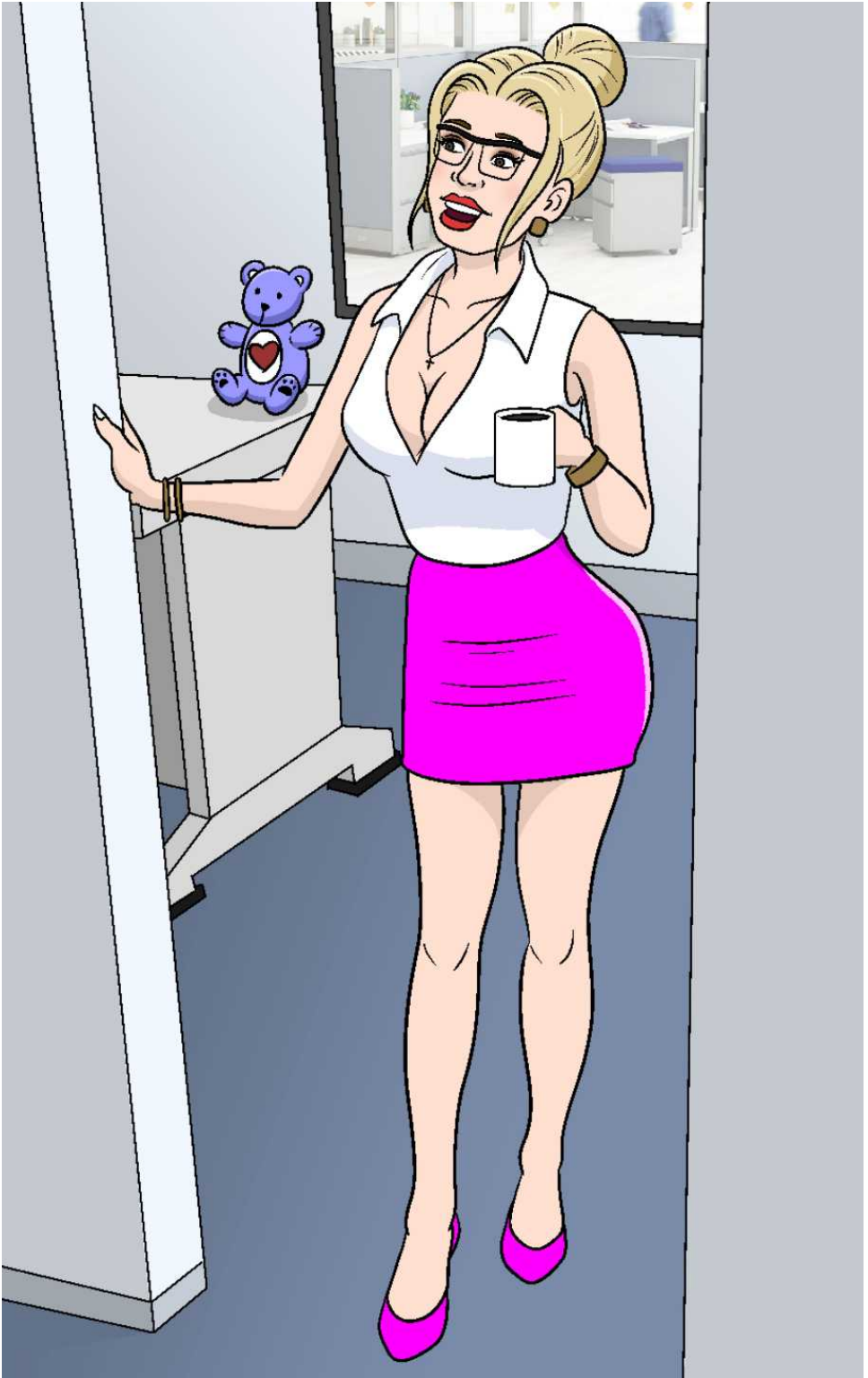
When he got the approval for his two weeks off to get his surgeries, the doctor doing the breast augmentation had pointed out that doing additional implants on the buttocks would be a great way to merge the recovery times.

So as Mick walked the aisle in the middle of the office, he attracted almost all the attention in the room, as his large, bulbous butt, with hips now nearly 38 inches around, was on full display in the short hot pink miniskirt he wore. The entertainment didn’t stop there, as Mick’s absurdly long and voluptuous legs embraced by sheer pantyhose minced in short steps towards Mr. Johnson’s office.

The freshly implanted breasts that gave Mick curves weren’t shapes new to his figure, as they took the place of the pads he used to wear, but his new 34 B breasts did give him the opportunity to display cleavage, and leave his blouse buttons open to show off two round globes of flesh gently touching in the middle of his chest.

Mick’s body had become a gallery for the dirty minded. The miniskirt he wore today wan’t exactly discouraging the stares, whispered comments and dropped jaws that seemed to happen in Mick’s presence. His sheer white blouse, through which the black bra underneath could be detected in the right light, was not remarkable in itself, only in that it gave Mick the air of delicate femininity a woman who liked to be looked at desired.

That delicate look was countered by the wicked-looking hot pink four-inch heels that Mick wore, bending his feet into a tortured but sexy shape, with long



stiletto heels that looked like deadly weapons. He had no visible difficulty walking in them, as he had been wearing them for nearly a month, at the suggestion of that mischievous Mr. Johnson. As if his body needed any more help looking as lewd as it did, the heels made him stick his rear end and his chest out further, and to use his bent arms and floating hands to balance as he walked.

Frankly, Mick looked outrageous. To men he looked like a cartoon, but a sexy, desirable cartoon. To women, he looked like a slut. To him, he looked like the ideal secretary he wanted to be.

“Your coffee, boss,” Mick announced as he set the mug down in front of Rod Johnson.

“Ah, thank you, Lori. Have I told you how beautiful you look today?”

“Oh gosh, Mr. Johnson, you say that every day,” Mick said with a cute little smile and squeeze of his shoulders.

“That’s because you just get better looking every day.”

Mick was blushing, as he reveled in the praise of the man in charge, twisting back and forth. “Oh! Um... I wanted to ask you something...”

“Yes?”

“Oh, I can’t remember what it was...” Mick rolled his eyes skyward as he tried to recall. The tip of his tinge leaked out between his red, lush lips.

“I have work to do, Lori.”

“Um, give me just a sec... I was just... It’s something to do with the thingy...” Mick’s two-plus months of being a secretary had not been beneficial to his cognitive skills. “Oh, I was just thinking about it!”

The job responsibilities of a secretary under Rod Johnson were not mentally taxing ones. He didn’t have to think much, and Mr. Johnson encouraged him not to. He emphasized the need to relax and take things easy, and not to worry about the things outside of his control, which to hear Mr. Johnson explain it, was just about everything. “The world wants a smile from you, Lori, and not another serious face in the crowd. Your value is to bring light and joy into people’s lives — keep your mind clutter free and your attitude upbeat.”

“Neat and tidy?” Mick asked.

“I like that,” Mr. Johnson said. “Yes. A neat and tidy mind.”

Mick, knowing that Mr. Johnson was as smart and experienced as anyone he’d ever met when it came to life, heeded his advice. The news was no longer a part of Mick’s media diet, which was now mostly reality shows and celebrity gossip. He no longer chatted about current events with his co-workers. It was all about weather, TV and office rumors.

He was further encouraged by the small cadre of fellow secretaries that made up the Secret Santa Committee, telling him that it was a cute figure and flirting with the boss that got you raises and promotions at the company, not opinions and arguments.

Mick, so new to this world outside rock n' roll, took every bit of advice to heart and did his very best to put it all into practice. Maybe *too* successfully.

“Lori... If you don't mind...”

“Oh, I remember!” Mick said, overjoyed he could recall the urgent question. “Have you talked to Mr. Simmons lately?” He asked. “I know he said he was going to be working in San Diego for a little bit more but...”

“He's going to be there for a little while longer, I'm afraid,” Mr. Johnson said. “You're stuck with boring old me for now.”

“Oh, no, Mr. Johnson! I didn't mean it that way! I love working for you! You're the bestest boss a girl could hope to have! It's just that...”

“I'm just kidding, Lori. Now back to your desk. I have to get these reports finished up.”

“Okay, Mr. Johnson,” Mick said, again with a cheerful smile. He minced on out of the office, shaking that incredible butt of his, as duly noted by Mr. Johnson.

The rest of Lori's day went along much the way it usually did. He followed his schedule for watering the office plants, conducted his weekly check on the number of pens around the office so no one ran out, and ordered exactly the right flower arrangements in Mr. Johnson's name for the upcoming employee birthdays.

That was in between freshening his lipstick, touching up the polish of his long nails and powdering his nose. Truly, a full day at the office for Mick, or as he thought of himself, Ms. Lori Chandler.



“Card, Miss?” the bartender asked Mick.

“Oh, sure!” Mick replied, fishing a license from his purse. He had just gotten it, thanks to having Lori Chandler's birth certificate in his possession, something he found while unpacking.

It read “Lorraine M. Chandler,” and had his new address. They had given him the option of an “X” for a non-binary gender declaration, but was proud to have a nice big “F” there instead. With a physician's letter, it was perfectly legal in

Virginia. It wouldn't be too long until it wasn't just a formality, either, he reminded himself. Maybe another year or so.

"Thank you," the bartender replied, then handing over the two mimosas Mick had ordered.

Mick felt complimented that he still looked young enough to get carded, as Lori Chandler was 28. He would have felt even more complimented had he remembered that he was in fact a 34 year old man.

Back at his table, Mick gave one of the drinks to Irene from work, as the two were enjoying their usual Friday cocktails at Chili's. "I don't think Julie is gonna show," Irene said, checking her watch.

"Her loss," Mick said with a shrug.

"To the weekend," Irene said holding up her glass.

Mick clinked his glass with hers. "The weekend," he said.

He didn't have any real plans. Since he'd already unpacked and arranged everything the way he liked it, it was going to be a quiet time, maybe with one of the many romance novels he'd found in Lori's things. A cup of tea or a glass of wine and curling up in the nice handmade quilt Lori's mom had sent as a housewarming present. He'd found her email in Lori's papers and sent back a nice thank-you message to "Mom."

Sunday, though, he was thinking that maybe he should take up those nice people at the clothing store and just drop by the church for services. He made promises every time he shopped there, and was feeling vey guilty about it. Mick was not religious, in fact most of his life had been spent advocating devil worship and reckless depravity, but without those memories, church had its appeal.

"Ladies," said a man who had walked up to Irene and Mick's table. He was wearing a suit, without the jacket. "You're not here alone tonight, are you?"

Irene and Mick exchanged a glance of their heavily mascara-lined eyes and didn't speak a word. They didn't need to. They were two single women out for a good time.

"Actually, we are," Irene said.

"My name is Todd and my buddy Josh is also alone tonight. Do you mind if we join you?"

"Is Josh half as good looking as you, Todd?" Mick asked. "If so, come on over. There's plenty of room."

They for chatted for a while, ordered a second round of drinks and some appetizers. Josh and Todd were in sales at Harwell Dynamics, a defense depart-

ment sub-contractor, and had a few boring but mercifully short stories about their jobs. Irene and Mick let them take over paying for the food and drinks. Once the after-work crowd had thinned out a bit, and the pool tables were available, they paired up for a game.

“You want to shoot it like this,” Josh said, as he leaned over and spooned Mick, taking over the process of making the pool shot he had lined up. “A nice, smooth motion. Take your time getting it right.”

Mick could feel the boner in Josh’s pants and intentionally backed into him to give him a thrill. Honestly, it was a thrill for Mick, too. Having that effect on a handsome young man was rewarding in a way he had never felt before.

He knew men looked at him as a piece of meat on the rack at the butcher’s shop, but it was another thing to actually feel the effect he had on a cute guy.

Mick made the shot with a loud strike and dropped the ball in the pocket confidently. This was not Mick’s first time shooting pool in a bar.

“You’re full of surprises,” Josh said as Mick stood straight again.

“I’m just like any other girl,” Mick replied with flush cheeks.

They were standing close together, facing each other. Mick flicked the butt end of the cue at Josh’s crotch, but stopped it just short, causing the man to flinch. Mick then handed him the cue. “Your turn.”

At the end of the evening, Mick had to cut the flirting short, knowing he was not capable of taking the cute young man for the full ride, and it would have been cruel to keep leading him on. After all, Josh was handsome, but he was no Mr. Johnson.

“You sure?” Josh asked when Mick said he had to leave. “We can take this to my place. It’s got a great view of the city and... Complete privacy.”

It was hard to say no to Josh’s dimples, but Mick had little choice. “You have no idea how much I’d like to explore all you have to offer, Josh...” Mick sighed a very tired and feminine sigh. “But I’m just not feeling up to the task.”

“Maybe you should let me be the judge of that.”

“I already know what the verdict would be,” Mick kissed him on the cheek. “Another time.”

With that, he headed to the parking lot for Irene to drive him home.

“Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh!” Mick said, as he got in with Irene. He was practically about ready to burst.

“I can’t believe you did that!” Irene said, just as excited. “I would have jumped his bones.”

“Oh my gosh, oh my gosh,” Mick continued, “He was sooooo cute!”

“Girl, you got some explaining to do! That boy was a total dream!”

“I’ll explain it to you one day, Irene...” Mick said with regret. In his head he felt like he wanted to rip his genitals out by the root. “One day.”



“Hi girls!” Mick sang out as walked into the salon.

“Hi Lori!” a chorus of voices called back. They all knew their favorite customer by now. When Mick had first come to the salon for his hair removal treatments, it was just the first of what would be twice-a-week visits from then on.

“Hi Mavis, hi Janey, hi Sasha!” Mick said as he passed by the employees. He knew them all by heart. “How did Kevin do on his driving test?” Mick asked Flora, the woman who handled the hair removal. Mick didn’t see her as often these days, as he had long since completed that treatment.

“He passed! Would you believe it?”

“Oh, that’s so great! Now he can pick up Cindy from soccer practice!”

“And you better believe he will!”

Mick’s heels clicked to a stop at the third station where Kira worked, who had become his stylist of choice. She really knew her business. Kira had the best stories too, as she handled all the local strippers and exotic dancers in the local area and had some wild tales.



“How’s my little office girl?” Kira sang as she readied the cover for her client.

“Super great!” Mick chirped. “How’s business n’ stuff?”

“Just keeping my head above water,” Kira answered as Mick was in the chair and the cape tied around his neck. “So what do you feel like today, Lori?”

“You know, my boss said...”

“Do you do everything your boss tells you to do, Lori?”

“Of course I do! That’s my job!”

“All right, what does he want you to do now?”

“Well, he was saying that my smile would so much better if... maybe I tried some lip and cheek fillers?”

“You know, I’ve been telling you that for weeks now, girl.”

“I know, but... It’s different when Mr. Johnson says it.”

“Anything else?”

“Maybe... Um... And I want your honest opinion... Maybe try going brunette?” Mick was a little nervous about the idea. “I mean, it’s not that big a change, is it?”

“Lori, I’m not going to lie. Going brunette is more of a life choice than it is a color choice.”

“I just want to look like a secretary,” Mick said. “Not like an executive. Blond is... Too bold. Brown suits me. And do a cute short cut. Something neat and tidy.”

“If you say so.”

“Don’t try to talk me out of it!” Mick said. “Do it before I chicken out!”

“The customer’s always right,” Kira said. “This is gonna take some time and I have chemicals I’ll need to mix, so I hope you don’t have anywhere to go. Did you just come from church?”

“How can you tell?”

“Well, it’s Sunday and you only wear knee-length skirts when you’ve been to church.”

“Guilty!” Mick said.

“You’ve been a regular there, haven’t you? It’s been every Sunday lately.”

“Well, I guess so. It’s fun. I help in Sunday School now. You ought to try it.”

“Honey, with the life I’ve led, if I get within five hundred feet of a church, I’ll burst into flames.”

“Oh, Kira. I’m sure half the stories you tell are... Exaggerated.”

“If only that were the case, sweetie. Now lie back and take it easy. The less you breathe of this stuff the better.”

“You’re the pro,” Mick said, his smile betraying his expectations to see the final product.

About ten minutes into the process, and after three reminders not to talk, a woman in a white coat came over. It was Rita, a registered nurse who did the fillers and piercings.

“Cheeks and lips, right?” Rita asked. “Blink twice if no.”

Mick just smiled back, and Rita proceeded with the injections. She did two in each cheek, then two in the upper and then lower lips. Mick got a wipe-down of alcohol, and a pat on the shoulder.

“Let me know if there’s any pain,” Rita said before leaving.

During this entire time, Kira had continued on her hair work, and the fumes were getting stronger and stronger. It was probably a combination of the injections weakening him for a few moments and the sharp jolt of ammonia in his nose, but Mick’s head involuntarily jerked back, hitting the headrest with a crack.

With stars in his eyes, Mick was feeling a bit loopy. He hadn’t felt this out of sorts since he’d had that nasty roach backstage in Edmonton. That was back on the *Dinner with the Devil* tour in 2017, and...

Mick could remember the tour. He was in a band. It’s name was DëthWÿsh. His name was Mick. It was slowly coming back to... Well, no it was all back. He could remember everything.

All of Mick Van Helsten came back like a drop into the deep end of a bottomless pool. In just an instant, he was aware of all of his own life, and recalled all of what he had been doing for the past three months.

He felt his seat start to jostle, and then the back of the chair was put upright again. In the same instant, the cape was whipped off of Mick. “Here’s the new you!” Kira said, showing her work to her client.

In the big shiny mirror in front of him, Mick now saw himself, with sheared freshly dyed lustrous brown hair, full cheeks, fat lips, a face fully made up, and wearing a pink dress shirt which exposed his breasts.

“Aaaaaaugh!” He yelled in a shockingly deep voice.

The entire salon went quiet, no one quite understanding what had happened.

“It’s not that bad,” Kira said. “Is it?”



It was not bad at all. Mick looked like a camera-ready movie star ready to make the world fall in love with her. That was not the issue. Every insane thing he'd done for the past three months hit him, as well as the things he'd done to his body. He'd never have a beard again. He had done some unspeakable

things regarding hair removal on his testicles. He'd had two silicone inserts put into his body and had plump, real-enough breasts hanging from his chest. He had his nipples surgically moved to make it look right.

