

The Messenger by Miyako Jones

In the cubicle next to him some people were talking. The whispers distracted him from his work and pulled him into a world he would rather not be a part of. Mark was cheating on his wife again, this time with the new receptionist. She was the third one that year. He had met Mark's wife at the last office Christmas party. During the general introduction she was pleasant, but, afterward, her eyes revealed that she knew.

The fabric-covered walls of his cubicle were bare. There were no family photos because he was alone. There were no photos of friends because most had grown distant. There were no posters or comics because what he deemed interesting was not "work appropriate" despite what company policy said. Mark was a member of the group that persecuted him.

Mark's friend asked if the receptionist was any good. What proceeded was a long, crude description of her varying talents. According to Mark, she had once been a sex worker. He heard Mark tell his friend that he had a lunch date.

When he first started working at the company, Mark was pleasant. They had once gone out for drinks after work with a few other male employees. The few women in the bar were hanging on the arms of men like Mark. Mark made a comment about one woman's supposed sexual ability. He was the only one who didn't laugh.

As they were leaving, he quietly protested Mark's disrespect of the woman. He asked if he would have laughed if someone had said that about his sister. Instead of seeing his point-of-view, Mark had questioned his manhood and joked about him being a virgin. He told him that neither was any of his business. He told him that he was gay.

Thus began his persecution. Mark was popular around the office. Anything he said or did was emulated by those who sought to be his friends, against company policy or not. They were like teenagers.

On his lunch break he looked up a phone number on the company intranet. He called as he descended to the ground floor. By the time he left the building, Mark's wife was on her way.