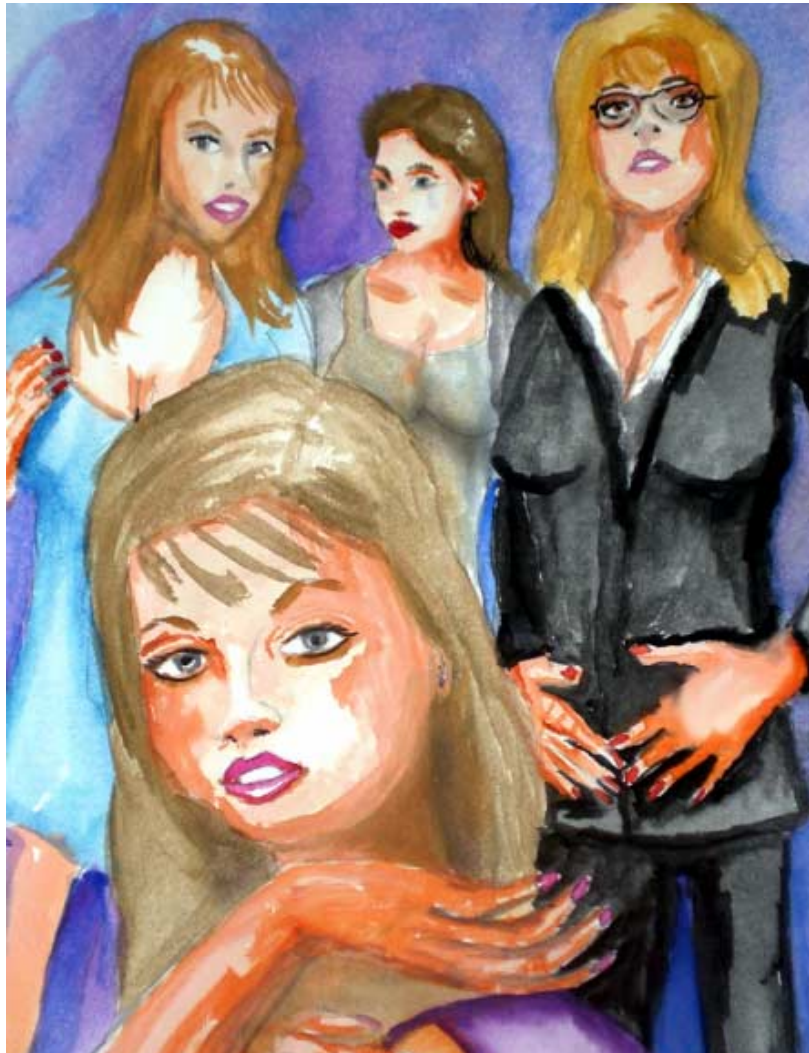




Reluctant Press presents:

Triumvirate

Maureen Glasgow



A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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Triumvirate

By Maureen Glasgow

OFFICE

The word was out at the office. Words actually. Words like, *downsizing, reorganization, and early retirement*. Everyone was really scared, especially when we all found out that a real shark with a fantastic reputation, Dorothy Holmes, had been given the job of Vice President in charge of Personnel and had recently been installed in the building where I worked. She was known throughout the company as a woman to fear under these and other circumstances, a real 'hatchet man'. At Thirty three, six years older than myself, she wielded appreciably more power than any previous occupant of her luxurious office had, though nobody at the managerial level – or higher - was at all interested in meeting with her as heads began to roll quickly after interviews with her.

With employment in the area at what amounted to a near standstill the potential loss of a job of any kind was extremely traumatic to everyone, myself included. I worked as a filing clerk for an elderly lady by the name of Luanne Adstred. She had been nice to work for and I was very sorry to see her take early retirement after her own meeting with Dorothy. I don't really know why she quit – maybe saw that life would be different under the new boss? She only had a small staff, six ladies and myself. When she made the announcement of her departure, she notified us that we would all be reassigned under a manager called Anne Maxton. We were all sorry to lose her but all sighed with relief as Anne was known to be one of the nicer ladies to work for.