He'd been taking female hormones for the past three months, and his libido had vanished. His penis was shrinking, now no bigger than a Vienna sausage. He also remembered that he had been delighted with both developments.

Mick had yet more silicone pads surgically inserted into his butt and hips. He remembered being so proud of his huge ass.

He had a driver's license with his face and Lori Chandler's name. He was living in her apartment. He was working her job. He had sent chocolates to her mom for mother's day.

What the hell had he done?

"Say something, sweetheart," Kira said.

"It's... It's... really nice," Mick said in a very wheezy voice. He felt the need to not create a scene and just get somewhere where he could try to think and figure this out. He just needed to be out of here as soon as possible.

Kira looked very concerned. "Honey, do you need a doctor? You don't look so well."

"No... I'll be fine..."



"We'll be at the ER in two minutes, ma'am," the ambulance driver said.

"Two minutes," the EMT perched by his side repeated to him.

"Thanks," Mick replied. He had been doing okay for a minute or two after Kira had accidentally awoken his memories, then he remembered the snip he'd had done that eliminated his testosterone production, and that he would never be able to have kids. That was when he started to hyperventilate. Then came the panicked screaming and trying to claw his own skin off.

Now he was strapped to a gurney and unable to budge. Mick felt surprisingly relaxed at the moment, in the back of the speeding ambulance, but that was likely because of the drugs.

Even Mick had to admit it was for the best. He had no idea what he was going to do when he had control of himself again.

He had truly, irreparably, catastrophically screwed up this time. He'd been on benders before and woken up in an unfamiliar room with insane people not

remembering anything from the last two days, but this was on another level entirely. He had stolen someone else's life and adopted a whole new way of thinking. He had actually *been* someone else for three entire months.

Worse yet, he was still that person. He was still his version of Lori, and now he was Mick as well. Oddly, Mick didn't feel any real, true conflict between the two.

What he did feel was the most intense sense of humiliation any human might have ever felt. He'd been parading around as a woman, acting flamboyantly feminine, throwing himself at men, reveling in his disguise and falling asleep at night dreaming of becoming even more lady-like. With every fiber of his being, he had been wishing to become more of a woman.

"Do you know where you are?" the doctor asked as Mick had been put into an exam room.

"Somewhere below hell," Mick replied.

"More specifically," the doctor asked.

"Alexandria, Virginia."

"That checks. Name?"

"John Doe." A need to stay out of the tabloids had trained him to never give his real name when in custody.

Still strapped down, the doctor gave Mick the briefest of examinations, and one thing was very obvious to his trained medical eye. "You're in transition?"

"No," Mick said.

"You've... Finished transitioning?"

"Fuck no," Mick said.

"All right, then." The doctor gave up pursuing that line of questioning. "I'm going to give you a sedative and that'll knock you out for a little while."

"Can you make it fucking permanent?"



"I can't feel my eyes," Lori said, her head spinning. "But I can taste light."

"Baby, that's how you know it's really kickin' in." Lars handed her another tab to lick.

"The sky is so green right now."

"We're on a bus."

“You are. I’m... In a balloon? Or am I the balloon?” Lori’s eyes were wide open, as wide as maybe she’d ever gotten them. Under the influence of LSD, her senses were going haywire and she couldn’t have been more into it. “No, wait. I’m in a car. A car with octopus tentacles. In space.” Her head was slowly waving around looking every which way, but it was clear she wasn’t really seeing anything.

“Are you wearing Mick’s clothes?”

“We’re about the same size,” Lori said. She was in a red spandex leotard with silver sequins on the chest, one of Mick’s standard stage outfits. She had been on the tour bus for over three months now, so a change of clothes was very necessary, even if it was a costume. “So craaaazy...”

Lori had accepted the first dose of LSD under false pretenses, as Lars was an old hand at getting girls drugged up. “It tastes like chocolate,” he had claimed. Once she was under the influence, Lars had told her, “you’re going on a trip, baby,” as she started to feel the effects. In a matter of seconds, she was looking at a bulldog’s face, but he was pink and the ground had started to evaporate in glowing threads.

“Another one,” Lori had requested, as it started to wear off.

That was a month ago. Now Lori had experimented with coke, weed, pain killers and ecstasy, but she had come back to LSD as she was quite fond of its effects.

“Have you ever really though about wood?” Lori asked. “I mean, *really* thought about it? I mean, it’s alive.”

“Yeah,” Lars agreed. “Freaky, baby. You know, you got amaaaazing eyes. I think you’re the cutest tranny I ever saw.”

“Woman, Lars. Transgender woman. Tranny is...” Lori paused as she had to dodge and get out of the way of a space whale. “Offensive and a slur.”

“Really?” Lars said, laughing. “Since when?”

“The nineties.”

“And what year is this?”

“2021.”

“Wild. Wild.” Lars chuckled again. “Well, I don’t have any problem calling you a woman, Lori.” He took a deep breath. “No problem at all. The spandex helps.”



The heavyset guard was standing by the phone with his arms crossed, trying to look as intimidating as he possibly could. It's not easy for a fat guy to look intimidating, but this man was doing his level best.

Mick, as a rock n' roll star who frequented some of the most shady back-alley clubs and bars than most, had little reason to be concerned, except that he literally had an arm tied behind his back and his legs strapped down. He was still in restraints.

"You get 30 seconds," the guard said.

"Yeah," Mick replied. He used his one free arm to dial the phone and waited for someone to pick up.

Click, the phone line went.

"Lars?" Mick asked. "Is that you Lars? It's me!"

"No, silly. This is Lori Chandler," said the feminine voice on the other end. "Who is this?"

Of all the people he could have heard on the other end of the line, Lori Chandler was the last he'd have ever expected. Given a billion guesses as to who would have answered that call, he would have been wrong a billion times. It was also the one person that terrified him the most. He wanted to apologize, he wanted to ask her for forgiveness, but he couldn't get his voice to make even a single noise.

"Gimme that back, bitch," Mick could hear Lars say in the background.

"Stop it!" Lori said, giggling. "You're gonna have to take it from me!"

How in the ever loving fuck Lori Chandler had come into contact with Lars, he couldn't begin to contemplate. Did she know? Mick had to think she knew. She had to know what he had done.

"Who is this?" Lori asked Mick, still giggling. "No, you can't have it!" She teasingly said to Lars.

"I'm gonna get that phone from you, baby!" Lars could be heard. "You come back to bed!"

Mick hung up. Bed? Were Lars and Lori...? He couldn't find a single neuron in his mind to help him compute what this meant.

Back on the tour bus, Lori handed Lars his phone back. "They hung up," she said with a pout.

"Good. I don't want us to be disturbed," Lars said as he began to knead Lori's budding breasts. "It's just you and me."

Lori swooned and let herself be ravaged by the old man, ready more than ever to give herself over to someone who didn't care about her useless little door knocker. Lars wasn't a great guy, but at least he had an open mind. For her first time, she was just a woman and Lars was just a man. Besides them, nothing in the world mattered.

...Except for the three teenage girl groupies sitting around eating snacks and watching TV as Lori and Lars fucked.

In the War Memorial Hospital of Alexandria, Virginia, however, a clearly shell-shocked Mick was still trying to deal with this impossible reality, when he realized his thirty seconds were almost up.

He did the first thing that came to mind. "Hello, Mr. Johnson?" He said when the phone was answered. He used his Lori voice. "This is... Lori. Sorry to bother you at home. I need your help again."



Having an upstanding citizen like Rod Johnson, Product Marketing Manager for PolyCon Corp went a long way to getting Mick out of the hospital. Mick hadn't really broken any laws or anything, but they didn't want to release him until they figured out why he had gone crazy in the salon. Mr. Johnson, however, had little trouble convincing them that his secretary was no threat to herself or the community, and was "as docile as they come."

A hospital orderly had helped Mick do his face, comb his newly brown hair and get dressed, restoring most of his usual standard of beauty as Lori Chandler.

"I'm... Really sorry... Mr. Johnson..." Mick said in his best female voice. He felt ridiculous, talking to this empty suit and showing him respect, as if he was his employee. He hated having to step back into the literal shoes of Lori Chandler, but there didn't seem to be any way out for him right now. Returning to acting and dressing like Mick Van Helsten would raise so many questions, and he had nowhere to go.

"You know I was concerned when you missed work today," Mr. Johnson said as he drove with Mick in the passenger seat.

"I'm sorry, I had a very bad night." He had to really concentrate to think how Lori would speak and act. He had already changed his posture five times, trying to stand like he thought Lori would stand. He had swallowed the word "fuck" several times trying to keep himself from using his usual spicy sentence en-

hancers. He was doing a passable job of pretending to be Lori, but it was exhausting to keep it all up.

“This is a very serious matter. I’ll need you to write up a report so I can put it in your employee file,” Mr. Johnson said.

“Oh, right,” Mick said, having completely written off ever going to the office again. “Yes.”

“It was absolute haywire at the office today, and I am holding you personally responsible, Miss Chandler.”

“Okay.”

“Next time you feel like going on a bender, you need to think of your responsibilities first. Your responsibility to your job, to your co-workers, your company and to me. Not even a phone call.”

“Yes... Yes... Sir.” Mick felt a little twinge. A twinge he recognized as something he felt in the presence of Mr Johnson. A twinge that was stronger when he was being put in his place. A twinge that felt familiar and comfortable.

There it was, Mick thought to himself. He was drifting back, and he couldn’t let it happen, even if he did feel Lori’s life pulling on him like the most powerful magnet in the universe.

“I’m not Lori,” Mick said.

“Well you aren’t acting like Lori, that’s for certain, Miss Chandler. And that hair color of yours makes you look completely different.”

“No, I mean... Lori Chandler is someone else. I’m not that person. That *actual* person.”

“We’re at your apartment building. I’ll walk you to your door.”

“You’re not listening to me.”

“You aren’t acting very rationally. When you act rationally, I’ll talk to rationally to a rational person.”

They rode up the elevator to Lori’s apartment, silently. Mick wasn’t sure what he expected, but he had to be honest with Mr. Johnson. He couldn’t let this mistake go on like this.

The door opened and they stepped out, Mick remembering to trail Mr. Johnson like he usually did. “I’m not trying to... I don’t know what I’m trying to do, really. But I’m not Lori Chandler. Legally. She’s somewhere...”

“Your door is open,” Mr. Johnson said, interrupting Mick.

Mick looked for himself. The door to Lori's apartment was wide open. He hadn't been here in over 24 hours and his memories were a little jumbled right now, but was very sure he had closed the door, at least.

Mick leapt forward, but Mr. Johnson blocked him with his arm. "They might still be here. Don't go in. I'll check."

The tall man in the sharp business suit entered the apartment, ready for trouble. After a minute of silent tension, he came back to the doorway.

"There's no one here. They sure did a number on your place, though."

Inside, Mick found the entire apartment upended. The chairs were turned over, the kitchen cabinets open and all the pots and pans on the floor, the plates shattered, the closets open and the clothes strewn about, the drawers in every chest removed with the contents dumped out and the bed mattress against the wall and slit open.

Wandering throughout the mess, Mick was emotionless. He was already so distraught, he couldn't be pushed any farther. His real life and fake Lori's fake life were a shambles.

"Shit," Mick said.

"Lori?" Mr. Johnson said shocked at the word he had heard coming from his demure secretary.

"Sorry," Mick apologized.

The apartment was half full of Lori's things, but half full of the things he had bought as Lori. It was a part of him. A part he held close and treasured. Now it was ruined.

"What did they take?" Mr. Johnson asked.

Mick looked around, but nothing was missing. The TV was there, the laptop was there, Lori's jewelry was dumped out of its box, but everything was still there. Whoever had done this was not there to steal, they were looking for something.

"Forget I asked that," Mr. Johnson said. "We can deal with that later. You're in no condition to cope with this tonight. You can call the police when you feel up to it and you'll spend the night at my house." He headed for the door. "Get what you need to overnight, and we'll head out ASAP. They might come back if they didn't find what they want."



Rod Johnson's house was beyond Mick's expectations. He expected a scrappy bachelor pad or a barren small house. Instead she found a suburban mansion, with a very homey decor. The carpet was a polyester coral color with turquoise walls and brass accents. There was a cuckoo clock on the wall, every room had a country ceiling fan and the furniture had a traditional look with deep brown wood stains with antique details. The maroon velvet couch with floral pattern throw pillows especially caught Mick's eye.

It felt like a hotel room from 1986 — and it was amazing. It felt comfy, cozy and clean. Everything about it felt like a real home. Mick could physically feel the remnants of Lori inside of him falling in love with the place. Lori Chandler would have been in heaven. However, he was not Lori Chandler anymore.

Mr. Johnson took the overnight bag Mick had been carrying from his hands. "I have a guest room upstairs for when my mother visits. You can stay in there." He led him up the carpeted stairs. The pictures on the walls were framed with embroidery, and looked to be of Mr. Johnson when he was in college. There was a photo of him with the Young Republicans, a photo of him with the Future Business Leaders of America, and another with the Hunting & Fishing Club.

"What a tool," Mick mumbled under his breath.

"Pardon?"

"Just clearing my throat," Mick replied.

A shiver went up Mick's spine as he saw his room for the night. The bed had double mattresses, tons of pillows, and an adorable country pattern bedding set with white lace edges. There was a bible passage on the wall and a framed "Home Sweet Home" cross stitch.

"My mother put it together," Mr. Johnson said. "She did the rest of the house, too." That explained a lot to Mick. This decor was not from the mind that Mick had grown to know so well. This place looked like a museum to folksy tasteless junk. Rod left the room, saying, "Have a nice sleep, Lori."

"I'm not Lori," was something Mick didn't say. He had to keep this up for another day, at the least. There was no way he was going to involve the police — both because of his hatred of the police and the sense that he had no way of successfully explaining his actions over the past three months. The publicity alone this would generate would be explosive when it went public.

"Rock Star Masquerades as Female Secretary," he imagined, written on the top of every news site.

The plan he had in his mind was to just go through with pretending to be Lori for another day, at least until he had an idea what to do. He had a lot of ques-

tions as to why Lori and Lars had apparently hooked up — and for God’s sake, how? Yet that was secondary to finding a way to slip away and disappear.

He’d need money, he’d need some kind of ID and he’d need, just as a courtesy, to leave Lori some kind of message to explain and apologize for what he had done. Then maybe, after he’d had time to recover from the feminization he’d done to himself, he’d re-emerge as Mick Van Helsten, guitar wizard. It was probably time to start that solo career he’d always wanted.

In leaving Lori’s place, he’d only gathered clothes and Lori’s overnight kit, but nothing to sleep in. He opened a drawer and was rewarded with true folksy horror. A granny nightgown. Doily edges, a floral pattern, and a hem that went practically to the floor. No doubt it was Mr. Johnson’s mother’s. Once he was undressed, and out of clothes that smelled awful after wearing them for two days, he thrust on the nightgown and couldn’t decide if he should laugh or cry.



“You’re up,” Mr. Johnson said, the next morning. Mick almost jumped out of his slippers, he was so shocked to have someone else in the room. He had been alone for so long.

Mr. Johnson was already dressed in his suit and tie, minus the jacket, which he draped over a chair. “I see you found my mother’s nightgown.”

“I haven’t slept, actually,” Mick explained. It was 7:15, and Mick was at the stove. “Thought I’d get a start on breakfast.”

“I don’t have a lot of food here...”

“So I ordered grocery delivery,” Mick answered before being asked. “They start at 6:00 AM.”

Mr. Johnson then looked at the kitchen table which had eight waffles, a salad bowl full of scrambled eggs, 18 strips of bacon, 12 sausages, a pot of coffee, a carafe of orange juice, a stick of butter and jars of grape, strawberry and peach jam.

“I didn’t know you could cook,” Mr. Johnson said.

When you have a tour bus full of comatose rockers and groupies trapped on a vehicle that isn’t stopping for eight hours, you figure out how to get stuff from the fridge and make it into food yourself. It was just a matter of survival. “My mother taught me,” Mick said, figuring it was the best explanation. “I hope you’re hungry.”

“This is a lot of food,” Mr. Johnson said in his usual matter-of-fact manner. “I will not be able to eat it all.”

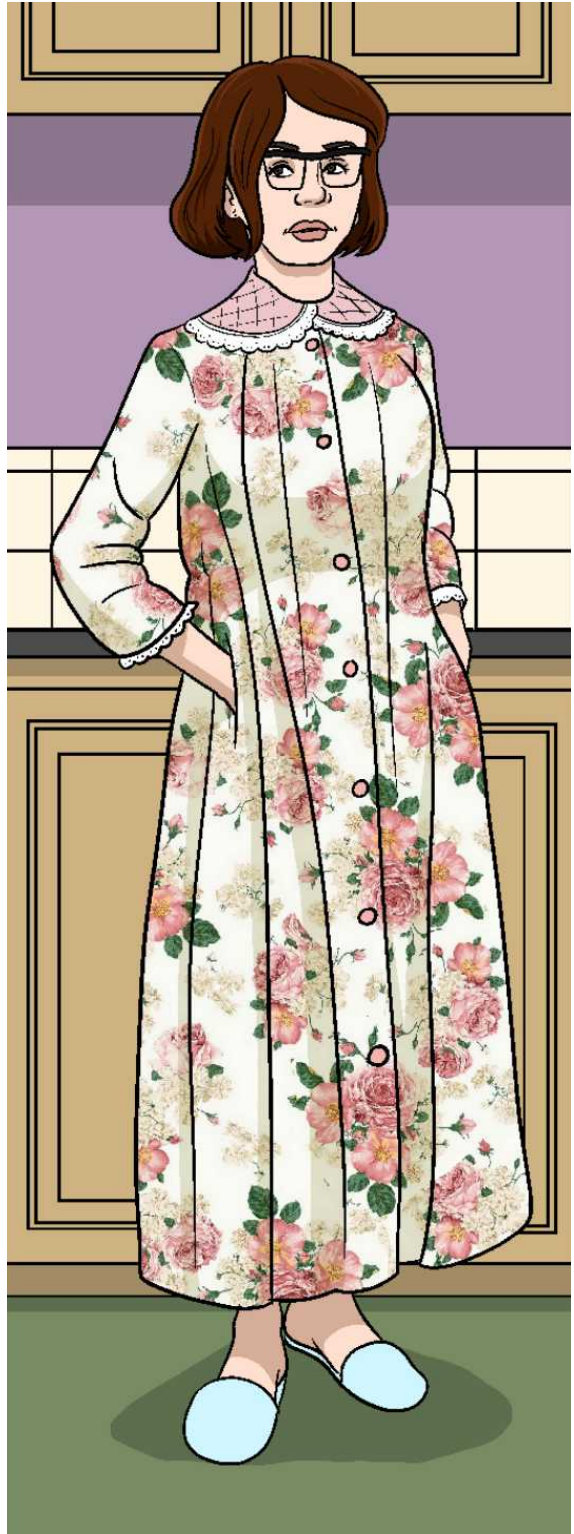
Mick looked at the piles of meat and eggs, as if for the first time. “I... Really needed something to keep me busy. I’m sorry.”

