**The Team**

“Do you realise this is my last lap dance, next week its finals then out into the big wide world.”  I was just finishing a half hour session with one of my nicer clients, you know the type that don’t push two fingers up you in the first ten seconds.  I’d been nice to him since it was my last dance and had been leaning forward whilst balanced on the chair’s arm rests.  I’d been pushing my nipples in between his lips for at least half the session.  Normally no one’s lips went near my nipples ever but I’d seen what the dirty girls were up to in the dirty girl corner and this was one of their tricks that I thought I could just about bring myself to do as an experiment.  I spoke to one of them once about what they got up to.  “If you have looks and brains you can get away with just dancing with perhaps a gently brush against them, otherwise you have to do what you have to do to get a living.”  At the end of the month, I’d noticed when suddenly the rent was due, there would be five or even six times the normal number of girls dancing and competition was high.  The dirty girl corner would be more populated and heads could be seen bobbing up and down at crotch level.

 “I wondered when you were a little more forward than normal so what’s your degree in?”  “Business.”  “You’re looking for a management job?”  “Yeah right, realistically with the job market at the moment executive assistant will be about the mark.”  “When you’ve finished your finals call me.  I may have something.”  He gave me his card.

I tucked it away in my knickers and after giving him a hug and a kiss on the cheek wiggled away just to provoke him.  Sometimes lap dancing can be fun.

God finally finals were over all I had to do was wait for the result.  I was going through my wardrobe, I mean to say I wasn’t certain that my lap dancing outfits would be needed any more at least I hoped not.  I’d just about reached my limit on over-weight elderly balding guys who thought they were god’s gift to women.  His business card fell out well what the hell I’d call his bluff.

“Come and meet the gang. Wear faded jeans, a casual top something you’re very comfortable with and no makeup.”  “Seriously?”  “Yes you’re dressing to impress them.”  “OK.”  Whatever.

I turned up dressed in the appointed clothes, in the appointed cafeteria at the appointed hour.  My guy was there with a mug of coffee waiting for me.  “Chantal meet the team.  Bob does the problem solving research, Justin runs the day to day stuff.  Joe specialises in the Oracle side, and Kevin looks after the backups.”  “Hi guys, I thought you said you might have an executive assistant job or something?”  “Ok she’s got lovely legs we can admire but what’s the angle.”  “Steve’s replacement?”  Two mugs of coffee got spluttered into.  “What are you serious?  They’d never let us get away with it.”  “Think about it guys, Chantal has a business degree so that’s the first hurdle right?”  “Right.”  “But what’s in it for us?”  “We get have those great looking legs around plus we get to train her properly.”  Four sets of eyes examined me closely.  “You’ll do as we say?”  “Well yes unless it doesn’t make sense then you’ll have to explain it to me.”  “God she’s lovely.”  “Ok so how do we do it?”

“Remember the last completion when they got 2,000 applications for a management trainee post?”  “Yes so?”  “They decided next time they’d reduce the amount of time they left the application up on the web to get a more reasonable number.”  “But didn’t specify how much?”  “Gottcha.”  “So Justin builds a trigger?”  “Justin builds the trigger.”  Kevin passed me his lap top “Just fill in the details.”  This was going way over my head but hey whatever.  “Right at the interview just remember when dealing with experienced technical staff the recommended management technique is to step back and let them get on with it.  OK?”  “OK.”  I mean I’d heard the theory mentioned by one of my professors but no one took it seriously did they?  Surely everyone wanted feedback on their performance and detailed appraisals.

I got the phone call at 11 am two days later.  Could I come to an interview that afternoon?  I got out my elegant business suit and my three inch black heels and dressed to the nines I arrived for the interview.

They asked a couple of warm up questions then the one about managing experienced technical staff so I tried the answer “Step back and let them get on with it.”  The suits looked at each other “No one else wants the job internally and you’re the only qualified applicant we had after posting it on the web.  I must tell you no one has lasted more than three months in the last two years and we’ve never even tried a female before.  Still if you want it the job is yours.”  A job, they were asking if I wanted a job, why would they need to ask?  I accepted.  “Can you start tomorrow at nine?”  “I’ll be there.”  Wow a job just like that, I wondered what it was.  I’d completely forgotten to ask the details.

The second phone call came around four o’clock from Matt.  “Tomorrow I want you to wear a really short micro mini dress, one that is about three inches max below the crotch.”   That night I hemmed up my bright yellow mini dress and in the morning I flipped a coin twice before it said wear the dress rather than the grey professional business suit.  I took the grey professional business suit in just in case.