Miss Holmes normally interviewed none of the lower level employees like myself. Any of us who were to be let go suffered that particular fate at the hands of our individual managers. One thing was particularly noticeable though: there weren't many men in the organization to begin with, but one by one, they started to disappear from the ranks as

they were let go. My co-workers started looking at me with various degrees of sympathy. It seemed obvious that my days with the company were numbered.

It sounds terrible, but I started feeling relieved when three of the six ladies in my group were terminated. As I hadn't made any close friendships, there is probably some excuse for my cold heartedness – but nobody ever said that life is fair. I also figured that a fifty percent cut in one organization was probably considered enough. With any luck, I was now safe.

But the afternoon of the Monday following Luanne's retirement, Anne Maxton dropped by my desk.

"Billy? You busy just now?"

"Not very Miss Maxton. Do you need anything?"

"Not exactly. Dorothy Holmes wants to talk to you if you have a moment."

My mouth was dry immediately, but I managed a weak smile. "Yes. I *think* I can spare Dorothy a moment." Made an audible gulp, then tried – not very successfully for a touch of humor. "Nice knowing you Anne."

She shrugged. "I don't know what she wants to discuss Billy. Honest. Just relax. Think about it. If she wanted you axed? I'd probably get that assignment."

I thought about it. "That makes sense Anne, but it doesn't make me feel any more secure for some reason. She wants to talk to me right now?"

Anne nodded. "Yup. Lots of luck dear!" She laughed.

As I walked to Dorothy's office I could actually *hear* the silence amongst my coworkers and practically feel the ax above my head ready to fall. Her secretary, an overweight lady by the name of Amy smiled coldly at me and waved me through. "Miss Holmes has been expecting you," she said coldly.

I felt like I'd just been reprimanded for dawdling and wanted to explain that I'd only just been told, but was too intimidated, so walked into the office expecting the worst.

Miss Holmes was writing at her desk. An attractive blonde lady, she was always immaculately dressed and coiffed. I'd often heard the other girls make envious comments about her shoes, handbags, and other accessories. From previous experience I had some personal knowledge of nail and hair care and was well aware that some serious money was spent maintaining these aspects of her appearance. That morning she wore mustard colored tailored skirt and jacket with a pale blue silk blouse, open at the neck to show a heavy gold chain. She wore a matching bracelet on her left wrist and plain gold circle earrings.

She looked up from the document she'd been reading then smiled, showing perfect white teeth.

"Do you prefer Billi or Bill?" She asked nicely.

"Billi will be fine Ms. Holmes," I replied nervously.

"You don't mind me asking? But your name is spelled B I L L I here in your folder. Is that a typo?"

"No Miss Holmes. My stepmother wanted my name changed to Billie, but made a mistake when she was doing the paperwork."

"Changed your name?"

I sighed. "I was just a little kid when she came into my life. My name was Gregory – but she absolutely hated that name. Talked my dad into letting her change it. I then got stuck with Billi."

"Didn't you raise hell?"

"Oh no ma'am. I was too young – and my step mom was not somebody you raised hell with. Still isn't." I said with a smile.

"Well, Billi, I insist you call me Dorothy." She smiled and pointed wordlessly to a seat across the desk from her. "We have to speak – privately, of course. If you accept the job, I'm about to offer you, we'll be spending lots of time together and I'd just as soon do without the formality if we can," she added, seemingly oblivious to my surprise as I sort of collapsed into the chair she'd indicated.

Then she continued. "But first a few questions if you don't mind?"

At my stunned nod, she asked her next question. "Why did you attend two years of college and not go for your degree?" Run out of money?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'd paid my way through to that point. It just got to be too much of a financial load to go on with my education after that." I answered. "There's very little job market close by and I just didn't have enough."

"Yes. I see that you worked as an assistant in a beauty salon to help pay your way through your two years. Interesting. You couldn't continue doing that?"

"No ma'am. The additional academic load I was faced with after that was just too much. Not only that, I was exhausted. Came to the conclusion that I wouldn't make too much of an engineer. Sort of hoped I could go back later. Try something else, you know? But from one thing or another, I haven't made it."

She nodded understandingly. "You also attended a Beauty School during high school I see." she remarked. "Rather unusual for a male?"