Mr. Johnson looked at the food, then at Mick, then at the food again. “I suppose it’s understandable.”

“Please have a seat,” Mick requested. In his quest to keep up appearances as Lori, he’d figured cooking Mr. Johnson breakfast was something she would definitely do. With all the weirdness shooting through his brain, there had been little hope of actually sleeping anyway.

He walked over to the table and began to pick out food for Mr. Johnson to eat, but was overwhelmed by his cologne. He had always noted Mr. Johnson’s questionable taste in cologne, but at full strength this early in the morning, mixed with the medicinal scent of his fresh shave, Mick found himself weak in the knees, but not in a good way. “I’ll be sure to save you the leftovers,” Mick said, despite the wooziness.

Mr. Johnson took one of



Mick's hands and held it. "Lori, I want you to know how much you've meant... to the office," he said. "Our productivity and morale have surpassed all our quarterly targets."

He didn't like where this was going, but Mick played along. "Oh, uh. Great. Do really mean that, Mr. Johnson?" Mick asked, as if he cared.

"I do. And even though things might be rough for you right now, I want you to know you have a lot of people who would miss your contribution to the team." All of the sudden, Mr. Johnson stood up. "Maybe it's the nightgown, maybe it's your new look, but you have never had me so... *incentivized*." He grabbed Mick by the shoulders.

"Sir!" Mick blurted, shocked at his timid boss's forwardness.

"I can't help myself, Miss Chandler," the executive said. "You've become an invaluable member of my staff. I don't think I'd want to face another workday without you." He seemed to be undergoing a tremendous mental strain, fighting a silent struggle within. "That's it. I've made my decision. I'm going to give you a raise."

"Oh, sir..." Mick said, relieved. He was worried there for a second. He knew that in his own way, Mr. Johnson had just given him the highest of praise, and tried to act as if Lori was truly touched.



Dressed in another one of Mick's stage costumes, this time a black spandex body suit with military-style shoulder straps and a belt in silver sequins, Lori Chandler was draped across Lars's slumbering body, flipping though the channels on the satellite TV.

He wasn't exactly a prize or anything, but he was a man, he was Lori's first as a woman and he was famous. Rich, too. Not bad for a former army brat from San Diego, she thought.

"...When Betty brings home a pet monkey, she gets into hot water with Uncle Steve on the next crazy episode of Bitter Pills..."

Click.

"...Clarissa Molina agradece a Karol G por publicar foto en bikini y dejar sus imperfecciones al descubierto..."

Click.

"...Industrial espionage rumors against PolyCon Corp CEO Dick Thornheart threaten to send the stock market to a weekly low..."

Click.

“...Team 8 Investigations holds truth to power, fighting on your side to...”

“Hold up,” Lori said aloud. She turned back to that previous channel.

“...Universal Plastics has not made any public statement, but insiders believe that a security breach has leaked highly sensitive data regarding potentially dangerous advanced materials under development. Their largest competitor, PolyCon Corp would stand the most to gain, as many industry professionals believe that they have fallen behind in the race to create the next generation of materials for the defense department. In addition, the untimely murder of Jerry Kendrick has hampered PolyCon...”

Lori couldn't believe what she was seeing. She knew these people. Mr. Kendrick had given her that nice trophy, after all.

“...Officials have kept their eye on the dark web for any sign of the data, if someone should attempt to sell the many gigabytes of data to the highest bidder...”

Data? Lori was picturing big rolls of paper blueprints, but she supposed that these days everything could be in digital files.

“...Enhanced security restrictions have been lifted, as the extra screening at airports, train and bus stations yielded no sign of the stolen data...”

Airports? Train stations? Bus stations? She remembered going through heavy security when she arrived in Alexandria, but was that the same thing? It was months and months ago. What could be so important that they had heavy security for several months?

A funny idea hit her. Maybe they were looking for her trophy.

She had been given those horrible bus tickets to move from San Diego, and no one would have suspected a secretary of smuggling... Something Mr. Kendrick gave her... By bus... And was going to work in the same building Mr. Thornheart worked in...

Then she thought it over more carefully. Maybe they really were looking for her trophy.

Oh God.

Had she been... Used? Had she been given that stolen data in the form of... an office trophy?

“Wake up,” Lori said, slapping Lars on the stomach. She slapped again harder, three more times. “Wake up, wake up, wake up!”



“You know, sometimes I get tired of the tour life,” Ace said, staring out the window of the speeding tour bus.

Stormy Summers, the tour manager, was trying to play her 304th game of solitaire of the week and didn’t want to be disturbed. “Then quit,” she said, snapping another card onto the table.

“It’s like my life had been going nowhere.”

“It hasn’t. You’re a roadie for a 3rd rate nostalgia rock band. Quit. Go home.”

“There are times,” Ace sighed, “it feels like I’ve seen every inch of every road in this country.”

Stormy deftly flipped the toothpick in her mouth. “You have. Your life is pointless.”

“It feels like just yesterday that I’ve seen that mountain there.”

“You’re delusional. Just like you thinking I give a shit.”

“Wait. I did see that mountain yesterday.” Ace sat up straight and looked around. “We’re going back the way we came.” He started to look around in the various rooms. “Where’s Lars?” He called out, “Lars! Hey Lars!” He yelled as loud as he could. “*Laaaaaars!*”

“Jesus fuck, what?” Lars said, emerging from the shower without a towel, the water still dripping off of him.

“Yeah, what?” Lori said, following behind him, just as wet and nude. Three months of tour bus living with a rock group had changed Lori somewhat. Her inhibitions had vanished, and she seemed to be far more sure of herself these days. It was getting to the point where one might not even recognize her.

“The bus is...” Ace had to look away for his own sanity, so he stared at a lamp on the wall and talked to it instead. “The bus is going back the way we came.”

“Yeah, we’re going back to the airport,” Lori explained.

“We are?” Lars asked Lori.

“Yes.”

“We’re going back to the airport, I guess,” Lars said.

“We’re going to miss the gig in Union City!”

“I cancelled it,” Lori said. “It wasn’t selling anyway.”

“Thanks, Yoko,” Ace said to Lori. He hadn’t liked the way they had become inseparable lately. “Lars, what the fuck?”

“Hey, don’t talk to her like that!” Lars said, angrily. “The little lady asked me nicely, so we’re going back to the airport... and then...” he turned to Lori. “And then?”

“We have to go to Alexandria,” Lori said. “I left behind something kinda valuable. Well, really really valuable. And some of the people I used to work for might kinda sorta get killed, maybe.”



“Dave, you old son of a gun, how are you. It’s been weeks.” Mr. Johnson was happy to hear from his old friend on the phone. It was morning in the office, and he had been reading the same report he’d read minutes ago, unable to focus.

“How the hell are you, Rod. Been a while, hasn’t it?” Dave Simmons replied. “Well, the good news is that I’ve finally wrapped up my work here, and I’ll be in Alexandria tomorrow. Finally ready to start the new job.”

“Excellent!” Rod said, happy to finally hear that he’d have his old buddy back in town. “Listen, I was meaning to call you on another matter.”

“It’s not the Hydroponics AI thing, is it?”

“No, no. It’s about Ms. Chandler.”

“Lori? What? You don’t want to give her up, I bet. I can understand why. Best little secretary I ever had. I hope you’re taking good care of her.”

“Yes, I uh... Well, on second thought, maybe I should wait to discuss this face to face.”

“I’ll be in the building tomorrow morning,” Dave said. “I’ll probably have meetings, but I’m sure we can connect.”

“Yes. Looking forward to it.” Rod Johnson hung up the phone. He had a lot to explain regarding Lori Chandler.



“At first, I wasn’t sure... But I’m quite partial to what you’ve done with your hair,” Mr. Johnson said to Mick. “It’s sensible,” he said, “not flashy and practical.”

They were back at Lori’s apartment, after work. Mr. Johnson and volunteered to help Mick clean up so he could sleep there again.

Mick pulled his long brown hair behind his ear. “Thank you,” he said, doing his best to look bashful and moved. This was the kind of sweet talk that made Mick sick, but Lori would have gone ga-ga for. If he still thought he was Lori, this sort of thing might make Mick never want to go back to being a rock n’ roller again.

Mick bent over to pick up a vase that had been knocked over and put it back upright. The funny thing was, he had almost convinced himself that this was his vase. That he had bought it. That he had chosen it. That he had paid for it. He hadn’t, though. He had no idea where it had come from because Lori had bought it.

Yet he had done this for most of the items in the apartment. He had invented stories in his mind for where he was when he, as Lori, had bought them. The fictional story for this particular vase was that it was something he had found in a small outdoor antique stand by the shore in San Diego, near the border. He liked it because of the colors. That why he bought it and brought it home.

It was almost too easy to invent these stories and convince himself that they were true. He half-believed them even now, while still remembering who he was. Mick felt like that at any given moment, he could just think the wrong thought and never recall anything about his life. He’d just mistakenly submit to being Lori Chandler.

“I’m not Lori,” Mick said to Mr. Johnson. “I’m a guitarist in a heavy metal band. I’ve been playing guitar since I was in high school.”

“I see,” Mr. Johnson said.

“I’m not even a woman. I’m a man. You see, Lars, the singer in our band — That’s Lars Strychnine, elected to the Rock n’ Roll Hall of Fame in 2012 — He’s got me under contract and...”

“Is this about this morning’s incident?” Mr. Johnson asked, apparently referring to the promise of a raise. “You don’t have to invent a cockamamie story, Ms. Chandler. I know it’s a big change and it might seem scary to your gentle temperament, but I meant what I said, and you don’t have to feign a mental issue to try and change my mind. I need you to retain some sense of professionalism even in the face of any challenge.”

“Really. I’m not lying.”

“Miss Chandler. Please. I’m a grown man.” He picked up some items from the floor. “We can either utilize our time as efficiently as we can, or we can engage in pointless fanciful fairy tales.”

Mick paused, wanting to convince him, but at the same time he didn’t have his heart in it. He sighed. “Yes, sir,” Mick said.

Mr. Johnson leaned in to pick up a long dress that had been tossed over a chair. “How come I never see you in something like this?”

“Well... Uh... You said that you liked short skirts and dresses, Sir.” The pig. Not that he didn’t like seeing women in tight, short skirts, but it was another thing to mandate it. The guy was a misogynist down to his core.

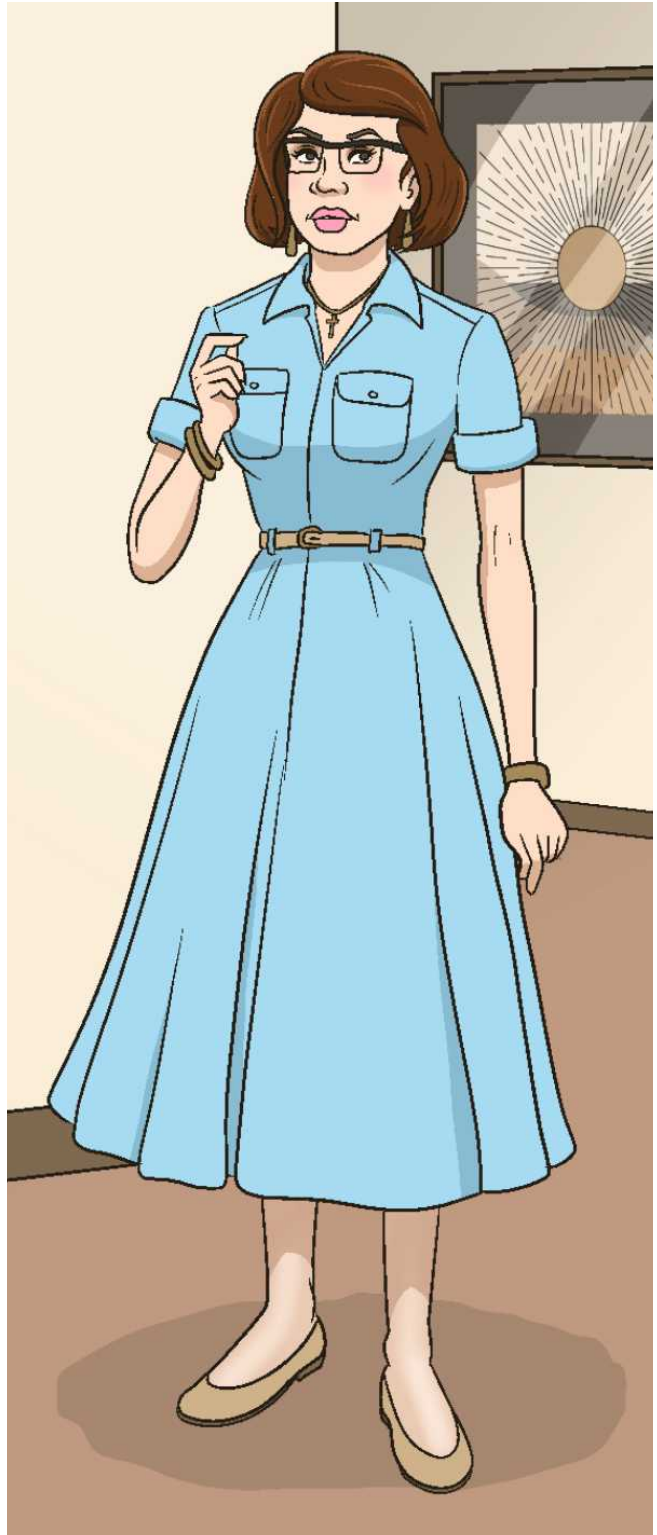
“That I did. But that’s for the office.” He handed it to Mick. “Would you mind putting it on for me?”

“N-n-now?” Mick stuttered, shocked at the audacity of the request.

“Why not?”

Mick took the dress. It was one of Lori’s old things, one which he had never actually worn. This was almost certainly his last night as Lori. It was his last chance to really dress up. He took it. “Okay,” he said. “I guess I’ll be back in a minute.”

While Mick was in the bedroom, Mr. Johnson



continued to tidy up, and by the time Mick emerged, he was practically done.

“My goodness,” the man said, clearly stunned. “You’re beautiful.”

Mick had changed into the light blue dress, a dress with a collar and long sleeves, pockets over the breasts, a built in belt, and with a hem that was about mid-shin. He’d added a pair of tan flats with knee-high stockings. A thin gold necklace and dangling gold earrings were added. He’d fluffed his hair out a little bit and adjusted his makeup to match the cool tones of the dress. He looked like a conservative housewife who had never left the safety of the suburbs and who’s biggest worry was picking the right scent of air freshener.

“Do you think so?” Mick asked. Truthfully, he was just as impressed as Mr. Johnson. Mick wore the domesticated look well, like he was born into it, and he knew it.

“Indeed I do. Give me a twirl.”

Mick reluctantly complied with a turn that billowed out the long skirt in a display that would have made Walt Disney cry.

“Lovely. Just lovely.” Mr. Johnson smiled ruefully. “I thank you for the indulgence, Miss Chandler.”

Balling up his angry sexist-punching fists, but keeping them by his side, Mick mustered up the appropriate response. “It’s my pleasure, Sir.”

“Please, you don’t need to be so formal after hours. ‘Mr. Johnson’ will do.”

“Yes, Mr. Johnson.” Mick felt it again. That twinge. That twinge he felt when he was told what to do and he obeyed. He was hoping he would never feel it again after he had regained his memory, but there it was, and it was stronger than ever.

“Lori,” Mr. Johnson said, after being silent for a few awkward moments.

“Yes, Mr. Johnson?”

“I hope you din’t think I’m being too forward but... I think we need to take this to the next level.”

“What are you suggesting, Mr. Johnson?”

“Lori, I’ve thought *long* and *hard* about this. Very hard. I think I’d like... I’d like to...” This was clearly hard for the man to say. He gather up his energy and gave it another shot. “In addition to the raise, I’d like to on-board you on as my full-time, permanent, confidential, traveling secretary.”

“Oh, Mr. Johnson!” Mick found his heart pounding. He couldn’t help himself. He wanted to tell this jackass where he could stick it, but there was still enough

of Lori inside of him to feel her deep desire to be needed and valued as a productive employee. He was nearly swooning. “Do you really mean it?”

“Yes. Yes I do.” He stood in front of Mick and grasped him by the shoulders. “It’s a lot of responsibility. Note-taking, typing, calendars, email sorting... And it would be on-call around the clock. You’d need to be there, whenever I needed you. I warn you, I am a demanding boss. We’d be practically joined at the hip. Do you think you can handle me?”

Mick gathered up all the mixed emotions inside of him, and kept it under wraps. He had to keep up his act at all costs. “I know I can, Mr. Johnson.” He paused. Lori Chandler, as Mr. Johnson knew her, would be no more soon. Mick would be in a motel somewhere watching TV and hiding under an assumed name by this time tomorrow. It didn’t matter what he said, he just had to keep this jerk from suspecting anything. “But I have to think about it.”

“I understand. This is big. Your life might never be the same.”

Then, shocking the both of them right out of their bodies for a second, the doorbell rang.

“Are you expecting anyone?” Mr. Johnson asked Mick.

“No,” Mick replied. “No one even knows I live here.”

Mr. Johnson motioned for Mick to be quiet, and then he turned out the lights. He got nearer the door, which started to make noise as the handle jiggled. It then popped open just a little bit, so whoever was outside could see in.

“Hee-ya!” Mr. Johnson said, utilizing the one class of Tae-kwon-do he had taken twenty years ago. He grabbed the man by the arm and rolled up on him, pinning that arm behind his back as he pressed his knee into the back of the intruder.

