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The Woman Who Wasn't There

by Sue Thompson

Sarah walked through the office, balancing her pile of books in her arms, struggling to stop them falling to the floor, but no one noticed, no one cared. No one came to her rescue.

Dressed in a long cotton flowery skirt that hung about her waist, unflattering, and plain. Her jumper hanging about her, too big for her skinny frame.

Everything about her screamed unfashionable. The shoes on her feet were too big, and should have been replaced many years ago. Her hair was unkempt and probably should have been washed, but she just never noticed, never thought about her appearance.

People walked past her, ignoring her, almost embarrassed by her presence, no one even knew her name.

She felt on the fringe, on the periphery of everything, time meant nothing to her, there were no coffee breaks, no meeting friends for lunch. She led a solitary existence. An outcast.

She carried out her duties in silence, filing, faxing, filling envelopes, over and over the same mundane jobs.

She watched them pass by her, laughing, they knew nothing about her yet she knew everything about them.

Bob who was having an affair with Melissa in HR; Sarah whose husband dressed up in her clothes whilst she was at work; Gill the office slut; Jim who hid a bottle of whiskey in his bottom drawer. Naomi who would sneak office stationary into her bag each week. Oh she knew it all, but she kept it to herself. Not telling a soul, because there was no one to tell. No one would listen, no one would pay attention.

She wanted to scream out. Tell them what she thought of them. Sometimes she just wanted to die; how would they feel would they even notice?

Sitting in the corner at her desk where she felt safe, her refuge, she kept an eye on the time, any minute now the boss would come out of his office and look around, as if he was looking for something, someone. She watched him everyday, it was a ritual and yet it was more. She knew who he was looking for, she knew that any minute his eyes would fall in her direction and he would look straight at her, he would hold his gaze for a moment and then turn and walk back into his office, closing the door behind him.

It is 5 o'clock and everyone is packing up to leave, they hurriedly close their computers down and put on their coats, eager to leave work behind them for the day.

The boss walks out of his office with a client.

“That is where Sarah sat,” he nods towards the corner.

“What happened to her?” The client replies.

“She didn't come in one day. The police said she had probably been dead in her flat all weekend. Sometimes I think I see her sitting there in the corner, where her desk was,” he pauses and sighs, “its as if she was never there.”