"Yes ma'am. My Stepmother, Irene, who raised me, thought I'd make a good cosmetologist. It was a friend of hers who owned the beauty shop where I worked" I added, "And not only that? Work was pretty scarce. One took what one could get."

"You say she raised you. No biological mother or father?" She politely asked.

"No ma'am. My mother died in a car accident when I was very young, and my father died a couple of years after he married my stepmother. But I'd rather not go into that any further if you don't mind." I replied. Found myself blushing.

She smiled sympathetically. "Of course not dear. I apologize for prying. Tell me though. You also attended Elite Secretarial Academy after you left college. That's the top secretarial school, public or private in the nation, in its field. The two years there must have cost you money. How did you manage that?"

"A student loan, and assistance from my stepmother" I replied.

“Ah! I see. You graduated from that school high in your class, but then seem to have taken a series of low level clerical jobs, then end up working here starting what? Two years ago?”

I nodded, and she made a notation on the paper in front of her, which I recognized as my personnel folder.

“Yes. So now you're working here. You're working as a clerk, but could make more than your current salary as a secretary. I'm a little lost. What's been going on Billi? This doesn't make much sense to me.” She said this with an inquisitive tone to her voice.

“It's sort of a rebellion against control Miss Holmes. At least, I think so. Mother Irene always wants to pick my careers for me; Beautician, secretary... women's jobs. She put me through both the beautician's and secretarial schools. I always thought she wanted me to be some kind of sissy, and I just won't play her game.” I replied. “I stay with her because that's all I can afford – but at least I have the satisfaction of making my own career.”

I'd really said the wrong thing. Dorothy looked at me through squinted eyes and shook her head. “That is the most unbelievable, macho, Neanderthal, backward statement I've heard in a couple of years, at least! I suppose you think I'm in a “*man's*” job? Sissy indeed!”

She shook her head and paused thoughtfully before speaking again. “I should let you go right now. Unfortunately, for the position of private secretary, you're the most qualified person in the office and I am a firm believer in offering jobs under me to the most qualified. So I'll give you a choice. You can refuse this *female* job I've been thinking of offering you - and accept your lay-off notice just now, or you can apologize for the remark you just made and listen to the job offer. What will it be, Billi?” she concluded.

I was in shock at the speed of her reaction. Knew I'd blundered. Was well aware that if I lost this particular job, the only possibility I had of getting work nearby was at a beauty salon – which although probably higher paying, offered none of the fringe benefits or security of my current position. As much as I hated apologizing to her for my remarks I did so out of my instinct for survival.

“I'm very sorry Ms. - I mean Dorothy. My mummy - I mean Mother Irene - taught me much better than that.” I said apologetically.

“Yes dear I know - I mean, I'm sure she did. Don't worry. I forgive you this time.” She fixed her eyes on mine. Seemed to be debating with herself on what to say, and then finally spoke. “Tell me, what would your reaction be if I told you that the next time you made a comment like that I would spank you?”

I just stared blankly at her, and she continued by explaining. “I am a very physical type person and a firm believer in the efficacy of corporal punishment. I think it only fair to warn you of this. If you work for me, I prefer you to know where you stand or. .” She added, “. Or over my knees – whatever is appropriate” She smiled to show that she was only joking.

She paused again and took stock of my stunned reaction. “By your facial expression, you're either surprised or offended. I can understand your surprise at someone in my position making such a threat, but this interview is being recorded.” She pointed to a machine on her desk, and I noticed that the 'record' light was on. “I did speak jokingly but it's only

fair to say that if I ever DO spank you? You can bring suit if you wish, but you would have a helluva job winning, because by accepting the job after what I'm telling you, you are also accepting the fact that I will punish you in such a manner if the situation arises!"

She continued. " And? If it's not surprise on your face? I don't really understand why such a statement would possibly offend a weak young man like you. Let's face it. Small weak women have been spanked by more physical males for centuries. It's only a question of physical superiority, that's all. Didn't your real mummy – or mummy Irene - ever spank you Billi? When you were naughty that is? They were bigger and stronger than you then. I'm bigger and stronger now. Why would you take offense at the thought of me spanking you if you were bad?"

My mouth dropped open, but I finally found words. "I can't believe you would ask such a question! What makes you think I'd ever let you do such a thing to me?" I asked in shock.