Mick actually screamed as it happened. The veteran rocker had seen men literally have their arms torn out of their sockets, and there was one time he’d seen a person lose his eye with an oyster fork in that incident in Bangkok, but Mick was unexpectedly terrified seeing the three seconds of violence.

“Get out of here!” Mr. Johnson yelled at him. “Go hide!” Mick grabbed his purse and quickly ran out the door, trotting down the hallway.

“Geez-o-pete, Rod,” the man on the floor said. “That’s a powerful hold you got there.”

“Dave?” Rod Simmons asked.

“The one and only,” Dave Simmons replied.

Rod immediately let go and removed his knee. “What in heckin’ heck are you doing here, Dave?”

“Got an earlier flight. Hadn’t heard from Ms. Chandler in a while, I wanted to check in with her.”

“Well you nearly gave me a heart attack.” He held out his hand. “Let me help you up.”

As Dave got to his feet, he brushed off his suit jacket and pants. “Remind me not to get on your bad side. Ho-lee cow.” He was flexing his arm to get the feeling back.

“I thought you were a prowler,” Rod said. “Miss Chandler had a break-in a day or two ago and we’ve been worried the thief may come back.”

“Oh, I see. Gotcha. Sounds like a real situation. Is Lori okay?”

“She’s fine. You know her, a little skittish, but she’s stronger than she looks.”

“Yeah, that’s Lori all right. What have the police said?”

“I don’t think Lori’s told the police yet. There may have been nothing stolen, and I don’t know if Lori really is strong enough to face questioning.”

“Fair enough,” Dave said. “So... Should I ask why you’re here, Rod?”

“Cleaning up,” Rod said. “And...”

“And...”

“Dave, I’m gonna be straight with you. I really think she and I make a great team.” Rod had never been more serious, and that was saying something, as Rod Johnson was always serious. “I’ve offered her a position in my office, and I think she’s inclined to take it.”

“Lori? I don’t know, Rod. She and I go way back. She wouldn’t just leave me in the lurch.”

“I think she just might. She’s the best member of the crew.”

“The whole reason she moved from Dan Diego was to work for me out here. She’s not the type to think for herself like that. She’s just too mild. She’s too tame.”

“We’ve been spending a lot of time together, Dave. I know her pretty well. She’s definitely going to give my proposal a lot of thought.”

“What are you saying, Rod?”

“I think she’d as good as mine, Dave. I know it’s not kosher. I know it betrays our friendship. I just don’t think I’ll ever reach the levels of productivity I’ve reached with Lori with anyone else.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have let me out of that arm lock, Rod.”

“I think it would be best if we just asked her,” Rod said.



“I think we should. Where did she go?”

Outside the apartment door, out of eyesight, Mick was pressed against the wall, overhearing the whole discussion. As soon as he heard them both wanting to find him, he dashed quietly to the stairs. He didn't need Dave Simmons blowing this for him right now.

He was just going to slip away tomorrow, without a word. No drama. This was 10,000 times more drama than he wanted, and he was not prepared. He hadn't put a lot of thought into this move, but he had to get away. Hopefully, with a little bit of thought and a bit more time, he'd find a way out of this.

Or not.



What Mick did was go shopping. It was the best way to calm his nerves. God help him, he had found that when he thought he was a woman, shopping just made him feel better, especially shopping for clothes.

After a bit of deliberation, he decided he needed a new outfit for his final day on the job. Nothing he had would suffice. Mick wanted one last killer look for his last day. It was vain, sure, but Mick had been masquerading as female for so long that he just couldn't give it up cold turkey. He wanted to go out with a bang.

So he was behind his desk at 9:00 am with a serene look in his made-up eyes. Hot pink five-inch spiked heels were nothing new to him, but matched with the dark black stockings and black miniskirt, he looked amazing. He added a pink blouse with the biggest, floppiest bow tie he could find. A small pink bolero jacket with black accent stripes rested on top of that.

The accents of gold jewelry were perfect, including the little gold dangling earrings he had become so fond of. He had worn his glasses, which really were *his* glasses now. He had worn them for so long, his eyes had adjusted and he needed them as much as the real Lori did.

Altogether, he was the prettiest little secretary in the building, and he knew it. He'd never get a chance to do this after today, so why not? He looked so professional and secretarial that it was a wonder no one had asked him to take dictation on the bus ride in.

His first order of business today was to re-do his nails to a nice pink color. In between a few phone calls, he also managed to tidy up Mr. Johnson's calendar for the rest of the week. He wondered who the new girl would be to take his place. She was going to inherit a sexist self-important blowhard of a boss, that was for sure.

Looking at his reflection in the easel mirror he kept stored in his desk, Mick wondered how long it would take, once he was off hormones, for his face to revert to what it once was. He'd never have his beard back, but that was no big loss and he hated shaving anyway, but how long until the filler wore off and the angular lines he used to have would manifest themselves once again. Would he be happy? Would he be sad? He honestly didn't know.

He also wondered if Mr. Johnson would notice that he'd worn a sexy new pair of underwear today. He had bought a pair with thick cuffs so it was sure to be seen through his tight skirt, with maximum visible panty lines. He wanted that prick to see what he was about to lose.

It wasn't solely his idea either. In what must have been one of the more opaque conversations he had with his boss, Mick had been encouraged to "think femininely" from the "skin out" by Mr. Johnson. "It was a vital part of office morale," he said, "that you embody femininity in every way, and always knowing you're feeling special under your office attire is paramount."

Even knowing how inappropriate the requirement was, how arrogant Mr. Johnson had been in making it, God help him, he felt like a million bucks today in his lacy semi-transparent panty and bra set. It was red, too, as if he was just begging someone to see it.

It was fun to show off for lusty men, he had to admit. It wasn't sensical, but he loved catching a glancing eye or an obvious stare that they didn't think he could see. A primitive part of his male brain had always figured that women were teasing men all the time, and now he knew. They were — and he approved of it, from both sides.

Mick turned on the hold music from the phone system to listen to. He wasn't going to miss that mindless, soft, meandering kind of music that didn't tax your brain much. It was kind of a metaphor for being Lori. He might have valued her mild, ordinary, low-ambition life at one time, but after living it, he knew better. He was looking forward to grabbing the first amp he could find, turning it up to 11 and blowing out people's eardrums with a mighty chord on an electric guitar. That was what he truly loved.

Despite his convictions, however, he had to wonder. Was there a part of him that liked being... Submissive? A part of him that craved a firm hand to guide him? A part of him that would always remember these months as Lori and... No. He was Mick Van Helsten, a man who could make a supermodel cum in her panties just by flashing a smoldering look and hitting a sustained C power chord. His time as a secretary would never cross his mind again, and he'd never look back after today.

Still, he had to wonder where Mr. Johnson was. He was an hour late, which wasn't unusual, as he frequently started his day with a meeting elsewhere, but it was odd for him not to call in.

Maybe there was still some unfinished business from the incident at the apartment last night. By the time Mick returned, the door was closed and both Mr. Simmons and Mr. Johnson were gone, and he had figured they had worked things out. Now he was starting to think that maybe they hadn't.

Until he heard from either of them, though, Mick started to file his nails and trim off the excess bits from the polish he'd just applied. Whenever he saw Mr. Johnson again, he wanted to look his best for him, so he would remember the sexy secretary that blew him off and ran away.



Some time later, Mick heard his desktop computer make a ‘ding’ noise, which meant new mail. It was from his boss, too, and he was grateful to have some communication from him. “FW: FW: URGENT: Emergency Marketing Meeting,” was the tile. “Report to facility B-13 ASAP. Failure to report will result in disciplinary action.”

He packed his beauty things back into his desk and then got up. He brought along a legal pad and a pen as he headed to the elevators.

“Hey, Lori! Committee meeting at 10:30 tomorrow morning,” Irene said as she passed Mick by.

“I... May be a little late, so you may want to start the meeting without me,” Mick said, knowingly. If he never saw that closed-minded shrew of a woman again, it would be too soon.

The lobby of PolyCon’s main building was echoing with the hollow clack of Mick’s heels as he headed for the side door. Every head turned his way — however the male ones were faster.

Mick’s path to Building B-13, according to the company map, was out this door and in the non-secure outer ring of facilities. As he walked, he hummed “The Girl from Ipanema,” the song that was playing on the phone as he left. Maybe he could do a metal cover of it when he recorded his solo record, he mused.

“Is that Lori?” Rod Johnson said as he travelled along one of the walkways. “I think it is.”

Mick was walking a few hundred feet away, headed to Building B-13, speeding along in the short steps his heels limited him to.

“Lori? That’s not my Lori,” Dave Simmons said.

“New haircut. She did her hair darker,” Rod explained.

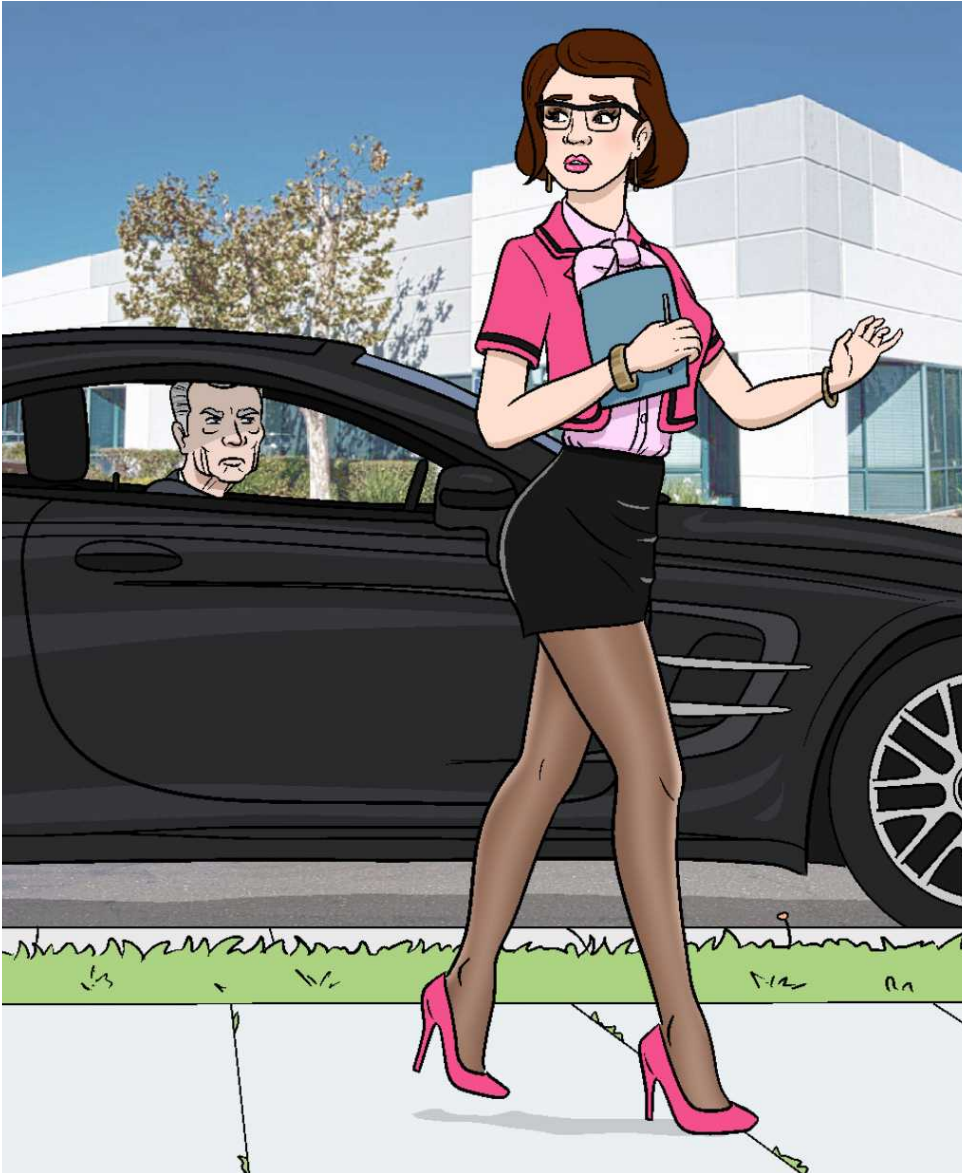
“Ah. Looks good on her. Where’s she going?”

“Probably on a break. You know, this would be a good opportunity to go talk to her.”

“If you have the time.”

“No worries,” Rod said. “We have a lot to discuss.”

“That we do. After you,” Dave said.



Meanwhile, Mick was having a dickens of a time finding Building B-13. There seemed to only be 12 buildings in the B complex. He minced this way and that, reading the signs, but there simply was no B-13.

“Miss Chandler,” said a voice from behind Mick. He’d heard it before, though he couldn’t place it.

“Yes?” Mick replied, looking in the direction of the voice. It was coming from the street, where a black sedan with tinted windows was parked. A man was

speaking from the car, his head showing through the open passenger side window.

“Why don’t you get in?” The man said.

“Who are you?” Mick asked.

“It really doesn’t matter,” he answered. He held up a pistol that was pointed right at Mick. “What matters is that I’m impatient. Get in.”

Down the street, Rod and Dave were looking on, wondering what they were looking at. “Why’s she getting in that car?” Dave Simmons asked.

“Maybe she’s... I have to assume she’s meeting a friend.” Rod replied.

“Lori?” Dave asked. “The Lori I knew didn’t have any friends outside the office.”

“Yes. My Lori doesn’t have any either.” He voice slowed down as his suspicions rose. “Do you recognize that car?”

“No.”

“That’s Dick’s car.”

“Dick Thornheart? How does he know Lori?”

They watched as the person they knew as Lori got very slowly into the car, with her hands up, and then clumsily closed the door behind her.

“He doesn’t.” Rod looked over to his friend. The sedan in front of them started to pull out.

“Are you sure that’s Thornheart’s car?” Mr. Simmons asked.

“I’ve been eyeing that car for years, Dave. The only question I have is why the license plates are missing.”

“I don’t like the looks of this.”

“It’s suspicious, I’ll give you that. What do you think we should do?”

A few parking spots over, Rod noticed a car pulling in. It was a company car, recognizable by the large PolyCon logo on the door. “You done with that?” He shouted at them man getting out.

“Yeah,” was the answer.

“Throw me the keys. Rod Johnson. Marketing. This is an emergency.”

Rod and Dave got in the car and took off quickly. They needed to try and keep the black sedan in sight, and after two blocks, spotted it taking a turn onto the expressway.

“Should we call the cops?” Dave asked.

Rod shook his head. “Are you prepared to be the executive who called the cops on their boss?”

“Yes. Point well taken.”

The car swerved around a limousine, and onto the expressway, hot in pursuit of the sedan.

Meanwhile, inside the limo, Lori Chandler was pointing out the back window. “That was Dave Simmons, I’m sure of it!” She said. “Follow that car, driver!”

“Hold on, hold on, baby,” Lars said, as he tried to grab Lori by the belt and pull her back down into the seat. “Who the fuck is Dave Simmons?”

“My old boss!” Lori said. “He’s gonna know more about this. Driver! The white car with the PolyCon logo! Don’t lose it!”

“I didn’t spend five hours in a plane to go on a car chase, babe.”

Lori immediately cradled Lars’s cock through his leather pants. “That’s funny, I can still feel your balls,” Lori said. “Even if you act like you don’t have any.”

Lars grunt-sighed. “Fine. Do what the lady says, driver.”

The long limo defied its awkward size and made a surprisingly deft turn to follow the PolyCon company car as best it could.

At a ridiculously long stop light, Dave slammed the dashboard with his fists. “Nuts!” he yelled. “I don’t see him. Darned light. Did we lose him?”

“I think we did,” Rod Johnson replied. “But I also think I know where he’s going.”

“How?”

“This is the same route I take to drop off Miss Chandler at her apartment.”

“Why would he go to her apartment?”

“No idea. But if Dick Thornheart is doing this, I want to know why.”

“Same,” Dave said. “No turning back now.”

By the time the DëthWÿsh limo pulled into the parking area for the apartment complex, Lori was suspiciously looking around at the arrangement of short two-story buildings. “I know this place. I know it.” She thought hard. “I’ve seen pictures... This was the apartment I rented. This is my place.” She reconsidered her tenses. “Was? Is?”

“That car’s just ahead, lady,” the driver said.

Lori scrambled on her knees to look up front and see for herself. “Stop the car!” She said. It was Mr. Simmons and someone she’d never seen before getting out. “Wait here, okay?”

“No, I’m going with you,” Lars said. “I’m bored.”



“Where are they?” Mr. Johnson asked, as he was hiding behind a corner. Dave was the only one with a clear view.

“Just walking along to the next building,” Mr. Simmons said. “Are you sure that’s Lori? Now that I can see her face... That’s not Lori.”

“She’s been through a lot of changes.”

“I suppose. But it’s definitely Thornheart. He’s pushing her along. I don’t think she’s here voluntarily. They just went inside the building.”

“What do you think we should do?” Mr. Johnson asked his long-time friend.

“The only reason he brought her here was to get something. Something that was in her apartment. Until he finds it, I don’t think Lori’s going to be in any trouble. That gives us some time.”

“There they are!” Lori said, pointing to the two men in business suits crouching behind a shrub. “Hey, Mr... I mean Dave. Hey Dave!”

Dave Simmons, confused and bewildered, looked at the person yelling in his direction. “Please be quiet,” he said. “Whoever you are.”

“It’s me! Lori!” she said, gesturing to herself. “Lori Chandler!”

“I hardly think so,” Dave Simmons said. “We just saw Lori being taken into that building, and you look and act nothing like Lori Chandler.”

Lori had long ditched her glasses, allowed one of the roadies to dye red streaks into her hair a week ago, and she was dressed in a royal blue leotard and denim jacket from Mick’s tour closet. She also had the largest, most dangerous looking pair of boots on, with metal spikes and a two-inch-thick sole threatening to do some real damage. “Yeah, great to see you too, boss.”

“Please be quiet!” Rod said.

Lori sneered at him. “And who the fuck are you?”

“Just... Quiet. For the love of God.”

“Anyone want a soda?” Lars said, arriving late and carrying some cans. “They had a machine back there.”

Lori took a can of RC. “Okay, someone explain to me why you guys are here outside my apartment?”



