

A Job for Life

by Juliet Hitchcock

'I woke at six, as usual. I needed no alarm clock. I was already comprehensively alarmed.' Silence followed Murray's smug words and he shot his audience a peevish look.

Only Owlsh seemed to be listening, he blinked two large eyes and shuffled his chicken wire wings. Murray pursed his lips and decided to help them get to the punchline. He waved his left arm in the air and pulled his sleeved down, exposing raw, puckered skin, and an ugly rend which dominated most of the ruined limb. Nestled amongst the pus and tendons was green a Bakelite alarm clock, its second hand had fallen off, but the hours and minutes still ticked.

'Comprehensively alarmed.' He shoggled the limb and blood started to seep from the tender flesh.

Owlsh turned his head away, a whole hundred and eighty degrees.

'Clearly I'm only one whose had their coffee this morning!' Murray grumbled. He picked up a spanner and wiped dried blood from its head. 'Speaking of coffee - De'Longhi?' the dark corners of the shed shuffled, but nobody came forward. *'De-Looooonnnghiiiiiii.'*

A trundle of wheels answered Murrays call as finally De'Longhi rolled forth. Her feet had been replaced with office chair wheels, her lovely long legs curved upwards, to her hips which now supported a rusty coffee machine, upon which her heavy bosom rested nestled amongst the stacks of cups.

'Cappuccino,' Murray demanded. 'Anyone else?' No reply.

De'Longhi smiled weakly and started his order. Her gel nails were chipped and as she steamed the milk flakes of pink tumbled into the froth, where they spun and twisted.

'You do make a fine coffee,' Murray offered her rare praise. 'Shame you had to go on maternity leave, the office wasn't the same without you. I told you when you started, we are a family. You don't walk away from your first family.' He glanced down at her wheels and smirked.

De'Longhi poured the espresso and topped it with steamed milk and froth. Her mottled hands were shaking and a maggot fell from her flesh and plopped into the beverage.

'Extra protein,' Murray smiled, his dry lips stretching thin over stained teeth as he took the cup. As De'Longhi retreated and he slapped her behind playfully.

Owlsh hooted reproachfully.

'What?' Silence. 'Yeah I thought so. No backbone, you were a weak and pathetic security guard and whilst you've changed a great deal you're still pitiful.'

He sipped his coffee for a moment, then pulled the sheets from the workbench. Gary the intern lay there, his mouth bound with gaffer tape. Next to him was the office fax machine, the one that only he had been able to work, when Gary left his placement, returning to college the damned thing had just given up.

Murray ran a finger along the machine, 'You weren't the only one who missed him. But he's here now.' He smiled at Gary, 'Aren't you.' The lad's eyes bulged and he strained at the telephone cords binding his limbs. 'No, no my dear boy don't fret, this is a job for life. Think of it, lifelong security, not many companies offer that anymore.'

Murray turned away from Gary to consider his sketched-out plans, he had been careful to consult with the fax machines manual while planning Gary's promotion. Tinkering was a fine art you could never be too careful.

'Tell me Gary, where do you see yourself in ten years' time?' he asked wondering if he had left enough room for upgrades, what if the office went fully digital, switched to email entirely. 'Do you know how to send and receive emails? You're young, is that something you've learnt at your fancy college?' Murray turned back to the youth, but Gary wasn't on the workbench anymore, nor was the fax machine.

'Gary?'

A flash of white and something heavy smashed into Murray's face. The fax machine. Gary swung again, this time striking Murray in the stomach.

'I quit!' Gary roared as Murray slumped to the ground. He turned and rushed towards the door where he struggled with the bolts. Just as he pulled the last one free Owlsh swept in, leaping from the shelf in a flurry of wire and feathers. It didn't take him long to subdue the youth.

Murray sat up, shaking his head sadly at Gary. But he quickly brightened and smiled at Owlsh, 'somebody's getting their bonus this year.'