She grinned a mite wolfishly. "Whether you'd *let* me or not is totally immaterial. Face it. I am two inches taller than you and probably outweigh you by twenty pounds. That twenty pounds is not soft, feminine, fat. It's all muscle. I lift weights for strength, not definition. I run every day, and I have a martial arts black belt. If I so desired, right now I could probably have you over my knee in about thirty seconds. So please don't even think of *letting* me!"

She said all of this very confidently then added. "Anyway? Consider yourself warned. Now, as for your stepmother. She sounds as if she rules the roost. True? You attended two schools you didn't want to go to. You work for a woman boss here. You're obviously under the control of a woman at home. Yet you say that you're rebelling against female control? Doesn't sound like much of a rebellion to me! All I can figure is that your stepmother has something on you Does she?

Fully on the defensive, I replied. "Yes! You're absolutely correct! Because she holds the purse strings. She always did. She does now. She won't help me out at all financially, because I won't work at the professions she chose for me. My father left because she had him on a small allowance, one year into the marriage. He had a *small* gambling problem, so she had him put *everything* in her name. He couldn't afford to take me with him when he left, but was working towards that when he died. Then she had me take out student loans that I'm still paying off, and I can't afford to pay them – and live anywhere else but with her! That's the hold she has on me!"

Dorothy smiled, sympathetically now. "Oh Billi, I am sorry. I didn't mean to pry to that extent. You've told me much more than I need to know. You sound upset. Would you like to take the rest of the day off dear, and continue this tomorrow?" She asked consolingly.

"No, I'll be fine. Please? I'd like to hear more about the job offer." I replied, a little embarrassed that I'd half spilled my guts, and that she was talking and using exactly the same tone that I'd heard her use to girls in her employ. In many ways it was similar to the tone that Irene used on me.

She spoke now. "Good. The job I'd like you to fill will be as my personal and private secretary here at the office, and also my traveling secretary on the road. Amy, my current girl is unhappy at having to move to this locale and wishes to transfer back to the main of-

face to be closer to her family. I'll also admit that she is leaving me in quite a bind. Pisses me off to be perfectly honest. I could probably hire a more experienced secretary than you, but there wouldn't be enough time to train her - as Amy has decided she wants to leave very quickly. That is why I'd much prefer to hire someone from here who is more conversant with the way things are done. Still interested?"

At my silent nod, she continued. "After a ninety day evaluation period, you will be reclassified to the position of Executive Assistant. The pay will be almost three times your current salary, full benefits, paid vacation, travel and expense account, as well as a clothing and grooming allowance." She looked at me seriously. "You'll have to look your best at all times." She stated firmly. Then she smiled and dropped her voice down to a confidential whisper. "I inherited Amy and couldn't get rid of her. It'll be nice to finally have someone smart looking working close to me that can look decent. She's far too fat and sloppy for me."

I had started gawking at her as I heard what she was saying. She smiled at my expression and continued. "Now. I want you to be fully aware that here's where I'd put your cosmetology skills to good use." She smiled engagingly. "I'll need your assistance in maintaining my appearance. I must inform you that **this** is a non-negotiable condition of employment! It's only fair to add that I expect to be quite demanding in this respect. I'll need your assurance that you will not consider it too *sissified* an occupation?" The last was uttered with a great deal of underlying sarcasm.

I ignored it. My head was reeling! THREE times my current salary? Possibly get out from under my stepmother's control? Finally! For EVER! Travel! All sorts of perks! I just licked my lips and shook my head as a negative to her question. Then, nervously, in case she'd misunderstood my head movement, managed to babble "Oh no Dorothy - I'd be glad to do anything for you along those lines."

"Excellent!" she said, then continued, "I have a favorite stylist - Monica - who I frequent as often as I can. She has her own salon," She cocked her head and looked at me approvingly. "I'd expect that you might want to make full use of her and her full line of services at the beginning. It would be silly not to put your grooming allowance to good use. Not only that? I'd like your opinion of her skill level and that would be a good way for you to get it."