“She’s in the window!” Dave said, pointing to a large picture window on the second floor. It was Mick, with Thornheart right behind him, and he drew the curtains shut.

“Lori!” Rod said, seeing Mick.

“Lori?” Dave said, unsure.

“Lori,” Lori said, and added a click of her tongue. “So someone *is* pretending to be me,” she said, crossing her arms. “I thought that was a bunch of bullshit.”

“Now this is getting interesting,” Lars said. “I’m still confused as fuck, but what’s new?”



Inside Lori’s apartment, things were considerably more tense. Dick Thornheart had a gun pointed right at Mick, and did not appear terribly calm about it.

“I’ve had enough stalling, Miss Chandler. Where is my trophy?”

“I keep telling you, buddy,” Mick said, angrily. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

Thornheart swiped his pistol-holding hand across Mick's face, nearly shattering Mick's jaw in the process. He was thrown against the wall and then fell to the ground.

The CEO of PolyCon was not playing games. "If you want to have ten more seconds of precious life, Miss Chandler, you better come up with an answer. I tore apart this place and couldn't find any sign of my trophy! What have you done with it?"

"You think I'm just some stupid secretary you can push around?" Mick said, testing his jaw. "You don't know shit about who you're dealing with."

Thornheart shook his head. "Don't know. Don't care. Trophy."

"Well, I don't have any clue about any fuckin' trophy," Mick said. Having a gun nestled in your side for the last ten minutes had steeled the young man, and Mick had given up his Lori act.

Thornheart fired his gun into the couch. "Enough fucking around! Tell me where that goddamned trophy is, or the next bullet is taking out a leg!"

Mick didn't hear much of that, as the ear-shattering sound of the gunshot had caused both his ears to ring, but he got the general idea.

"Oh, yeah. *That* trophy," Mick said. He still had no idea what this person was talking about, but clearly the only way out of this was to tell the hot-headed lunatic with the gun what he wanted to hear. "It's over here..." Mick said, heading to the door.

Thornheart stopped him. "Stay there! Just point to it!"

Instead, being just close enough, Mick lunged for the gun. His five inch heels significantly hampered this, and he wound up just pushing Dick Thornheart's arm, and the gun went off.

The gun was pointed at the floor, and missed the both of them easily. However, knowing he had just fired two shots in an apartment building, Mr. Thornheart was very aware that he had run out of time. Someone would have called the police by now, and he needed to leave.

So he threw Mick off of him, which was pretty easy given how thin Mick was, and ran out the front door. As Mick righted himself, he could see Mr. Johnson run by the door, down the outer hallway, chasing after Thornheart.

The next thing he saw was Lars coming in the doorway. "Everyone alive in here?" He asked. Lars looked down on the floor where he saw a young woman helping herself up off the ground. Only this young woman had a very familiar face. "*Mick?*" He asked.

"Hello, Lars," Mick said, as he stood up. "Long time no see."



Down by the parking lot, Lori was trying to re-connect with her old boss. “No, it really is me,” Lori insisted. “I worked for you for over two years, don’t you remember?”

“Would you let go of me?” Mr. Simmons said, trying to escape Lori’s firm grasp of his arm. “I just wanted to apologize, Mr. Simmons!”

“Why would someone like you need to apologize to me?” Mr. Simmons said. “Unless it’s for corrupting the fine upstanding youth of our country?”

“It’s just a costume, Mr. Simmons! I’m still Lori Chandler!”

“I need to help my co-worker, miss. He might be in danger!” He finally got Lori to let go and me made a break for it.

“I’m Lori fucking Chandler!” Lori screamed after him, as he ran away.

“Are you, now?” Lori felt a barrel of a hot gun touch the back of her head. Mr. Thornheart had found a way out, and had found Lori. “Then maybe you can help me with a little problem I’m having with a lost trophy, Miss Chandler.”

“Put down the gun!” Mr. Johnson said, as he ran upon the scene.

“You back off, Johnson! I’ll kill this girl!” Thornheart said as he used Lori as a hostage. “I’m going to get out of here, and I’m taking Lori Chandler with me. Maybe she’ll have a better memory.”

He began to edge his way back to the apartment building, dragging Lori with him.

“She’s not an employee, Thornheart! The health care reimbursements costs will be astronomical! We’ll be filling out tax forms for years!”

Mr. Thornheart was not deterred. “I’ll risk it!”



“What... What the fuck did you do to yourself?” Lars said, horrified. To his eyes, Mick was completely changed in almost every way, but after living with him for years, day in and day out during the tours, he knew Mick’s face all too well, and recognized him immediately. “Jesus Christ, man. Someone really did a number on you.”

“Kind of a long story,” Mick said. “I needed to pretend I was... This person... And...”

“Forget that, this is awesome!” Lars said, uninterested in the explanation. “I got my guitarist back! DëthWÿsh rides again! Fuck yeah! You don’t know how bad it’s been. Most of our shows are down to half capacity, and we cancel most of ‘em anyway. They wanted to cancel the rest of the tour, but this fixes everything! The proud return of Mick Van Helsten!”



Mick was all too used to Lars spouting off.

“Lars...”

“Hey, we’re flyin’ back to the tour right after this. We’ll get you right back on the bus and slayin’ it for the crowds! Oh, and all the catered tour food you can eat!” He slapped Mick’s tummy. “We’ll fatten you right up again.”

“I’m not coming back, Lars,” Mick said.

“Geez! Listen to that voice of yours! I could have you singing the girl parts now! So here’s what we’ll do. We’ll put out some PR that says you got lost on a spiritual journey in... I don’t know... Katmandu... And then after soul-searching, you decided to come back to your one and only love: Rockin’ out with your cock out!”

“Lars...”

“You still have your cock, right?”

“You’re not listening to me, Lars. I’m not coming back.”

“Sure you are! I mean, what choice do you have, really? Like you’re any fuckin’ good at anything else?” He pointed out the door. “Hey, while they’re chasing this clown with the gun, we can just get the the fuck outta here. Just slip away. You got anything you need to grab?”

“I’m not going with you, Lars,” Mick said, again.

“Who decorated this place? My mother?”

“Lars!” Mick yelled. “Get out.”

“What are you talkin’ about? We’re a team! You and me! And you can’t play for anyone else without getting sued into oblivion. You know that.”

“I’m not playing for anyone, Lars. I’m not in your band.”

“It’s that Gary asshole from The Gryym Reapers, isn’t it! He made you an offer! He’s always trying to steal my best guys!”

“I’m not signing with anyone!”

“Like hell,” Lars said. “I’m gonna go back to the limo, you got me? I’m gonna wait for ten minutes. If you’re not there by then, I’m leaving without you, and you’ll have to fly your own way to the next show!”

“I’ll see you around, Lars.”

“That’s a promise! I’ll do it! I really will!”

“Be happy, Lars,” Mick said.



“So, you know about the trophy, do you?” Thornheart said as he pulled Lori back towards the apartment building he had just come from.

Lori was very aware she had said the wrong thing to the wrong person. “No. I don’t know anything about it!”

“Sure you don’t.” As he got to the building entrance, Mr. Thornheart punched the button to go up in the elevator. “We need to see if maybe you can find my trophy for me, don’t you think?”

When the doors opened, he threw Lori into the cab. “Get in!” He commanded. “Second floor,” he said, forcing Lori to choose the correct floor. She did that and kept a wary eye on Mr. Thornheart.

As the elevator climbed slowly up, the door slid open on the second floor and on the other side was none other than Mick Van Helsten.

“We were just coming to get you,” Mr. Thornheart said. “Get in.”

Mick put his hands up and walked sideways into the cab, staying as far away from the gun as he could. The doors closed and Mr. Thornheart yanked on the emergency stop.

“Now we won’t be disturbed,” he explained.



Coming from the apartment complex, Rod Johnson was jogging towards Thornheart's black sedan, assuming he was trying to drive away and escape. Instead, the car was still where he had left it.

Dave Simmons also arrived and looked around. "He's still here? Where would he go?"

"I have no idea," Rod said, catching his breath. The grounds were surrounded by tall fences so there was no way out except through the parking lot. The PolyCon car, minus functioning rear tires was still here, as was a limo.

"Hey!" A man called from the sun roof of the limo. "You guys see a dude in a skirt on your way out here?"

"Who is that?" Dave quietly asked Rod.

"I assume he's a pimp."



"Now," Mr. Thornheart said, with both Lori and Mick against the rear wall of the elevator cab, "between the two of you, one is the real Lori Chandler. I need to know what you have done with the small gold trophy you were given in San Diego." His hand was shaking again, as the intensity in his eyes betrayed more than a hint of madness.

I knew it was the fuckin' trophy, Lori thought to herself. *I knew it*. She looked over to the person leaning against the wall to her side.

"Are those my earrings?" She asked.

And for the very first time, Lori and Mick met. Mick was slow to come to grips with the situation, but after computing everything he'd been through, it was plainly obvious and he suddenly became very aware that he was sharing a firing squad wall with the real Lori Chandler.

"Don't you think you better just give him the stupid trophy?" Lori asked.

"What trophy?"

"The San Diego Office MVP trophy. That dumb thing."

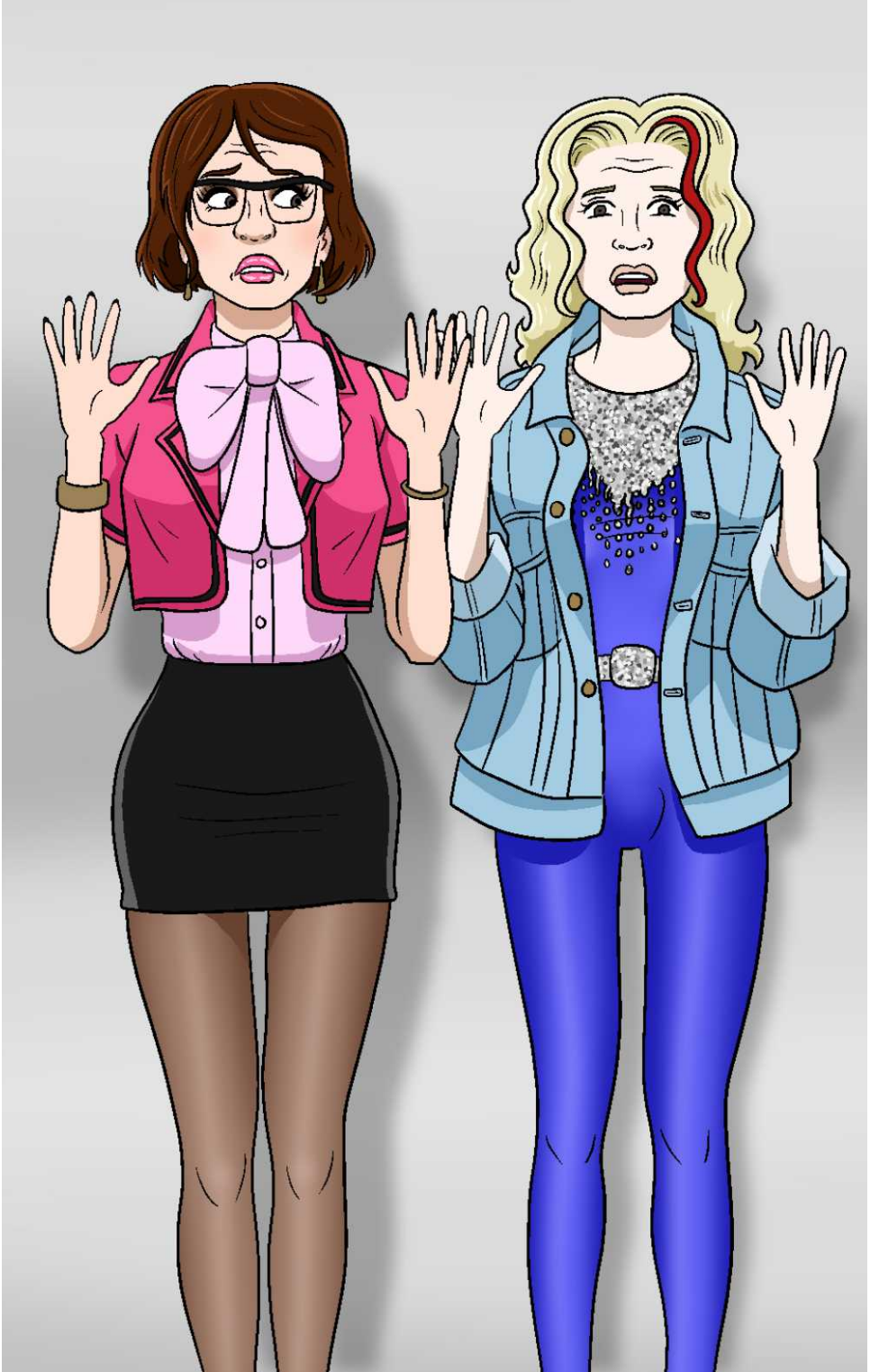
"I don't... *That* trophy? I haven't seen it for months! Ever since I unpacked."

"You unpacked my stuff?"

"I didn't know it was yours! I thought it was mine!"

"How the fuck do you make a mistake like that?"

"I... I... I had a memory problem recently... I don't clearly remember everything I've been doing... or who I was... over the past three months."



Lori rolled her eyes. “You’re not seriously going to claim amnesia, are you?”

“But... That’s what happened.”

“Stop your yapping!” Dick Thornheart said. “Unless...” He motioned to Lori. “Maybe a little bit of influence can leverage this situation.” He pointed the gun right at Lori, between the eyes. “I’m gonna give you one minute,” he said. “One minute to come up to tell me where that trophy is, missy, or I kill your friend here.”

“I’m not Lori Chambers!” Mick blurted. “I’ve never been Lori Chambers! It was all a misunderstanding!”

“Uh, look, I’m not averse to begging,” Lori said. “But I don’t want to die. I’m Lori Chambers. I’ve never seen this person before in my life!”

“I don’t care who is who. If someone doesn’t cough up the location of that trophy, I’m going to start shooting. Limb by limb. Then right in the brainpan!”

Mick was pleading. “But I don’t know where it is... I was Lori when... I did that... I can’t remember much from back then...” His appeal to Thornheart lost a lot in the translation. He knew this angry man with the gun didn’t care about his memory lapses.

“Fuckin’ do it,” Lori said to Mick. “Try to remember, okay? I won’t be angry.”

“I don’t want to... I don’t want to do it again. I... I want to be me. I don’t want to be Lori anymore.”

“Forty-five seconds!” Dick barked.

Lori’s demeanor was beginning to get panicky. “I don’t think we’re being given a choice. Please try. Please.”

“I can’t do it...I can’t just turn it on. It’s not like that.”

“*Make* it like that!” Lori yelled.

Mr. Thornheart gave them an angry update. “Thirty seconds.”

“Try. Please try. Be Lori Chandler. Be her. It’s okay.”

Thornheart fired a shot in between them, leaving a smoking hole in the metal elevator wall.

“Stop shooting!” Mick screamed.

“You’re Lori Chambers!” Lori said. “Remember what you were doing when you last saw the trophy! Lori! Please!”

“I’m not Lori!” Mick yelled, his eyes were tearing up, and he was sliding down the wall.

“You have to tell him or we’re going to die!”

“Listen to her! She makes a lot of sense!” Thornheart yelled. He took another shot that was an inch away from the last.

“Stop shooting! Stop shooting! I don’t know anything! I don’t!” Mick yelled, gripping the sides of his head.

“Jesus,” Thornheart said to himself. “I hope I brought enough bullets.” He checked. “Yes. We’re fine.” He pointed it right at Lori.

“It’s in my purse!” Mick blurted out. “I put it in my purse so I’d never lose it and it would always be with me. It’s so special.”

Mr. Thornheart punched the emergency lever back into its normal position. “See? It just took a little bit of persuasion. It always does. Now you lead the way, all right. Nice and easy.”

The elevator went back up to the second floor, and Mr. Thornheart marched the two back toward the apartment. There, with the door still open, they went inside. The purse was on the kitchen counter, right where Mick had left it.

“It’s wrapped in a sock,” Mick said. “To keep it from scratching. It has tiny little ducks on it.”

With his free hand, Mr. Thornheart grabbed the purse and shook it with the top down, spilling everything inside of it out onto the counter. Sure enough, a small bundled object was amongst the debris, and it was covered with pictures of tiny ducks. He unfurled it, and tumbling out on the counter was a small plastic, gold-finish trophy that read “San Diego Office MVP” on it.

“Don’t...!” Mick cried out.

Too late to stop him, Dick Thornheart smashed open the base with the butt of his gun. He brushed the broken bits aside and then picked out the small microSDXC card, no bigger than a pinky fingernail.

Dick smiled as he held it. “I have some very interested people in the middle east who’ve made quite a down payment to get this.” He then turned to the two terrified people he’d ben holding at gunpoint. “Thank you ladies,” he said and fired two quick shots.



“Don’t kill them, Thornheart!” Dave Simmons said, running into the apartment. But it was too late.

On the floor was the figure of Dick Thornheart, and kneeling on his chest was Lori Chandler, with a kitchen knife held under his chin. Over in the corner was Mick, who was shivering and trembling, hunched up on the floor.

“What happened?”

“Lousy shot?” Lori said with a shrug. “I mean, he had us point blank and he missed us twice.”

“Be careful with that!” Thornheart said, with a shaky voice. The man was not cut out to be a mastermind villain, as he had very weak nerves. His trembling hands betrayed his aim.

“Shut the fuck up, you stupid shit-for-brains suit,” Lori said to him, driving the tip into his skin just before it would cut him.

Once Mr. Thornheart had missed, he was out of bullets, and was chased by Lori throughout the apartment before she grabbed her favorite knife from the kitchen and threatened him with it. He had surrendered easily in the face of actual bodily harm.

“What’s happening?” Rod Johnson said, following Dave closely behind.

“Mr. Johnson!”

Mick squealed. He got up and threw himself into the businessman’s arms, who embraced Mick tentatively. “I was so scared!”

“I’ll call the police,” Dave said, retrieving his phone from his pocket.

“He kept shooting at us and shooting at us!” Mick said, crying into Mr. Johnson’s shoulder. “He wouldn’t stop shooting and... and threatening to kill us... I thought I was gonna die!”

