

Ms. Judith Pomerantz watched her office door close behind her most recent client. She stamped the client's paperwork with the appropriate markings -- "Claim Denied" -- then signed her name where she had signed so many other such documents, and took a long swallow of black coffee as she put the manila folder in her out box. Then she took the next file from her Incoming stack, opened it and briefly scanned the papers inside in an effort to reacquaint herself with the facts of the case. After silently reviewing the file for several moments she made a conscious effort to erase the cynical frown from her face and pressed the intercom button that would signal the receptionist to send in her next case.

The door before her opened, allowing the lettering on the outside of the frosted glass panel to be read: J. Pomerantz, Department of Industry and Labor, Office of Disability Determination. The man who entered was rather tall, but his muscular frame prevented him from looking gangly. He had wavy, sandy-blonde hair, and was dressed in a fashionable pair of slacks and a smart, well-pressed, button-down shirt. Judith had had a lot of experience sizing up clients in her years with the Department. She could often tell as much from a client's appearance as she could from the job disability claim they'd filed. It struck her immediately that this man wasn't evidently unhealthy, and was, in fact, somewhat handsome - except for the huge, dark circles under his eyes, the slack and sallow expression on his face, and the air of misery that seemed to hang over him. *Jeez*, she thought to herself, *this guy needs some sleep*.

She waited as the man approached her desk, then she stood and reached her hand forward to clasp his. His handshake was loose and soft, as though she were grabbing a leather glove with no hand in it. Despite herself, Judith felt a shiver run up her arm at his touch. *If he's faking it, he's a hell of an actor*, she mused. "Good morning, Mr. Rosewood," she said. "I'm Judith Pomerantz, your caseworker. Won't you have a seat," she recited, indicating a chair before her desk, as she had done with so many clients before.

When they both were seated, she made a pretense of scanning Rosewood's open file again. As she looked at the papers she began her well-rehearsed spiel. "Now, Mr. Rosewood - may I call you Kenneth - or would you prefer Ken?"

When he answered her, his voice was deep and husky, his diction sluggish. In effect, he seemed as though he'd woken up from a deep sleep only moments before. "Uhm, Ken's fine, I guess. Hi." He looked at her, and Judith couldn't help but notice how empty his eyes were. Any suspicions she'd had were immediately set into stone in her mind; this guy's only disability was due to substance abuse. She was now convinced that he was having a love affair with either a bottle, a spoon, or a needle.

"Okay, Ken, then... Now, Ken, my job is to ascertain the facts of your claim and determine whether your job disability claim should be approved or denied. We can speed this process up with a few simple questions. First: do you swear under penalty of law

that all the statements you are about to make are true and factual to the best of your knowledge and belief?” She was bent over the forms, pen in hand, ready to check-off his answers.

“Uh, yeah, I do,” Ken replied.

“And that the statements you’ve made in this, your case file,” and Judith tapped the folder with her pen, “which bears your signature, are true and accurate to the best of your knowledge and belief?”

No reply came. Judith looked up from the folder and found herself staring at the top of Ken Rosewood’s head. She waited a moment for him to respond, and was greeted by a pronounced snore.

THIS IS A PORTION OF A LONGER STORY. THE STORY IS CURRENTLY IN PUBLICATION. CONTACT THE AUTHOR IF YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BOOK IN WHICH IT APPEARS.