She then shook her head and grinned a little. "Unfortunately she's extremely popular and has a mind of her own. I can usually, only get an appointment with her once every two weeks or so. But that's getting away from the subject. All I'm trying to say is that she is the one I use for establishing my "look." Often I need a quick do, a manicure, and a make up repair on short notice. That is where you would come in. Just don't always expect a lot of notice."

She sighed "I can't get Monica to come here or my home on short notice. Nor could I possibly get her to go on the road with me. If you take this job, you'll always be required to be readily available for such assignments." She paused "In all fairness, I must warn you that I am exceedingly fussy about my hair and also very demanding. I am not filled with sweetness and light at those times. Do you understand? Want to hear more about the job?"

Bemused by this offer of freedom from financial woes and my stepmother's domination, I nodded. I didn't listen too well to what this woman was telling me for the rest of the discussion. I did remember later that she even told me that I would probably raise some jealousy in the ranks of the female employees. "Yes Billi" she said, "Sexism even exists amongst females. Some consider a private secretary's job – because, that's what the job really is, despite the actual title - to be a plum job and an entirely female position. You might want to take that into consideration as well." She finished up with. "Okay. Do we have a deal?"

Still somewhat stunned, I nodded my head in agreement. She reached over the desk with an outstretched hand and I shook it. Could feel the strength in her fingers. It was almost like shaking a guy's hand who wants to show that he's stronger than you. She held it for a few seconds longer than was absolutely necessary.

"Good. You can start next Monday," she smiled, and stood up. I was effectively dismissed "Thank you for this opportunity Dorothy" I said.

She smiled, nodded, and turned off the recording machine.

OFFICE

Working for Dorothy Holmes turned out to be slightly embarrassing. She had cut out so many jobs, that in the office floor where we worked, I was the only remaining male amongst about thirty people.

Dorothy was there of course and she had four managers reporting to her. As she was the top executive there, I effectively became the senior secretary because of her position. There were about another twenty-two or three analysts, again all women.

The Personnel department was actually a Division unto itself. The principle function was to perform research on questions faxed or phoned in from the managers in the line divisions. Once the purge was over and the dust had settled, the rest of the company noticed the gender imbalance and it didn't take long for the division to become "Dorothy's Harem" – I was probably the only one who didn't care for that, but the other girls liked it, as it gradually become apparent that Dorothy, though tough, was fair.

There are eight other ladies who will appear regularly in this story – the four managers reporting to Dorothy and their secretaries. These were:

Ann Maxton. Secy. Nancy Perston

Geri Hastings. Secy. Elaine Wilson

Drew Gray Secy. Jane Wilson (Elaine's twin sister)

Sandra White Secy. Marge Kohn

My start wasn't too auspicious. Amy was worse than useless. There was obviously a deep schism between her and Miss Holmes but neither ever discussed what had caused it, and I never asked. She was only scheduled to show me what to do for four days, but only turned up the first day, called in sick the next two, then showed up her last day to say goodbye to her old friends – not that she had that many, the old crowd! Her obvious desire to harm her old boss on any way possible made me all the more determined to be the best secretary I could be.

I soon discovered that the other secretaries had detested her. She'd made it very obvious that she considered herself a cut above them and treated them accordingly. Naturally they were delighted to have somebody younger replacing her – and went out of their way to help me make the transition. Amy disappeared out of my life without a trace and left me to do my job – something I was very happy with.

Like any good private secretary I had to screen all of Miss Holmes calls and visitors. I also took dictation for memos and reports and was often brought into her office to take minutes of meetings. I did all of her record keeping and filing, maintaining the files in my office. I also ran the occasional errand for her. Also being responsible for her schedule as I was, I was delighted to see that she had no business trips set up for a fair period of time. Thought that this would give me a chance to ease into my role a little better.

There were however, a lot of embarrassing chores associated with the job as I discovered on what seemed to be an ongoing basis. The fact that my desk was immediately outside Dorothy's office served to underline my position as her subordinate. One of my chores was to serve her morning coffee or tea. Of course I'd had to make both so that they would be ready for her when she came in. This necessitated me getting in to work ahead of her. She preferred both beverages to be decaf, with the coffee flavored, the tea herbal. I would usually bring her first cup of whatever she chose and be given my assignments for the day. She liked me to carry her cup in on a small wooden tray.