“Now, now, Lori.



It's all over," Mr. Johnson said, patting Mick on the back.

"Can we... P-p-p-please get out of here?" Mick said through his tears and sobbing. He was a wreck.

"I didn't get your name," Lori asked Mick.

"I-I-I-I'm Lori Chambers," Mick said. "And w-w-who are you?"



"Mr. Johnson, that's sexual harassment!" Lori Chandler said, all agasp. She was in Mr. Johnson's inner office, and had just felt his hand on her butt. "You're taking advantage of me!"

"Tut-tut," Mr. Johnson said, who was seated at his desk. "It's just my way of showing my appreciation for the fine work you do here, Miss Chandler."

"You always say the same thing," Lori replied, in her very girlish voice. She pouted, sticking out her puffy lower lip.

"And you always come to your senses and apologize," Mr. Johnson said.

"I do?" Lori squeaked, looking worried. "Oh, I guess I'm sorry then."

"Think nothing of it," Mr. Johnson replied, patting Lori on the same spot of her butt. "Now back to your desk, Miss Chandler."

"Okay!" Lori said, merrily, like a five year old who had been told to go watch her shows. She turned away and hustled herself out, her boss enjoying the show. She was wearing five-inch pumps that looked like they were breaking her ankles as she walked, and was limited to taking steps no longer than five or six inches at a time. Despite the inconveniences, though, Lori only wore the highest of heels to the office.

The walk was a bit longer than it used to be. That was because she now worked in the CEO's office, as her boss Rod Johnson was the new CEO of PolyCon, a reward for his single-handed capture of Dick Thornheart. This new office was much more extravagant — and far longer — than the marketing office, as was appropriate.

Lori sat down at her desk, and arranged her little dood-dads. She had a tiny gold trophy given to her by Mr. Johnson, with a plaque that read "Alexandria Office MVP" on it. She had it right next to her "Sand Diego Office MVP" trophy, and they were exactly the same size.

She also had her very favorite fuzzy blue bear with a heart on its chest, which she loved so much. Lori turned it so it was looking directly at her, with its shiny black eyes. She liked to imagine it was Mr. Johnson looking at her.



Lori loved her job, which wasn't much more than some light secretarial duties. The most important parts of her job seemed to be looking pretty, smiling, giggling and wearing sexy outfits — which was fine with her.

Today, the outfit she wore was breathtakingly stunning. She wore a high-waist hot pink miniskirt that hugged her curves like it was glued to her body, and a pair of pink pumps that brought out the sublime shape of her long, lean legs.

She was also wearing a silk white blouse that exploded out of her waist to cover her still-growing DD-cup breasts making them look even more obscenely large than they already were.

Lori had a body that any doctor might have declared impossible, but here she was. Taking female hormones for over a year finally began to make real changes in her body, and on top of the implants she had already had, exaggerated her new natural curves out even farther than they should have gone. Her butt alone, at 42 inches around, was big enough to alter the planet's orbit. It was hard to blame Mr. Johnson for wanting to get his hands on it from time to time.

She brought out her mirror, makeup and polishes from her drawer so she could refresh her look, a constant process for her as she was always thinking about the next thing she could do to improve her appearance. That was very important to her, and little else troubled her these days. She no longer worried about anything else than the here and now, as the past was not relevant in the slightest.



Sheena Hellfire made another roundhouse strike on her electric guitar, hitting another power chord, sending the throngs of metal-loving fans into rapture.

DëthWÿsh's sold-out tour of Australia was on its' eighth date, playing to a festival crowd of over 80,000 fans. The fans had been growing ever since the addition of the sexy new guitarist Sheena Hellfire, dressed in a provocative and tantalizing outfit of leather, metal and fishnets, with her hair dyed a neon yellow fading to fiery orange.

She wore eight costumes per gig, actually. They had re-designed the whole set so Sheena could disappear every so often and come out in a new barely-legal outfit to the booming cheers of the crowd. Sheena had single-handedly revived the fortunes of DëthWÿsh, and catapulted them back onto the radio, streaming and sales charts for the first time in twenty years. Their US tour was already selling out, and was tipped to be the hottest tour of the upcoming summer.

In front of her, Lars looked over his shoulder to see the way she was vamping up the moment, stealing yet another song. He had created a monster, and he wasn't sure how long he'd be able to control it. Sooner or later, she'd be bigger than the band, and too big to keep under contract.

Playing a guitar, as Lori Chandler quickly learned, wasn't that hard. After a month or two of teaching herself a few things while she was stuck on the tour bus resulted in her learning pretty much every song in the band's setlist. When Ace was down with a sprained wrist, Lori talked her way into playing a gig — or more accurately, slept her way into playing. She dreamt up the Sheena Hellfire persona overnight, as well as put together the costume.

Needless to say, Ace never got his job back.

As the weeks and months went on, and it became clear that people were showing up to see "Sheena," Lori's contributions became more and more elaborate. She had someone attach a flame thrower to the neck of one of her guitars and another one shot out sparks. A third was laced with LED lights which created strobing, fascinating patterns.

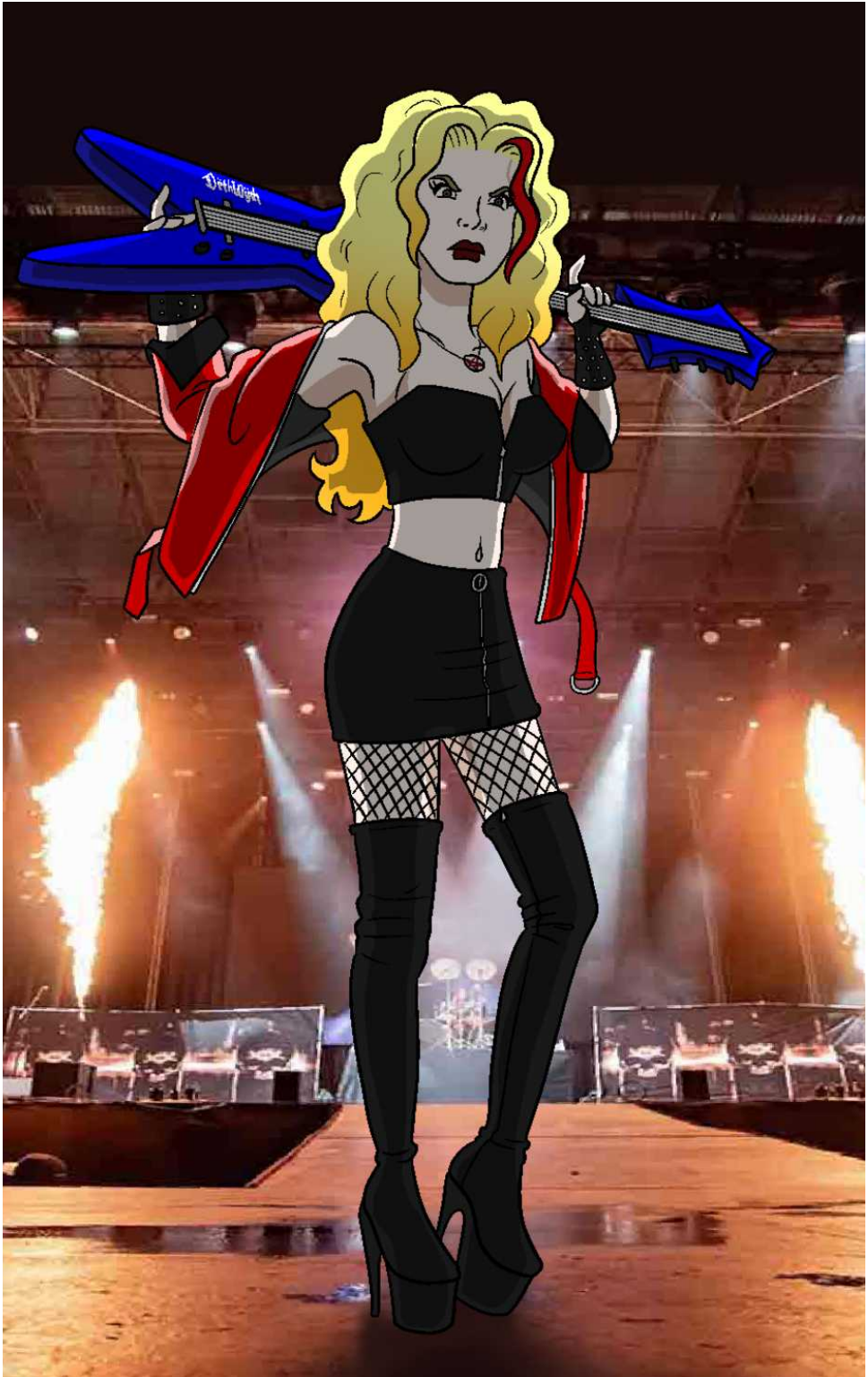
These were all useless distractions as time (and medications and copious surgeries) had blessed Lori with the assets she had been patiently waiting for. Her breasts were huge and round, her butt was fleshed out to maximum capacity and her body had a pleasingly feminine shape that thrilled her to no end. Lori was no more. She was Sheena Hellfire now.

Back when Mick Van Helsten clung to Rod Johnson and begged to be comforted, Lori immediately suspected something bad had just happened. The stress of the moment, being tortured by Dick Thornheart, combined with the pressure to reactivate whatever it was that had made him adopt Lori's life had broken him. So when she asked his name, and he responded with hers, she wasn't shocked, just sad.

Mick had saved her life, but he had sacrificed his own identity to save her. When they escorted a sobbing Mick away, crying how she used to cry, scared like she used to be scared, she knew the least she could do was leave him be. There was no point in torturing him further, and no point in trying to figure out how to untangle whatever was going on in his head. She wasn't a psychologist, anyway.

Besides, she had little intent on ever being that miserable little secretary ever again. As far as she was concerned, Lori Chandler was an abandoned life, and Mick was welcome to it.

So she slipped away in Lars's limo and back to the tour, without ever saying a word about it. As far as she was concerned, Lori Chambers was now someone



else, her life had been spared, and as Sheena Hellfire she was now becoming reborn.

With the last of the power chords blaring through the sound system, the sustain of the guitar just starting to die off, the pyro flames shot out into the dark sky and Lars began screaming the chorus into the mic. She would have never imagined that she'd find her place in the world here, but she had. Sheena Hellfire was going to be big, and she was going to enjoy the ride.



For the first time in a year, Mick Van Helsten grabbed a guitar and began to play. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," he sang, strumming the acoustic guitar.

The children at the Sunday School clapped along.

"Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong." She was smiling broadly, so happy to be able to entertain people and educate them about Jesus at the same time. "Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me, Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so..."

After she finished the song, and did two more after that, the children applauded appreciatively and politely. Lori handed back the guitar to Sister Doris, and waved goodbye to the neatly-dressed kids as they spilled out.

"The kids love your singing, Lori. Will you be back next week?" Sister Doris asked.

"You couldn't keep me away," Lori said, placing her hand over the large gold cross that dangled from her gold necklace. "See you then."

She headed out to her car, dressed in one of her very favorite church dresses, a peach dress with ruffled details, and a matching jacket. Her open-toe two-inch heels were very sensible for church.

"Lorraine, there you are!" Said an older woman, dressed in her extravagant Sunday best. She headed straight for Lori, and Lori headed straight for her. "You missed almost all the service!"

"It was my turn in Sunday School," Lori said.

"It's always your turn! You might as well just do that full-time."

"And quit being your son's secretary? I would never!" Lori replied with a smile. The older woman was actually Mr. Johnson's mother, Marsha Johnson, who at 72 was still attending church on her own.



Lori had tracked her down, and without Mr. Johnson knowing, had become fast friends with her. After all, she needed his mother on her side. She wanted to apply pressure on her boss from both sides when it came time to become Mrs. Rod Johnson. That, however, was many years away. For now, he was overjoyed to be able to be Mr. Johnson's little secretary, his Girl Friday, his submissive and pretty assistant.

"I'll be by on Tuesday to help with the grocery shopping," Lori said, "and then you have to promise to help me out with my cross-stitching."

"Of course, sweetie. I'll see you then," Mrs. Johnson said.

Lori then headed back to her car once again, where Irene and Julie were already waiting for her. "You missed the most boring service ever conducted," Irene said, in her cynical way.

"It's only boring if your heart isn't in it," Lori answered. "You have to learn to let Jesus in."

Of course, that was just a tease. Both Irene and Julia had done just that. Lori had talked them into joining her at church every Sunday, despite neither of them wanting to do it, but after weeks of needling, Lori finally got them to give in. After their first service, then came another and then another. As the weeks went on, with Lori's encouragement, both her co-workers had become just as devout as she had. Irene, Julia and Lori now car-pooled to Sunday service every week, all in their prettiest church clothes, looking beautiful.

They got in the car and headed to the downtown Salvation Army soup kitchen where Lori volunteered. It was on the other side of town, not far from the courthouse where she had testified against Mr. Thornheart and was ultimately sentenced to jail for a very long time, and she was happy knowing that.

The three young ladies served up food and the word of God for the lunchtime shift, looking terribly out of place. They were pretty, high-maintenance women in cute dresses and high heels handing over trays of over-cooked food to scruffy, smelly and crabby vagrants.

Being religious was not in Mick Van Helsten's nature, as he was — down his core — all about embracing the devil and the chaos within. Lori Chandler though, had clung to the structure and promise worship had offered her, and now Lori had given her new self over completely.

It was all a part of becoming the perfect woman for Mr. Johnson, both a sexy secretary and a devout, devoted woman. It was a matter of time before he proposed, but until then, Lori kept working on becoming the obedient, conservative, Christian wife that would be Mrs. Rodney Johnson. She had already picked out the wedding invitations they were going to send.

“We should get some burgers,” Irene said as Lori drove. “I’m hella starved.”

“*Heck-a*,” Lori corrected.

“Hecka starved,” Irene repeated. She had given up on fighting Lori’s insistence that there be no swearing in her presence. “Where do you want to stop?”

“I’m up for a kale bowl,” Lori said. “Burgers just make you super fat.”

“Why did I know you were going to say that?” Irene said, dejectedly.

“Cuz I’m right!” Lori said. “We need to make sure we don’t let our bosses dump us for younger girls!”

Julie sighed. “One of these days, I’m just going to grab a tub of ice cream and eat the whole thing in one sitting!”

“I just look at ice cream and I gain weight,” Irene said.

“You’re crazy!” Lori said with a giggle. “You need to focus on what’s important, sweetie. And what’s important is that we keep our bosses happy.”

Keeping herself focused had become Lori’s obsession. After all, it was her sheer willpower that had rid herself of that voice, according to Dr. Sarah.

“How long has it been since you heard the voice, Lori?” Her therapist, Dr. Sarah, had asked her at their final session, months ago.

“I don’t understand,” Lori replied.

“When you first came to me, you said you were hearing a voice in your head. A voice that told you that you were making a mistake, a voice that said you were an impostor.”

Lori shook her pretty head. “I don’t even remember that,” she said with a smile, “Gosh, how weird. I really said that?”

Lori had to think. The memory of a voice was just a distant thought in her mind. She couldn’t even recall the last time she had heard that gruff, angry, manly voice begging for her to remember the past.

“That’s wonderful, Lori,” the therapist said, looking smart and professional in his glasses and tweed outfit.

Lori noted it had a very short skirt. She seemed to have that effect on other women. Everyone she saw on a regular basis appeared to be a bit intimidated by her outrageously feminine appearance. The girls at the salon were unbuttoning their blouses a button lower and hobbling around in at least four-inch heels. The secretaries in the office had all started wearing miniskirts and sporting new shiny hairstyles, as if they needed to keep up with her. The members of the Secret Santa committee alone had adopted the bright colors Lori had been wearing every day.

“I think we can safely say you’ve conquered your inner doubts,” the therapist continued.

“Awesome!” Lori said with a smile.

“We can safely say you have it all behind you,” the therapist replied.

That was when she knew it was okay to have the surgery that would confirm her once and for all was a woman, as Lori Chandler. She pictured in her head, a shadowy, vague vision of her long lost masculinity, shoved into a tiny safe and thrown overboard in the deepest sea. It would never trouble her again.

After the girls had eaten their salads, Lori dropped them all back home and she headed to her apartment. The new place was much larger than the first, almost too big, really. So she decided to bring on a roommate. Their name was Cris.

Mr. Simmons asked her if she might be amenable to training a new secretary for him, as a way to compensate him for losing “Lori,” and she agreed. “We’re a bit shorthanded for secretaries,” he said. “I’d appreciate it if you could find someone who can live up to your standards.”

Cris McRae came along at the right time, as Lori was looking for a roommate, and Cris was looking for a job as well. Something about Cris struck her as needing her kind of help, and she picked him out of a crowded field of female applicants.

Cris may have been very obviously Mexican or Latino or whatever, but for some reason she didn’t immediately understand, she wanted to help the poor thing out and even help them get a job at PolyCon. It had taken a lot of questioning during their interview, but Lori was certain that the reason Christopher McRae was using the name “Cris” was because he had gender issues. Finally, after asking the same questions over and over, Cris said seemed to agree.

Lori’s imagination flew into overdrive. She could help Cris realize the woman within. She also thought Cris was just the kind of person she could mold into being a secretary that Mr. Simmons would love. That’s when Lori knew she could be Cris’s guiding hand and guardian angel.

Being a secretary was heaven on Earth, and soon Cris would know the very same bliss, even if it did take some pills, some shots, some therapy, some implants and some gentle persuasion.

Soon, Cris would be a part of their little foursome of secretaries. They could play doubles tennis, Lori thought to herself. She couldn’t wait to buy some cute tennis skirts.

Lori changed out of her church outfit into one of her house-dresses, the sky blue dress with a tan belt and tan flats. Cris was laid back in front of the TV, resting on the flower-print ornate couch, flipping through channels.

“I know what we should do today! We should practice your typing skills!” Lori suggested.

Cris’s eyes checked the time on the cuckoo clock on the wall, next to the embroidered-frame pictures and bible passages. “Can’t we just relax? You’re supposed to rest on Sunday, right?”

“Church-going Christians do. But you are not a church-going Christian,” Lori reminded him. “Besides, Mr. Simmons is going to meet you for the very first time next month, and I want you to be perfect. So go change into your work clothes and we can get started on your lessons for today.”

