

ICE STORM

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Chapter 18 - Claims

An operator burst-out with bad swear words as I made an inspection way up high in the cab. That took me aback, but he wasn't mad at me. He pointed to the problem on the ground where a self-propelled crane had dropped its crane arm. A body lay sprawled flat on the ground under the end of that crane arm.

My hard hat hadn't been tuned to this site, and my ear phone hadn't either. He reported to me what he heard as he heard it.

One of the immigrant workers, probably an undocumented illegal immigrant paid in cash by a subcontractor, had been hit when the crane collapsed. The victim never regained consciousness for which both of us and many other people were grateful. He had died by the time an ambulance arrived.

The crane had collapsed when a bolt had been withdrawn to change a pivot point. The dead man had been assisting with that. The man moving the bolt had been so devastated he went home, got drunk, and quit construction work.

Some times I wished Rick didn't send me into things. For this disaster he sent me as the witness to several government agencies and for a deposition.

I hadn't believed Rick the first few times he warned me about insurance companies, and how hard they could be. Now I did.

Rick had me come with him to every meeting. In my presence, they made an agreement to send money to the victim's family in Mexico. It wasn't all that much. On the way out Rick confided in me how sorry he felt for all of this. That man had come north to the United States as a teenager to support his family back in Mexico. Rick added "that had to be the best I could do for them".

I cried when I talked with Andrea about this accident, and then Andrea and Denny. They told me what a special person Rick was, and for me to learn everything I could from him. I talked multiple times with the Cross Dressers Support Group. My memory of that body lying crushed under the weight of that crane boom still haunts me.

One of the banks on a line of credit for a construction project threw a shit fit over percentages of construction progress and loan draw downs. Mr. Rick had me spend half a day with the accounting department. Then he called the bank.

On Rick's instructions I pointed out to the bank calling officer a few mea culpas, and then Rick told me to lower the boom. Figuratively speaking, that is. The boom would be that two days later I would be at that site. That is, I would be there with the

official clip board in my hand and my hard hat on my head.

They sent a man and two women from their loan administration department. None of them lasted an hour.

Back at the office I hid out in the Supply Order Department, but I told them I was only hiding, not supervising. Geraldine started the jokes, and then we were all laughing so much we had to tone it down. The phone rang. It was my secret ally at the front desk Sharlene saying Mr. Rick had arrived at the parking lot.

I only waited a few minutes, thanked my cross dressing buddies, and went to Mr. Rick's office. I found him in the break room making a cup of coffee.

I reported on those feeble footed loan officers, and then said I had a private question. I hoped to go into his office.

No such luck. "What is it, Sandy?"

Oh hell. "Mr. Rick, sir, why me? You have many more experienced people for inspections, loans, and special projects. Why are you sending me? What do I need to know?"

He held his coffee cup in both hands. "Kid. What's refreshing about you is your naivety. You don't support a family. You aren't afraid of your mortgage. You don't have to prevaricate or fudge the truth. You don't need much formal training. You just go barreling in where ever needed in your outrageous girl clothes, and knock 'em for a loop with that. You have your hard hat on your head proclaiming your masculine competency, and tell it like you see it. I dread the day you grow up and become like all the rest of us."

"Uh, sir, are you putting me on?"

"No, Sandy, I am not. A personnel consultant looked at this without telling you. Their assessment is you have no goals. That you have the emotional age of a two year old. Or at least you see so many things in black and white that you have some of the traits of one. No, before you ask, I didn't tell them you wear diapers like a two year old. I didn't tell Sam, either. Or the t-girls in Supply. I'd bet they all know because a few of them told me. Sorry to hit you between the eyes, but you asked. You seriously asked. And if you won't lie to me, I guess I had better not lie to you. Need to sit down after all these hits? I would."

I did sit down, but he didn't.

"I'm not your father, brother, uncle, cousin, Pastor, therapist, or any of that. I won't mislead you either. I hope you stay with us. Now, here's the next project I want you to take on."

I managed not to cry in front of him. I had one hell of a temper tantrum when I got home. I knew I had to stop that before Andrea arrived, so I ordered one of her favorite dinners as carry out from a restaurant. Denny arrived with her.

I managed to keep myself under control through dinner and clean up, and then I admitted I needed help.

We stayed up late. For better or for worse Andrea and Denny thoroughly agreed with him. They went further and said my mediocre grades at school and refusal to say what I wanted had to be a result of a very deep seated anger. I might be smart, yes, but that refusal to admit to myself what I wanted had to be too weird.

I also told the Cross Dresser Group on their use of the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous of admitting to God and another human being.

They listened. They made little comments. Two or three of them said they had been thinking of trying diapers. Then a girl wearing men's clothes calling herself Benjamin told the group they had just become a therapy group. "So get with it." We went overtime. They also quoted that slogan from the church. 'No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.'

I cried at that, which they understood. The group had become the one place where we could all come together and know we didn't have to explain who we were.

The office gave me one of those ear mounted telephones. They called me often enough tearing me away from some project to go dashing off to some other crises.

It went off in my ear early one morning when early meant 9:30 for the office but after two hours of work at a site.

"Sandy here."

"Sandy you dressed extra good today?"

"Uh, Sharlene, not really. What's up."

"They forgot to tell us you are being deposed today."