Naturally, as she had her own personal coffee maker and tea brewer. I was responsible for both. This sometimes necessitated me serving the beverages of choice to the managers who attended meetings in her office. The left side of my desk faced her office with a small window there. When she wanted coffee or tea, she would rap on the window. She'd brandish a coffee mug then or teacup and smile. This way, I was informed what I had to pour for her.

A more embarrassing facet of the job was the way she made it really obvious that I sometimes did her hair, makeup and nails, especially her nails. When someone complimented her she would make sure to tell them how much time I'd spent that day tending to her hair or manicures.

"He's so good, I wonder if he doesn't practice at home on himself," someone said once in my hearing. Dorothy laughed. "I may have him do just that!" she replied.

She'd often want her nails done when all the girls were on coffee break and standing around talking. She'd walk out of her office and hold her nails up in full view of everyone. She'd wiggle her fingers and silently motion for me to come to her office. She'd then sa-shay back through the door, hands held high and fingers spread, her perfect hair swaying back and forth while I had to rush and get my instruments, following behind her like a servant.

One time she came to a full stop inside her office. Paused. Glanced at her watch.

"Why don't we do my toes today as well Billi? We should have time," she stated.

"I think you've forgotten, Miss Dorothy." I reminded her respectfully. "You have a meeting with your four managers in about fifteen minutes."

“No Billi. I hadn't forgotten, but this is just an informal get together with my subordinates. No minutes to take. So? You can do my nails while I chat with the other ladies.”

That meeting was another exercise in embarrassment to me. I had to sit there like a servant to a woman, while she and her lady friends chatted about a number of subjects pertaining to office activities and personnel issues, motivation and the likes.

Dorothy brought up a point that raised quite a lot of discussion – networking with peers, and they all agreed that women had to make a conscious effort to make 'old-girl' networks wherever possible.

“Yes! Dorothy concluded. You gals and I are a network. Okay, I know that I'm the boss, but there has to be informal get-togethers so that we can swap information amongst ourselves. Billi? Make a note to yourself on your calendar to remind me to set up informal meetings at least once a week.”

Then she added. “Billi? I think that it's very important that *you* start getting together with the other secretaries as much as possible. I've noticed you keep pretty much to yourself. That's got to stop! I want you to network with the other girls.”

“Are you talking about the our secretaries?” Ann Maxton asked.

“Oh yes! I don't want her – I mean him – getting overly friendly with the clerical types. Want him to concentrate on creating a secretaries network”

From the amused glances that flew between the lady managers I knew that Dorothy's slip of the tongue in referring to me as 'her' had not gone un-noticed.

This was bad enough – but worse was to follow.

When I was finished with her fingernails, Dorothy scrutinized them intently, and then made me apply another coat to one nail.

“Very good Billi! I'm so happy with the job that you're doing. Now would you give me a pedicure as well?”

“Very well Miss Holmes. But?”

She looked at me, puzzled. “But? But what?”

“You have stockings on Miss Holmes” I said nervously.

“So? Take them off for me. My fingernails are still wet!” she said calmly, as if to an idiot. Then she stood up and kicked her shoes off.

In front of four amused women, not making the slightest attempt to hide their scorn, I knelt on the floor and, with my face blood red, lifted my manager's straight skirt up to reveal her shapely thighs – and the suspender straps that supported her stockings. I unfastened everything delicately then carefully rolled her stockings down and off her legs.

“WOW! Bet he would make a great maid! Look at how careful he is with your stockings Dorothy!” Geri Hastings was saying.

“I'm positive he will!” Dorothy said casually, the inference plain.

Then like a subjugated slave I had to kneel and work on Dorothy's feet, which I lifted and propped up one at a time on a little stool in front of me. Put cotton wool balls in between each toe and applied polish very carefully to her exquisite toenails.

"Oh Jesus!" Ann Maxton was saying, "I've never had a pedicure! That looks marvelous!"

"Never?" Dorothy asked. "You're kidding!"

Then she snapped her fingers excitedly. "There's an idea for motivating you gals! Top group performance for the week gets Billi to do a manicure and a pedicure the following week!"

"Like he's a prize?" Geri asked.

"Wow! What a great idea!" Ann said.