“Do I really need to dress up for typing practice?”

“You’re gonna be a working girl, Cris. You need to be nice and comfortable in your cute work clothes.”

“You call a miniskirt and high heels work clothes...”

“And don’t forget to do your hair the way I showed you.”

“Ugh! Fine!”

Lori was very proud of the progress she’d made, especially since he was a wanted man. Cris didn’t think Lori knew that when he moved in, but she did, and used it to her advantage. In the nicest, kindest, gentlest way, she was making Cris accept piece after piece of what would eventually become her new life. You can make a boy named Chris do all sorts of things in service to his disguise.

Lori couldn’t help herself, imagining the Simmons family, meeting up with the Johnson family, and watching their kids playing together. Cris would make for a wonderful wife to Mr. Simmons.

After all the wonderful years working for Mr. Simmons in San Diego, Lori felt she owed Mr. Simmons a replacement — and it only made sense to make sure her substitute was a near clone of Lori Chambers. She would be just as submissive, demure, feminine, devout and beautiful. She would have the same permanent smile of blissful submission and the same biblical sense of devotion to being a secretary.

It was all very neat and tidy. Lori liked things neat and tidy. A place for everything, end everything in its place. Her world, her job, her apartment as well as her whole life was immaculate. Cleanliness was next to Godliness, as she liked to remind people, and Lori took every opportunity to make her life as Godly as

she could. She had little time for anyone or anything that didn't adhere to living the same neat and tidy life she did.

She poured two cups of tea for the both of them, and added a few extra drops of hormones to Cris's cup. He seemed to be in the habit of forgetting to take them every day. Sooner or later they would be joining her at PolyCon as a secretary, and as a happy, healthy, focused young woman who would be unshakably loyal to her boss and the company. Soon, Cris would be neat and tidy, too.

So the person who had once called themselves Mick Van Helsten was forever committed to a life of bras and panties, skirts and heels, salons and shopping. He had surrendered himself to becoming this woman, but far from pretending to be Lori, this new Lori Chandler had never been so real. He had also never been happier.

Being Lori Chandler was wonderful, and wonderfully rewarding. Every day she woke up and thanked God she was still Lori Chandler. It was a shame, she often thought to herself, that there could only be one at a time.

The End





Titles from Sick Puppy Press

Sick Puppy Comics

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Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. Three college students sign up for a six-month isolation experiment. Things start to get a little strange, and they begin to lose their masculinity day by day. Yet, they don't seem to even notice... Full Color Comic Book / 38 pages

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Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack. When teen goth Brandyn gets his drivers' license, he thinks it's a ticket to adulthood. Unfortunately, he's already cashed a ticket in the opposite direction. Full Color Comic Book / 27 pages

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Story & Art by Fraylim, Script by KK, Ink & Color by Joe Six-Pack. The "Summer Blossom" camp welcomes anew group of young men. But although it may be an all-boys camp when they arrive, it's girls-only when they leave. Full Color Comic Book / 100 pages

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Story by Joe-Six Pack, art by Osoku WARUI. Gavin is a student who laments his boring life. Then he crosses paths with Krista. Things are about to change, and not necessarily for the better. Comic / 24 pages

Candlewick Court Series

Welcome to Candlewick

By Joe Six-Pack. Book 1 in a series. Candlewick Court is looking for new residents. Residents who will find new lives and new genders in a suburban paradise with a mysterious purpose. Book / 149 pages / 30 illustrations

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By Joe Six-Pack. Book 2 in a series. Candlewick Court has found it's first homeowners, and the kids need a school to attend. What kind of bizarre transformations await them? Book / 152 pages / 38 illustrations

Brides of Candlewick

By Joe Six-Pack. Book 3 in a series. The story of Colin and Elliot concludes as we welcome Candlewick Court's next homeowners. Book / 159 pages / 39 illustrations

Teens Transformed

She Made Me Into My Sister

"A Little Too Clever" by Joe Six-Pack. Wyatt wanted to help his girlfriend get revenge, but at what cost? As it turns out, a cost greater than any boy could have imagined. Book / 88 pages / 20 illustrations

Gone Girly for Good

"Big in Japan" by James J Craft. Mike and Ken were one-hit-wonder rock stars. Then they discovered they had fans in Japan, so they left to become famous. Then they discovered that the Japanese didn't know they were guys. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

One Year in Tokyo

By James J Craft, illustrations by Kwon Lee Tran. Mickey is forced to spend a year with his father in Japan. However things often get confused when words get translated from English to Japanese, as Mickey soon finds out... Book / 87 pages / 20 illustrations

Student Exchange

By Joe Six-Pack. Kelley Sue's convinced a French exchange student to disguise himself as a girl. What happens when she realizes he has no intention of returning back home? Book / 77 pages / 22 illustrations

He's a Valley Girl, Fer Sure

From the files of TGStories.com: "Corey Taylor's Big Bodacious Adventure" by Joe Six-Pack. For Corey, the only way he can get into college is to pretend to be a girl. But when does it stop being pretend? When he's cheerleader? A girlfriend? A beauty queen? Book / 78 pages / 17 illustrations

From Boys to Bridesmaids

"Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Groom" by James J Craft. Two spoiled and privileged boys are about to be put in their place by their new step-mother. And their place is by her side as her bridesmaids and daughters. Book / 77 Pages / 16 illustrations

Little Mis-ter Popular

"My Two Moms" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Thanks to his aunt's "Confidence Club," Leon will find a way to become popular, and to get over all his hang-ups... Including his masculinity. Book / 77 Pages / 17 illustrations

Bride to Be

By Joe Six-Pack. Derek and Cole grew up together as kids. One year, though, Cole has to start pitching in at the family wedding business. His life will never be the same. Book / 63 pages / 25 illustrations

Winning is Everything

"Costume drama" by Joe Six-Pack. Seth made a funny little bet for Halloween. He needed to pull off the impersonation of a Cheerleader for a party. What's at stake? 100 million dollars and his manhood. Book / 215 pages / 37 illustrations

Creating Samantha

Story by Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by The Might Fenek. Samuel was under the tutelage of his legal guardian, only his guardian had no intentions of letting him grow up male. Book / 70 pages / 16 illustrations

Convicts to Co-Eds

Story by Courtney Captisa & Claire Bear, illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Three teen boys are sent to a reform school. What they can't know is that they are about to be "reformed" all the way into skirts... And beyond. Book / 154 pages / 31 illustrations

Mall Makeover Madness

"A Day at the Mall" by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Four boys are going to have one weird day at the mall. By the time the day is over, it's four girls who leave the mall to begin their new lives. Book / 109 pages / 25 illustrations

Crosley High Chronicles

By Joe Six-Pack. River is coming to a new school, and trying to fit in. The problem is the only way he's going to fit in is in skirts and heels. Book / 217 pages / 75 illustrations

Tales of Transformation

He's the Wrong Girl

"Office Chemistry" by Joe Six-Pack. James had to fill in at the reception desk. Problem is, the business is a bio-genetics company. And all of the sudden the coffee tastes funny. Book / 53 pages / 14 illustrations

City Boy, Country Girl

By Joe Six-Pack. Richard's successful city life is interrupted when a sheep he wants to fleece needs urgent care out in the country. But instead of returning home, all Richard's wife hears are a series of suspicious excuses. Revised in 2019. Book / 92 pages / 34 illustrations

Thames Greene

By James J Craft. Ira wanted something better for his family. A new start. But in Thames Greene, everyone's getting a new start, whether they want it or not. Book / 77 pages / 26 illustrations

Hiding in High Heels

"How Not to be a Sissy" By Joe Six-Pack. Vince was on the run from people who wanted their millions back. Howard was a friend with a funny little idea and a knack for making subliminal CDs. Mini-Pix / 48 pages / 15 illustrations

A Blessing in Disguise

By KK, illustrations by Kannel. Jay was a witness to a murder, and now he's the target of a vicious criminal. Resorting to a female disguise, he becomes trapped with no way out. Book / 84 pages / 16 illustrations

I'm Your Dolly

"Barbie-in-a-Box" By Joe Six-Pack. Tyler wasn't much of a boyfriend anymore. Jessica wanted to throw him out, but then a better idea came to her, in the form of the Barbie-in-a-Box service. Tyler better get used to pink. Book / 103 pages / 20 illustrations

His Life as a Trophy Wife

By Joe Six-Pack. Nick had a great life, but then it evaporated. Now he's down on his luck. In steps a wealthy executive willing to pay him handsomely to pretend to be his wife. What can it hurt?

Revised in 2018. Book / 256 pages / 39 illustrations

Male Monday, Girl Friday

"Hey, Cutie!" by James J Craft. Daniel is going to be promoted from his average life to an exciting executive position. At least, that's what his bosses are telling him. They may not be telling him everything. Book / 58 pages / 20 illustrations

The Happiest Place on Earth

From the files of TGStories.com: "The Fairest One of All" By Joe Six-Pack. Will is a kid looking for a job. He gets one, performing as Snow White at a theme park. For Will, he doesn't suspect that playing the role and wearing the costume is slowly changing him, day by day. Book / 51 pages / 21 illustrations

Hello, Nurse

From the files of TGStories.com: "Quality Health Care". Dane is filling in as a nurse for his pal Jimmy at his new office. Although both are doctors, Dane begins to take to his new role as a nurse. Soon, he feels compelled to be the ideal nurse. Book / 44 pages / 15 illustrations

My Boss, The Bimbo

"If I Were a Betting (Wo)Man" By James J Craft, illustrations by blackshirtboy. CEO Lucas has a superiority complex. When his long-suffering secretary is able to feed into Lucas' competitive nature, he'll make any bet to prove his dominance over women. Book / 38 pages / 10 illustrations

He's the Girl They Want

"Rallies" by Joe Six-Pack. Spencer has a great new executive job in the food service industry, but first he's got to learn the ropes of the business by waiting on tables. He just doesn't quite fit in with the cheerleader theme. Yet. Book / 63 pages / 22 illustrations

Demoted and Degraded

"Trixie the Secretary" by Angela J. Cindy didn't much like Tom Jones attitude and his advances, so when she has the opportunity to help take the wind out of his sails, she takes it. But she had no idea that it was all designed to make Tom into Trixie the secretary. Book / 87 pages / 17 illustrations

I, Candy

"Sissy Sweets" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Inheriting his family's bakery requires this young man to become the new face of the business. A female face. Book / 45 pages / 15 illustrations

Boyzz II Girlz

"The Making of the Ballroom Brats" by Joe Six-Pack. The Ballroom Brats become the newest worldwide celebrity sensation. How did four unsuspecting guys at a fast food joint become the hottest girl group in music? Book / 113 pages / 34 illustrations

His Strangest Desire

"Employee of the Month" by Joe Six-Pack. Mick is declared Employee of the Month, and he's going to find himself hurtling headlong into facing his weirdest inner desire. Book / 59 pages / 19 illustrations

Hard Time or High Heels

"I'm Turning into My Mother" by James J Craft, illustrations by rocketxpert. Colby got deep into debt to a local gangster. Before long, he's on the arm of that very same gangster as his reluctant girlfriend. Book / 75 pages / 20 illustrations

Seriously Skirted

"The Show Piece" by KK. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Mel finds work at a clinic as a secretary. He slowly begins to fit to role. Book / 75 pages / 19 illustrations

From Mister to Sister

Story by Melissa N., illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Dan just wanted to help guide his girlfriend's sister out of her depression. Instead, he's being guided out of his manhood. Book / 84 pages / 24 illustrations

The Russian Girl

Story by Melissa N., illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Casey's wife has had enough of watching him kill himself with work, so she forces him out of his comfort zone... Into the life of a female stripper. Book / 196 pages / 30 illustrations

Swindled into Skirts

"Beta Male" by Joe Six-Pack. Kyle inherited a multi-million dollar mansion in southern California. He begins to adjust to the Cali lifestyle, but his adjustments seems to have a decidedly feminine flavor to them. Book / 78 pages / 23 illustrations

Stories of the Supernatural

A Change for the Better

"Do-Overs" by Joe Six-Pack. Evan wants a chance to do over his biggest mistake. He gets the chance, but he keeps wanting his new life to be a little bit better than the last. Book / 59 pages / 18 color illustrations

Changed and Rearranged

"Wrongs Make Wright" By Joe Six-Pack. Chris and Matt were rivals. Then, Matt decided to show everyone how smart he truly was by impersonating a teacher. But the disguise becomes more and more real, much to Chris' dismay. Book / 74 pages / 19 illustrations

From Pals to Gals

From the files of TGStories.com: "Mandate of the People" By Joe Six-Pack. Teens Jeremy and Stewart are good friends, but a bit thick in the noggin. When they jokingly nominate each other for Prom Queen, they slowly become the perfect candidates, thanks to some magic. Book / 45 pages / 16 illustrations

A High-Heeled Halloween

Story & art by Joe Six-Pack. A costume shop has four spooky tales to tell this Halloween, where the price you pay for your costume is far more than money. Book / 128 pages / 34 illustrations

Crossed Fiction

If the Shoes Fit

"Hand Me Downs" By KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Sydney is a teen who is just trying to make it through the summer with no money. He finds himself wearing hand-me-downs from his sister, and that takes his life in a whole new direction. Book / 98 pages / 30 illustrations

Sisters for the Summer

"Camp Counseling" By Joe Six-Pack. Brock McCade always thought of himself as a real man, or at least he would be one, someday. After summer camp, he's no longer so sure. Book / 76 pages / 17 illustrations

They're the Girls for the Job

"Peace and Harmony" By James J Craft. Illustrations by blackshirtboy. Pete and Harmon need jobs bad. How far would they have to go to get them? Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

Blondie's Lost Summer

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Carl's dream summer was about to become three months of dresses, heels and makeup. Book / 159 pages / 48 illustrations

Blondie's Lost Year

By KK. Illustrations by Fraylim. Book Two in the Blondie Series. Carl's trip to Florida has been horrible enough, trapped in dresses and makeup. Now, high school has presented a whole new level of humiliation for him. Book / 221 pages / 52 illustrations

Blondie He's Not

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Mark got a job at a salon, and fell in love with one of the customers. Problem was that customer was Candi "Blondie" Wethers, and what happened to Candi was about to happen to Mark. Book / 151 pages / 40 illustrations

I Never Wanted to be a Woman

"Politically Corrected" By Cheryl Lynn. Illustrations by Joe Six-Pack. Michael's politically active mother has decided she's going to make her hippie son over into the daughter she always wanted. Book / 64 pages / 19 illustrations

The Boy's Guide to Girlhood

Story by KK, illustrations by Fraylim. Dweeb Kenny and cool Rex find themselves trapped in a Principal's twisted scheme, and only one of them is going to get out in tact. Book / 109 pages / 32 illustrations

Fashion Victims

Story by Lauren Bliss, illustrations by Fraylim. Teenage boy Jamie just needed clothes for school. Oh, he's going to get clothes for school. Just not male ones. Will he ever need male clothes again? Book / 67 pages / 26 illustrations

The Making of a Beach Bunny

Story by KK & Fraylim, illustrations by Fraylim. Before heading off to college, John wanted to spend his last normal summer at the old rental summer house with his friend Stanley. There was nothing about this summer that would be normal. Book / 134 pages / 58 illustrations

Seriously Sissified

A Family Femmed

"The Femmed Family Robinson" by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. The Robinson boys all had dreams of their own, once. Now they have new ones, thanks to their stepmother. Book / 96 pages / 29 color illustrations



Forever Femmed

Story by James J. Craft & Cheryl Lynn, illustrations by Sortimid. "A Family Femmed's" Deborah is still hard at work, flipping men into sissies and selling them to the highest bidder. But this time, there's a new wrinkle. Book / 108 pages / 28 illustrations

Auntie's Girl Time

By Cheryl Lynn. David was just a young teenage boy who wanted all the things in life a man could look forward to. His aunt, though, is going to make sure he never gets them. Book / 79 pages / 20 illustrations

Revenge of the Cheerleaders

"Pansy Cheers" By Angela J. Patrick Sears was a football player trying to sleep with every cheerleader at his small college. He'd have to pay for his conquests. Book / 116 pages / 19 illustrations

He's Got His Mind Made Up

By James J. Craft. Illustrations by kinkyrocket. Corey has just a sliver of a chance to get into college, but that chance involves becoming his stepmother's maid. And she wants him to fit both the role and the dress. Book / 68 pages / 16 illustrations

Fated for Femininity

Story by KK, illustrations by RocketXpert. When a web page shows Evan having sex with another boy, the poor kid is chased out of town — right into the arms of a gender therapist who has her own agenda. Book / 70 pages / 15 illustrations

Web Classics Revisited

Two Forms of ID

By Joe Six-Pack. Harvey had the unusual ability to convincingly imitate a teenage girl. In desperation, he has to use that talent to make some money. But when is enough enough? Paperback / 194 pages / text only

SHORTHANDLED FOR SECRETARIES



Memoir of Julio Luis Suarez

June 13

I want everyone who reads this to know I am a man who does not run away because I am a coward. I am only doing this now because I know I am an innocent man who surely will never get the chance to defend himself.

I am a proud El Salvadoran and son to my mother and father. I deserve to be heard. I have rights, even if I am not a legal American.

To whoever reads this, I want you to know, from the very depths of my soul, I did not do what I am accused of. However, as an “illegal” I will never be given the benefit of the doubt. A guilty verdict awaits me should I ever be found by the police, but I will not surrender.

The other car was at fault. I tried to avoid them but they were going too fast. There was no time. I mourn for the souls who have died, but I was not the one who took their lives.

It has been two months since that day. I will never forget the terrible screeching of tires, the sound of metal crumpling and the anguished cries of those in that car who I could not help, nor could anyone.

My life now is one of a man in hiding.



I have never stayed in the same place for very long. I can't risk it.

But now I have an ID. You do not want to know what I had to do to get it. It is for a man by the name of Cristopher McRae, a name I did not choose, as it was for a real person, so I am told by the man who sold it to me. I have been able to get a bank card and a phone in that name so I can do the things I have taken for granted for all my years of living in the USA.

I do not think the name quite suits me, but I am not a man with a lot of choices. So if someone should read this in the future, know that I am doing only what I have to do.

