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## **Rock Gods & Messy Monsters - Chapter 1**

### **One**

**T**he blood didn't bother Alex, but cleaning it up made her angry.

"Damn it," she cursed aloud as she surveyed the red stained walls and coagulated mounds of Langferd ooze around her boss' corner office.

Alex returned to her desk, her wildly improbable blonde hair already streaked stress magenta and anger black. It was coming to an end; Alex had to get out of her job. But with the worldwide recession and lines of job applicants she saw every day on her way into the building, she was lucky to have a job, especially in a major record company.

Alex put her backpack on the floor and unzipped the side of her head. She reached in and pulled out her brain, placing the throbbing gray matter in the customized, faux crystal cerebrum urn Acht Records had supplied her with her first day at the company. She had fought the procedure at first, refused to sign the Cerebrum Extraction Release form, but with times being as hard as they were, and with the knowledge that she had spent over six months unemployed before being offered this job, Alex knew she had no choice. And after wandering through the homogenous maze of Acht, up and down forty floors of identical gray hallways and glaring fluorescent lights, she had realized she would be better off if she removed all traces of thought and intelligence before commencing employment at the company. Unfortunately, these days she seemed to be developing the ability to think and feel without a brain in her head. And that couldn't be good.

Dread and negativity washed over her. Langferd was nearing. She looked up and smiled brainlessly as her five foot six, blood encrusted boss stormed past her and into his office.

"ALEX!" blew out of Langferd's door and into Alex's face.

She leapt to attention, her body automatically responding to the tone of his voice, and quickly entered his domain.

Langferd glared at her, his short Germanic blonde hair standing straight on end while his standard two cigarettes were both lit and smoking in his battery operated smokeless ashtray. His brown eyes bulged from their sockets, a precursor to a childish tantrum and possible blood vessel explosion.

Langferd pointed to the ooze stained walls of his corporate executive office, his hand shaking with uncontrollable rage. "Why isn't this mess clean?!"

Alex rushed to the oak cabinet end table next to Langferd's brown, calf skin sofa. She opened the door and snapped on her Playtex rubber gloves. She grabbed the sponge and ever-waiting bucket filled with sudsy water and attacked the walls with the vengeance of a professional cleaning woman. She wiped; she washed; she dunked and wrung. Her arms moved with lightning speed as she attempted to return the walls to their original executive office ivory, regulation color.

When the water turned the same deep red as the coagulated floret of blood dangling precariously from Langferd's neck, she knew she had to regroup and prepare herself for the second round of cleaning. Alex hurried out of Langferd's office, the bucket of now-sudsy blood firmly in her grasp yet still sloshing about her. She rushed into the corporate executive supply closet laundry room and emptied the blood water into the industrial-sized sink installed for just such emergencies. She rinsed the sponge as best she could and refilled the bucket with wall cleaner and water. She returned to Langferd's office and washed once again, trying to remove the magenta hue. When the walls diminished to a light pink tone, Alex realized she could clean no better, so she returned her cleaning equipment to its proper place and returned to her desk.

She sat uncomfortably in her Acht-issued black vinyl chair and fidgeted with the back-support cushion she had to buy after her ergonomically correct, company regulation seat nearly landed her in the hospital with back trauma. The company doctor blamed it on lack of exercise, not on the soft, unsupported, low-back chairs all the secretaries were forced to sit in. Alex turned on her computer and squinted through the glare from the overhead fluorescent lights. She typed in Langferd's revisions to his daily itinerary, reverse alphabetizing the executives who were also joining President DiMachio for lunch at one o'clock.

The shock brought her to her feet. Langferd had embedded neurological electric shock chips in Alex's body when she first started working for him, so with the push of a button, he could get her attention anywhere in the building. The second jolt ripped through Alex's ankles and nearly toppled her. If she didn't carry out her duty quickly, he would start shocking her all over.

Alex hobbled around her desk and out of her secretarial suite, limping down the hall toward the vending area and executive kitchen. As she turned the corner, she glanced through the doorway of the neighboring executive office and saw the Senior Vice President of Promotion's lingerie-exposed secretary sitting contentedly behind her desk, busily preparing herself for another day of doing nothing. Doing nothing can be a difficult achievement, especially when there was work to do, but Zena excelled. Her brain floated happily through clear cerebrum nutrient juice in the synthetic crystal Acht urn she proudly displayed on her desk. Zena was so proud to display her brain to any passerby she often left what she called her inner self in the urn full time, even at night and on weekends. Sometimes the promotion secretary would even sneak the vessel out of the building, her brain still swimming in nutrient juice, so she could show herself off to friends and family.

When Alex limped past Hellie, the executive helmsman and senior level receptionist, she knew she was nearing her intended destination. Alex had no time to stop and exchange their usual morning hello, but Hellie herself seemed preoccupied as she faced the aquarium stationed on her desk and tapped a light melodic tune on the fish tank glass with her regulation Ticonderoga number two pencil. Inside, twelve mutant sea creatures swam through the water, their tails swishing in time to the beat.

As Alex approached the vending area, she saw movement out of the corner of her eye. It was a brief flash, a whirlwind of repressed energy, but she thought she saw a tall, gangly man zipping down the hallway, handing cassettes to people right and left. She turned her head and saw him, head to toe in blue, even his hair and skin. When he whizzed by the snack area, emitting a short, dry cough, he tossed a cassette in Alex's direction. She caught the tape and looked down at the blue casing, noticing the band's name was "Bleu". By the time she looked up, he had disappeared around the corner, remaining only a vague memory and a flash of color.

"The Roadrunner," Alex said as she stared into the emptiness left in the man's wake.

The executive secretary stepped into the snack machine alcove. Langferd insisted on a cup of black coffee and a packet of Twinkies every morning, though Alex never quite understood what he did with the twin golden sponge cakes. Every day between eleven and two o'clock, not long after Langferd would arrive at work, Alex would enter his executive domain and find crumbs and splashes of white cream scattered about his desk and office. It seemed that more Twinkie fell about the room than into Langferd's mouth.

Alex pressed her face against the glass of all four machines, searching behind the bags and bars of chips, crackers and candy, hoping a packet of the golden sponge cakes had accidentally strayed into another row of junk food. She cringed when she realized the Twinkies were gone. Alex filled a special-ordered Styrofoam cup with steaming black coffee and sighed from an emptiness that overwhelmed her from within. She pulled out two dollars from the emergency snack fund she had recently begun keeping in her pockets and put them into the vending machine. She pressed the appropriate buttons and pulled out a packet of nacho cheese Doritos and a bag of Whoppers malted milk balls. She returned to her desk, her hands clutching her snacks and her boss' coffee while her hair flew wild and stress magenta behind her, a flag to her every mood and feeling.

Alex breathlessly entered Langferd's office and placed the cup of coffee on his desk. She rarely looked at him, but when she saw his arm reach out for the cup, and noticed even it was purple with rage, she stepped back and trembled.

Today was not going to be a good day.

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