But Dorothy started shaking her head regretfully. "No. On second thoughts, I don't want competitions like that. Can raise too much bad feeling."

"Aw shit!" Ann exclaimed, grinning. "I would have liked that!"

"No." Dorothy said. "You misunderstand me. I'll just make Billi available to all you ladies – just don't overdo it now! One manicure – and one pedicure a week!"

"But how will we know if he's free at any particular time? First come first served?" Drew Gray asked.

"That sounds fair to me," Dorothy said. "But do call him and see if he's busy. Billi? If any of these ladies call you? I want you to give their requests high priority. If you have any doubts about whether their requests conflict with work you're doing for me? Just ask me. You don't have any objections to working on these lovely ladies, do you Billi?"

What was I to say? I knew that all the women were smirking at me. The last remaining male in the whole division working as a manicurist – at their beck and call!

"No Miss Dorothy" I said. "No problem."

"Isn't she just the sweetest thing?" Miss Dorothy said – and leaned forward and patted me on the head!

There was no attempt to correct her error in assigning my gender this time.

OFFICE

She had not been kidding about my having to network with the other secretaries. From then on, it became a routine custom for me and the other secretaries to have our coffee breaks at my desk and, if we didn't go out for lunch, take our lunch breaks together at any other secretary's desk

At first, though it was unstated, I was 'head girl', owing to my position as Dorothy's secretary. This didn't last long however. I'm small boned and slim. Not very tall. No striking features at all – other than my hair, which is quite nice and long. The secretaries were like their managers. Slim, and always elegantly dressed. Hair and makeup perfect. I was like a burro in amongst a pack of thoroughbred racehorses. Nancy Perston, being the Sr. Manager's secretary was next in the pecking order under me. She was deferential the first day or so, but soon saw that I didn't have the necessary self-confidence or personal charisma to 'run' the group.

The third day we met, she casually suggested that we should all take turns at serving up the group's coffee when we got together for chats. I couldn't figure why everyone gave

me strange looks when I agreed and said it was a fine idea. It didn't take me long though, to discover that this chore fell on the Wilson sisters (the two most junior secretaries) and me. Afterwards, neither Marge Kohn nor Nancy gave the slightest indication that they were going to do their share, but I never quite got the nerve up to complain.

To tell the truth, I was intimidated by Nancy and Marge. They just seemed so *sure*, so *confident* all the time. I fitted in much better with the Wilson sisters. Yes, they were probably a little silly and giggly, but they were fun to be with. I even found that I was starting to act a little like them when I was in their company. Discovered that Marge and Nancy condescended to me in exactly the same way that they did to the two other girls.

And then, oh God! The embarrassment!

Dorothy had gone out to lunch one day. I was sitting chattering with the other secretaries when Sandra White walked along to where we sat.

"Hi girls!" she said cheerfully.

"My companions all smiled and replied "Hi Miss White!" (She was popular) but I didn't reply.

She looked at me quizzically, and then cocked her head slightly to one side. She seemed to be waiting for an answer.

"Hi Miss White." I finally said.

She nodded approvingly at my reply, and then said, "Are you busy, Billi?"

"No, just chatting. Finished lunch." I said.

"Good!" she said – and held up her hand and waggled her hand at me, just the way that Dorothy did! "Come and do my nails, will you sweetie?"

I stared at her in horror, not knowing how to react. Sure, I'd been told that I had to do things like this by Dorothy, but I had never dreamed that I'd have to face something like the embarrassing situation that I was in now! Surrounded by women, being called 'Sweetie' and treated like I was some sort of girl in a beauty shop!

"My manicure kit is in my desk." I croaked finally.

She shrugged. "Well sweetie? Don't just sit there – go get it! I'll be in my office." And with that, she turned away. "Bye girls!"

My cohorts all replied cheerily "Bye Sandra!" Again, I didn't reply. Just started clearing up my lunch things.

"That wasn't very polite!" Marge said to me after Sandra was out of earshot.

"What wasn't" I asked, still red-faced from the humiliation that had just been visited on me.

"You ignored her when she said goodbye!" Marge said sharply. "I think you should apologize to her when you go to do her nails!"

"She said 'Bye **girls**!'" I remonstrated.

"So?"

"I'm not a girl for Chrissake!"