With proper legal documents, I can now get a job if I so choose, and in some ways it is actually easier than with the Green Card I no longer have. I have decided to apply for a place to live, sharing an apartment. I only hope I do not bring upon them the wrath of the law because of my troubles. If I do, and do not get the chance to say it in person, here I deeply apologize.



June 18

I have been accepted by a woman named Lori Chandler as her “roommate” to share rent and living expenses. I cannot express how grateful I am to have a room to myself, as privacy has been beyond my abilities for a very long time now, even before the accident. In addition, I now share an apartment with a beautiful woman, both in body and in soul. She cooks me food and makes my bed. I do not deserve such blessings.

The universe is still cruel to me though, and I have further degraded myself. My shame knows no end, it seems.

When we sent emails to set up the interview, she must have assumed that the name I was using, “Cris,” was that of a woman. When I arrived, she seemed heartbroken that I was a man, and asked me if I was spelling the name as Cris instead of Chris because it was a “gender neutral” name.

I confess I am not educated in such things. In my family, you are a man or you are not. However, I needed the room more than I have ever needed anything else in all my life, so I told her what she wanted to hear. I did get the room, but in doing so, it seems I have led Ms. Chandler to believe I am a man who is becoming a woman.

I do not mean to lie. I am a truthful person. I am just desperate.

So now I sit here, writing these words, my face shaved of my pride, my mustache and beard, wearing a pair of women's underwear under my pants Ms. Chandler gave to me. She has also given to me many pills she insists I take, to help me be a woman. I beg the forgiveness of my family.

One day I will hold my head high again. But today is not that day.



August 7

When one month passed by, I found myself unable to pay Ms. Chandler what I owed her in rent. To my shock, she simply dismissed it, and told me she would forgive my debt, and could do so for a few more months. She would also help me find work. I am overwhelmed by this woman's generosity.

As a small, insignificant way to pay her back, she asked me to do some of the chores around the apartment, which I am only too happy to do. I wash the dishes and take care of the laundry, which are tasks a man like me has no trouble with.

She has also asked me to talk to a woman who she says helped her through her transition, a therapist. I did not know what to expect, and when she asked me about the woman I wanted to be, I had few answers.

She asked me if "Cris McRae" was a southern name, which is a question I didn't understand. I told her it might as well be, which seemed to make her happy. She asked me to take a pill during our session, which she said was not dangerous, that it would just open my mind to her techniques and make the sessions go faster, something I quickly agreed to. I want to do



right by Ms. Chandler, but the therapy is very boring and the pills do help.

I have made some changes to my appearance, in the way I dress, which I believe is the smart thing to do. Not only do I need to make sure I am not recognized as Julio Suarez, but Ms. Chandler does encourage me to dress less like a man. I am somewhat ashamed when I see myself in the mirror, as I look like a mariquita. A sissy.

I do not know if it is because I am helping out with the cooking and the shopping, but I have found I am eating much less. It seems so much work to make a meal that I do not want to do it as often as I used to. I have lost many pounds in the months I have lived here and I suppose I might lose more. Ms. Chandler says it will only help in my new life as a female, which makes her happy, and I do love to see her smile. I do wish the weight loss were more even, as my chest and bottom appear fatty and swollen compared to the rest of me. I may be imagining things but my chest jiggles when I move sometimes, and I do not like it.



August 30

Dr. Sarah, my therapist, said I'm making good progress, a claim which I would dispute. I do not know what progress I am supposed to be making!

Ms. Chandler suggested to me that I could work at her business and could make arrangements, but I needed to learn certain skills before I could do the job. So she began to train me. I have learned the calendar software to make appointments, and I am learning how to take notes from recorded messages. It is not as easy as I thought it would be, but Julio Suarez, he does not back down from a challenge, especially one that so many ordinary women can do.

I have been told that one of my most important duties is to make sure I understand that I am just an employee and I must know my place. I am obliged to call the people above me "Mr." and "Mrs." and do what I am told as efficiently and as humbly as I can. I am not a humble man, and I do not like authority, so this has been my greatest challenge, but she says I am learning well.

It has been over two months and I suppose I have adjusted to living with Ms. Chandler. She does not like a lot of loud noises or curse words, that is for certain. I have had to measure my temper when she is around. She does invite me to listen to her music and shows, but I would much prefer my own. She does not like my music, and she often asks me to turn it off. I suppose it is a bit loud.

Ms. Chandler has encouraged me to try to use makeup and style my hair like that of a woman's, but I do not share her enthusiasm. I do little things to make her happy, but I am a man and even letting my hair grow as long as it has cannot disguise my true nature. She has been giving me women's clothes to wear, but I don't think I will ever touch them, except for the panties I have wear to keep her convinced I am telling her the truth about my desire to be a woman.

I guess I do wear the bras as well. My chest gets sore from all the shifting of it's fat if I don't wear it. I do hope they begin to shrink soon.

Ms. Chandler has this phrase "neat and tidy" that she likes to use often, and tells me I should learn to keep my things neat and my life tidy. I owe her so much I dare not disagree.



December 23

Ms. Chandler gave me a printed out piece of paper that read "Graduate of the Chandler School of Office Technology." She said it was my diploma, and I needed her to explain that to me. She was just making a joke, it turns out. That is what I like about Ms. Chandler. She is always smiling and likes everyone around her to be happy.

She says I am now ready to work at her business, but there is no current opening for someone like me. Until then, I am to try to make myself "more secretarial" as she put it.

When I made her dinner last night, she explained that a secretarial job was for women, and since I was becoming a woman, this was why she thought I could get the job. As a man, however, there were no positions for me.

I am not happy about continuing my disguise, but I must find some way to pay my share of the rent, and if I must do this, than I will do this. After all, a little bit of makeup and a little extra care in my appearance is nothing to be ashamed of. I let Ms. Chandler take me to a salon where they lightened my hair a little and started me on a treatment they said would help me keep my beard from growing back so quickly. They said the could also lighten my skin tone as well.

It is the perfect disguise. They are looking for the illegal El Salvadoran Juan Suarez, not the secretary from Tennessee, Cris McRae.

My therapist wanted me to describe the person I wanted to be, so I made up a story about Cris McRae. I based it on a woman on the reality show Lori is

watching. Cris McRae, I decided, was a young woman who had moved to this city from Nashville Tennessee, seeking work as a secretary. She has dreams of being well-off and secure in her future, and meeting a man who she would wed that would provide this for her. Starting over where no one knew her as a man was why she had moved away from home. She is a happy, optimistic and pleasant woman who is proud of her heritage.

Every session, Dr. Sarah asks me to tell me something more about my “true self,” although I never remember the details afterwards. Once I take the pills she uses to open my mind, I guess I fall asleep or something like that. The doctor seems pleased, though, and tells me everything is going very well. I suspect therapists are con artists, taking Ms. Chandler’s money and doing nothing but watching me sleep.

Sadly, Lori has told me she can no longer cover for my half of the rent, and that I must start to pay my way. So I have stopped spending my money as much as I can. I do not have much, but I should be able to pay this month if everything goes well. I wear only the clothes Lori has given me, as I can’t afford to replace the old clothes which do not fit me very well anymore and are falling apart.

Ms. Chandler is helping me by showing me how to dress myself attractively and do my hair and makeup properly, which she says will save me money so I don’t have to do it more than once a day. She also helps me by teaching me everything there is to know about being a good secretary, so I can get the job I need to make money.

Lori has been such a good friend to me. I cannot let her down, but time is running out. I need that job as soon as I can get it. It would kill me if I lost her friendship.





January 15

Lori and I are like two peas in a pod. I suppose I could have wound up with just about anyone in the world but I wound up rooming with someone I share so much in common with. We like the same TV shows, the same music and even the same clothes.

She's also opened my eyes to all sort of new things like cross-stitching. I would have never guessed it would be so engrossing, but I have to say I'm addicted. There's a tennis court in the building complex, and we go out and hit the ball back and forth for some exercise. It's fun. I've never played tennis before, but I am enjoying it.

Lori is also making sure that I am ready for the office and teaching me what she calls "office etiquette." It's mostly just being polite and deferential, which is common sense. She said I should just pretend I was the hostess of a birthday party and making sure the birthday boy (my boss) had every wish taken care of. That was an interesting way to think of it, I suppose.

She is also not shy about giving me advice. She constantly critiques my posture, reminds me to smile, and to keep my hair and face perfect. Anyone else would probably have given up by now, but she seems to really want to help me, which I do appreciate.

I asked Dr. Sarah if we should just give up on the therapy sessions, and she seemed shocked that I even suggested it. She insisted that I was making "tremendous" progress and I had come too far to give up now. I wasn't sure about that at all. I told her I hadn't noticed anything different about my life, and she seemed quite pleased to hear it.

I still do not understand, but she is the professional.



March 2

Today Lori asked me to join her on a drive, so I got dressed in a nice cardigan and skirt, put on my earrings and got in the car. However, it was a kind of trick.

As we got about a mile away from the apartment, Lori told me she was taking me to see a doctor. I felt like a pet being taken to the vet.

I was terrified, as one might well understand, as someone in my position might get into a lot of trouble being examined. I've never liked doctors anyway.

The doctor was very angry with me for taking hormones without medical supervision, but he said I was in fine health and didn't alter the regimen of pills I had been taking. Lori tried to help and took the blame, but I had to stop her. After all, I was the one who was transitioning into becoming a woman, not her.

The doctor felt my chest and told me that my development was coming along very quickly, and that I could expect to have C-cups or more by the time I finished growing. I suppose I should be proud that I was going to be a big girl, but I couldn't help but feel apprehensive about having real breasts. It seemed so... so... I don't know if I can put it into words.

I just don't know if this is what I really wanted.

I had a very similar experience when the girls at the salon took my hair up another shade and made me a blond. I definitely looked better, but I looked so... feminine.

That's what I wanted, right?

Again, it feels wrong somehow.

Anyway, the doctor wanted me to come back for monthly visits, so I filled out a form for Cris McRae, Caucasian, 22, male-to-female in transition. I guess that was my first official act as Cris.



May 10

Yesterday, I was in the waiting room of Dr. Sarah when there was a commotion inside her office. I could hear shouting and things being tossed around. The other ladies in the waiting room looked just alarmed as I was.

We were asked to leave, but not before the woman inside broke out of the office and started screaming nonsense at us.

The poor thing looked out of her mind. She was telling us that Dr. Sarah was using mind control, hypnotizing us, and that we were being brainwashed.

Can you imagine? I can certainly understand why someone so unhinged needed Dr. Sarah to help them.

I was rescheduled for the next day, and the doctor apologized profusely for the disruption. I told her that it was probably just a part of the business he was in. She nodded in agreement.

Anyway, when I did get to see the doctor the next day, she gave me my pill like she always did, and I was asleep in minutes. After the session was over, though, she couldn't have been more apologetic.

"I won't charge you for today's session, Cristi," she said to me.

"Y'all are too kind," I said. "As a girl from Tennessee. I've surely seen a lot, but I can't say I've seen crazy like that. The cheese has slid off that girl's cracker."

"She's already on the way to recovery," Dr. Sarah said.

That was some comfort, at least. I do declare, that was one harrowing experience for someone as gentle-hearted as myself.

I treated myself to a little froyo on the way back to my apartment, doing a little windows shopping on the way. I couldn't wait until I had a paycheck. Oh, the things I'm going to buy when I have the money. A new dress, some heels, a properly measured bra... A girl can dream, can't she?

That evening, while I was hand-washing our delicates and Lori was sorting and folding, I told her all about it, and she was spellbound by my tale.

But Lori being Lori, she was more concerned about my safety and sanity. She wanted me to be in the best possible mindset when I met Mr. Simmons for the first time, which was coming up very soon. My job interview with Mr. Simmons was only a week away from today, as a matter of fact. I do hope I've learned enough to get the job. I pray to God he likes what he sees.



Diary of Ms. Cristine McRae

June 13

I'm frightfully sorry for letting this diary lapse for so long without an entry. Being Mr. Simmons' secretary is a full-time job! Oh, and yes, I did get the job. I owe it all to Lori, of course, she was such a peach throughout it all, mentoring me as I learned all there was to know about being a bona-fide secretary.

That poor Mr. Simmons needed a secretary something awful, too. He had been through a dozen interns in the past year, none of them with the sense God gave a goose, and his schedule was in a mess a' trouble. I straightened it all out, of course, and he was might bit grateful for the help.

I remember walking into the interview for the job, barely able to steady my nerves in my four inch heels, more nervous than when I came out as a woman to my folks back home in Tennessee.

Well, wouldn't you know that I had nothing to worry about. That handsome Mr. Simmons hired me on sight, and I was being put to work that very same day. "Lori's recommendation is more than enough for me," he explained.

Turns out, I knew everything I needed to know about being a top secretary for my boss, and by the end of my first week, he called me into his office.

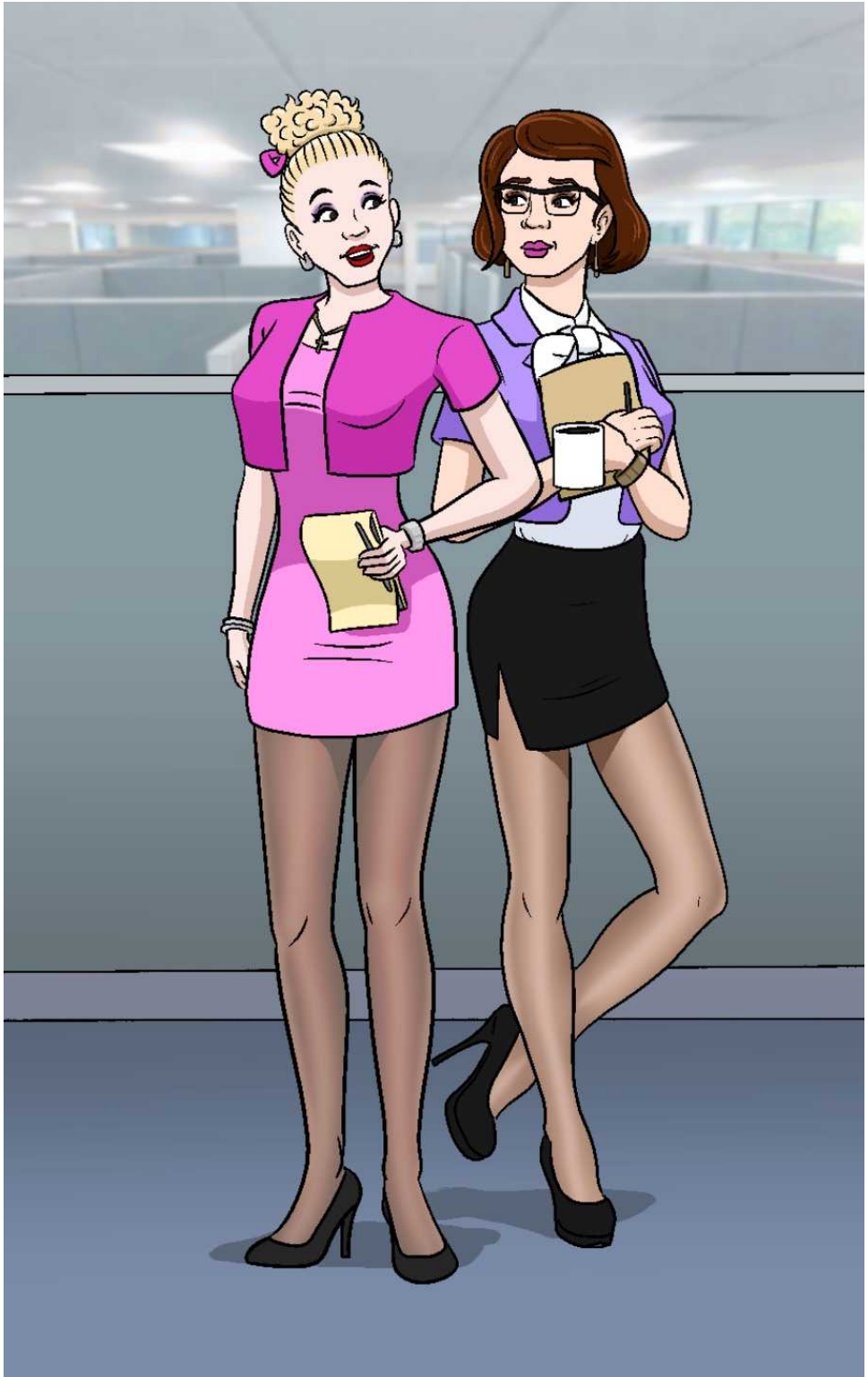
"Ms. McRae, I want to offer you the job permanently," he said. I was supposed to be on a 90 day trial of some sort, but I guess that my work had been that much appreciated.

I got my first paycheck, paid Lori what I owed her for rent and spent the rest on pampering myself. I bought a few new dresses for work at St. Katherine's, which felt absolutely sinful, as I had gone without my own clothes for so very long.

I went to the salon and had the girls touch up my light blond hair and have that bikini wax I'd been putting off for so long. Fortunately, that disgusting male growth down there had been removed by my doctor back in May, and it was no longer a concern for me. No unsightly bugles for me. After all, it just wouldn't be proper for a fair-skinned southern gal like myself to be havin' anything but my feminine charms between my legs.

I think I'm going to try and get Lori to have a Brazillian done, too. It really is the best. I just like being neat and tidy down there.

Dr. Sarah couldn't have been happier for me during our final appointment. She said I had been one of her best patients, almost as good as Lori. As I stand



here today, I do not understand what this therapy was supposed to accomplish, as I do not have a clue what it has done for me, but she insisted that I had come a very long ways since I began seeing her. Bless her heart.

If I live to be a hundred, I will never fathom the last thing she asked me. She wanted to know if I had seen Julio lately, and I had no idea what this woman was on about. Honestly.

Oh well, that's all behind me now.

Now I have the life I've dreamed about since I grew up down home in Tennessee. I have the most wonderful job working for the most handsome boss a girl could hope for, the closest friend I have ever had in Lori, and I've rediscovered my most important relationship of all, the one I have with Jesus.

Now, diary, I promise I will write more tomorrow, but for now, I have to get dressed in my church outfit, as Irene and Julie are picking us up for services and then tennis at the club.

That about puts the rag on the bush for me. Y'all take care now, ya' hear?

— Cristi

The End