Fear gripped me. "Deposed. Thrown away like old garbage. Fired?"

"Oh my Gawd no, Sandy. You're golden around here as far as I can tell. That means the lawyers ask you a bunch of questions. Can you scurry home real fast and get into your best? I'll wait an hour before I tell them I caught you on the phone. Can you do that?"

She had become one of my best Guardian angels around that office. "Almost. I'll do my best. Save me some precious minutes, will you, Sharlene. I'll dash out of here unannounced if you will call and tell them that I had to go. OK?"

"Sure thing. You go."

I did go in my diaper as I walked out.

I took a quick shower, and put myself in fresh diapers and new silent plastic pants. I brushed my hair, used different lipstick, turquoise earrings, but didn't have time for my chipped fingernail paint. I wasn't very good at painting my fingernails anyway. I put on a new bra, inserts, and a rose colored one piece dress with a navy blue jacket. I arrived only forty minutes late.

Those lawyers were frightfully formal. They didn't get much past my name when one of them, the worst, asked why I wore girl clothes.

Over my dead body I thought am I going to tell a nasty person like you anything like that. "That's personal."

They had a big oral fight right there on the spot over whether they could ask me that. They ended that with an agreement to ask a judge.

"Covers a medical disability." Let them win, I thought, but only up to a point.

His eyes went to my bust.

OK, I thought, if you think I have big breasts. Maybe I should. That thought of enlarging my breast stuck in my head and wouldn't go away.

Nobody told me the subject of this deposition, of course. I understood when they got to a question about that Union Rep saying "you can't make me".

That mean one tried to shake me up, but I simply sat straighter and glared right back.

"You're badgering the witness. Move along."

He grinned. "Make me."

He and I laughed, but nobody else did. "I get it now. Badger away all you want. He did say that, so how many different ways do you want me to say 'he said that'?"

We got along great for the next twenty minutes, and then they sent me out of there. I drove straight to the office and told Rick. We had another laugh, and then he told me the subject of that law suit for a great big sum of money.

I blurted. "No shit. Oops, pardon me sir, I try not to swear. Upsets my girlish image."

"Makes you human Sandy. I don't expect to see any of that money, but that Union needs to behave, too." He put a finger to his lips in thought. "And a whole bunch of others need to behave too." He picked up a phone and punched numbers. "Sharlene. Send Tom the VP of Operations to the little conference room. Sandy and I will be there. Got it?"

Rick and Tom laid out for me they were going to bid on the biggest project ever. It was much bigger than anything this company had ever done. The competitors included the big multi-nationals, so more of our people would have to work on the proposal. Little ole me would be the force of 'more people'. They wanted me to pull my naive stunt of saying just a little too much on occasion. My first call was on one of the woman in the Jaycees who was a very junior bank commercial loan calling officer. Rick had been right. She fought her way into the upper level loan committees, with Rick telling me in advance what to assemble. He flew me to the West Coast for visiting a crane manufacturer. They gave me an introduction on how to work three cranes on the same site. That is without the crane arms colliding with each other way up there in the sky.

I very timidly asked Rick who could run such a big project. I secretly wished for Sam. His answer took my breath away. "You."

I almost put my hand to my sternum girl style.

“No, Sandy, I’m not going to ask you to boss around a bunch of old hardened farts. Projects are throwing 10,000 components up in the air hopping they all come back in the right order and miraculously fall together. Somebody has to watch that like a hawk. The Supply Office responds to you like a puppy dog to a boy, which is a big plus. Mostly, somebody has to know the project like the back of their hand, and watch everything happens on time, on queue, and in the right quality. Like concrete boring and grades of steel. You don’t have to know how to see it. Just know how to keep the inspectors doing their jobs, and be willing to call the bank and blow a whistle in their ear.”

“A whistle.”

“They are too cozy with the insurance companies. What do you think their reaction will be if the whole damn building has to be torn down for bad concrete on the second floor? Who is going to stand there in pretty girl clothes, scowl, and naively know she is damn right?”

The silence was so sharp it could have cut the sheet rock on the walls.

“Sandy. Take this to heart. There was a project near Washington, DC., before I was in this business. Some foreman let ‘em build on green concrete. Back then they didn’t have the fast curing concretes we have now. The building collapsed injuring many and killing a few. There was a manslaughter trial, and a few foremen served hard time. You think gruff old Sam can look a big executive square in the eye and say ‘go to hell’. And make it stick with them looking forward to the trip? No way. I just want you to protect my people, and if you do that, you protect this company.”

“Yes sir. I’ll ask lots of questions.”

“Exactly, Sandy. We’ll give you a portable computer keyed into the company records, but you secretly keep your own back up records. The next time one of those mean lawyers thinks they can intimidate you, guess what? No way. I thought you could stand up to them, which is why no one told you. You came through with your skirt blowing shamelessly in breeze. Your colors were flying. Sorry, we thought so, but today had to be the only way to find out.”

I remembered Andrea and Denny. “Put that job offer in writing. Sir.”

“No problem; will do. Now take this to heart Sandy. Your job is to be honest with me and this company. Be totally naive about it. Keep us out of jail. You don’t have to be a big executive. You keep right on being your nice sweet innocent self to everyone. The executives and myself will do any fighting, fudging, and prevaricating.”

“Yes, sir.”