

Things are never as bad as they seem

by Victoria Cooper

Three women are standing in a dimly lit back office. It is strewn with stationery detritus from over-stuffed files to a broken office chair and a large humming photocopier glowers in the corner. The oldest woman, Margaret, is applying lipstick whilst looking into a small mirror on the wall.

“They’re all the same love, you’ve just got to get over it”, she presses her lips together and peers at herself.

A young woman sits on a low step, sniffing and dabbing mascara trails with a tissue.

“Did he offer you that job on the fourth floor then?” the woman between them bluntly asks. Laura is aged somewhere between them and is making tea.

Tracey looks stung; the slap of the question forces more tears.

“I didn’t know there was a job. I just wanted to go home”, Tracey wails emphatically.

“What you have to understand dear, is that Mike’s very, what’s the word, tactile that’s it. Always been a bit of a hugger hasn’t he Laura?”

“So, did you go in to see him or did he call you up?” Laura ignores her, “I know your friend in HR thinks he’s quite hot”. The fridge light shines onto Tracey’s trembling fingers.

“He’s never even talked to me before. I said I’d miss my bus, but he said he would be quick”, Tracey cries.

“I bet he did” Laura spits and hands Tracey tea.

Margaret faces her, “Dear you just have to accept it and remember things are never as bad as they seem. Frankly no one would take much notice of you; did you see his figures last month? My advice would be remember Margaret’s mantra: light and breezy,” she flicks her hair and throws up her hands in demonstration. “Yes? Light and breezy”, she confirms.

She rolls her eyes at Laura, then flounces out of the office leaving a lingering scent of Chanel No. 5.

Laura is still scowling at Tracey. Her fingers tapping.

Tracey looks up at the sound, hesitates and says, “he said I’d lose my job if I didn’t... you know do it.

“Do what?”

“I couldn’t look at him. How did he know I want to be in Marketing? He said he could help me If I just did it.”

“Do what?”

Gulping back sobs Tracey managed to say, “I believed him”.

“My parents keep telling me to take chances Tracey, don’t get stuck Tracey, you need to push for yourself Tracey. But he said I was just their type. Just his type.”

“What did he do?”

“I thought I was being taken seriously, I thought he meant it about my designs. But then he started to get really angry. He started hitting his hands on the desk and his face went”

“What did he do Tracey?” she slowly asked.

“The CEO was actually listening to my ideas. But then he said it, like it was nothing, like it was normal. He got so angry when I said no.”

“Oh God” Laura said quietly.

“He’s so big, he’s probably bigger than my Dad. I couldn’t even say goodbye to Dad this morning”.

“You need to tell me what happened Tracey. I need to know so I can do something this time.”

Tracey looks up at Laura, as if realising for the first time that some one else is there.. “But she knew. Margaret knew.”

“Margaret?”

“She told me to go upstairs.”