

ANGELA'S FIRST DAY

Angela took a deep breath and pushed open the office door. Instantly the hubbub of people at work seemed to die away. Seventy or eighty people ceased talking, writing or filing, and looked at her. Even the phones stopped ringing. It felt like one of those scenes in the movies where everything stops when the bad guy walks into the saloon. Angela nearly ran out again, but knew she couldn't bear the humiliation of running away. She noticed a blonde girl sitting near her who, if not exactly smiling, at least didn't appear hostile.

Angela's throat felt very dry. "I'm looking for Mr Baker," she squeaked.

"Office at the end," nodded the woman, and turned, no longer interested, back to her work.

The open-plan office was large, but the walk to the office was longer. Angela squirmed under the gaze of all those people sizing her up. She tried at first to keep her head up and show some self-confidence, but it leaked out with every step. She didn't like the way some of the men looked at her. She thought some of the women looked openly hostile. She tried to avoid making eye contact with them. She had never imagined that a single office could be such an unfriendly place.

At last she made it to the door to Mr Baker's office, signified by the simple yet forbidding legend "Manager" etched onto a Formica sign and, torn for a moment between the desire to seek refuge and fear of the ogre that dwelt beyond the door, she knocked timidly.

Mr Baker sat behind a large wooden desk with a leather top. He wore a dark blue

suit and a maroon tie, and looked very powerful. She thought it strange that she should feel so afraid of him, when she knew so many people who were more influential. But he was to be her manager, so she had to make sure she impressed him.

She had worn her best suit for her first day at work, together with a new, cream-coloured blouse, with a lacy collar. Now she felt very over-dressed, noticing girls her own age wearing ski-pants and T-shirts.

"Never mind that lot out there, Angela," said Mr Baker warmly, as if he could read her thoughts. "You'll find them quite pleasant once you get to know them. They're just naturally curious about you, that's all."

After the ferocity of the office environment, Mr Baker's jovial warmth was like a cup of cold water in the middle of the desert, and Angela began to relax. They sat down together at a small conference table, and the secretary brought them coffee. Angela was sure that the secretary scowled at her, but Mr Baker didn't seem to notice.

They chatted for a bit, and then Mr Baker picked up the phone and sent for a girl called Cathy, whose job it was going to be to show her around and get her settled in.

Before Cathy arrived, Mr Baker delivered his final homily. "Remember, Angela, that this lot aren't going to do you any favours. If you want to get on, you're going to have to earn it, and not only that but make sure everybody out there knows you've earned it. God knows, you've got the ability to get right to the top here, but we're all going to make sure you do it the hard way."

Angela tried to smile, and thanked him for his wisdom. Inside she thought it was

blisteringly unfair. Why should everybody be so set against her, when they didn't even know her? After all, it wasn't her fault that her father owned the company.