God don’t you just loath those snotty women.  She looked me up and down like I was something the cat had brought up over the carpet.  I just smiled sweetly as she said “Follow me.”  We eventually arrived on the 14th floor, have you noticed how many offices don’t have a 13th?  “These are your team.”  And with that she turned on her heel and left me.  Matt smiled up at me.  “Time for our coffee break I think, come along gang.”   The gang I’d met before surfaced from behind partitions and we all trooped down for coffee after I’d hung up my business suit.

“Right time to fill you in, just in case no one has mentioned it yet you’re our new boss.”  He pulled out a wad of forms “So we need you to sign these.”  I looked at them, they seemed to be order forms for expensive bits of something.  “Do I have this much money?”  “The new fiscal year starts tomorrow so yes you do.”  “But what are they?”  “Computer hardware for the most part I could explain it to you but it would take forever, for the moment trust me and just sign.”  I started signing, when I’d finished there was a collective sigh round the table.

“Now the next thing is to say the following magic words to me.  We survived the year, thank you very much.”  I repeated the magic chant.  “Now say it to Bob, then Justin etc.”  There were more forms to sign that said annual appraisal on them, which in turn were signed by the team members.

“Next training forms.  Keep signing.”  I signed training forms I noticed that two were for people who I hadn’t met yet.  “So who are Dan and Shawn?”  “They’ll be joining us tomorrow, in fact they’re just coming into the cafeteria now I’ll wave them over.  Oh they don’t know they will be joining us so don’t say anything just yet.”

The two guys stopped by briefly and were introduced.  They were bemoaning the fact that their new manager called Jason was a total moron who wanted to make an impact but hadn’t the faintest what he was doing.  Sounded like me except I wasn’t being allowed to do anything that might make an impact.  After they left Matt explained that I was now a AS-6 and told me the salary range.  I gasped, “Well you have to make more than we do and he told me the salary range of everyone in the group.”  “But at that salary I should be wearing a business suit to impress every one.  No wonder madam snot looked down her nose at me.”  “Relax we need you to look like an air head, that way we can slide things through before they notice.  If you looked the business suit type everyone would think you were a threat to their career whilst this way you get to keep your head down and learn before the long knives come out.”

As we trooped back upstairs Matt pointed Jason out to me.  He was sitting at a table in splendid isolation so I stopped by since I was feeling inquisitive.  A flattering mention that I’d heard he was a new manager and wondered how he was getting on he opened up about his favourite subject, himself, how predictable.  He was going to put his staff in their places by rating them unfavourably in their appraisals because their desks were untidy and show them who was boss.  Not someone I’d care to work for, still he’d been here longer than I had.  Upstairs I asked Matt what I should be doing.  He thought for a moment then said “Well we could treat you like a technical trainee and teach you the technical side.  That’s if you don’t think it’s beneath you.  That way you can do the first level support if need be.  There’s a weekly progress meeting you need to attend but I’ll brief you what to say before you go.”  So I got to sit by Justin most of the day whilst he explained what they did.  I just asked questions from time to time to get things clear in my head.  That evening I went shopping for more short dresses.

The following morning I was in by 6:30 as requested.  It seemed my team went over all the stuff that ran at night then reran any problems or resolved them before the rest of the office came in.  Justin let me check the logs and helped me resolve a couple of problems myself.  Wow me a techie!  Bob came by and produced the budget figures.  Even I noticed that we were two people understaffed according to the budget.  “Dan and Shawn?”  I asked.  He nodded, “Now here are the two training forms that will reel them in.  The first is a technical conference that Dan has been unsuccessfully trying to get to for years, and the second is a backup and recovery course that is being held at a golf resort down south.”  “And Shawn plays golf?”  “Not locally in the winter.”  “Do we need them?”  “We definitely will need them within a month or so.”  “OK.”  I’d been given my marching orders.

We drifted down for coffee and sat at our usual table.  The guys had left a gap besides me and our targets came storming in.  Justin waved them across to our table and seeing they looked as if they wanted to release themselves verbally I thought it would be politic to go and get them some coffee letting them vent.  When I eventually returned they seemed to have calmed down.  “Problems?”  I asked “Problem!” came back the reply.  “They’ve just had their annual appraisal.”  “And since he doesn’t have the faintest what we do we got rated unsatisfactory for having untidy desks!  Thanks for the coffee by the way.  How are you settling in with these guys?”  “Oh I have my problems too.  Do you know I can’t get the books to balance?”  “Spending too much?”  “No according to the books I should have two more staff and the training budget is unbalanced.  I have two courses that are just the right price and would just balance it nicely, have a look, but these guys don’t want to go.”  I pulled out one of the signed training forms and placed it in front of him.

Ever notice how guys drool?  I mean really drool over a bit of paper, a dress I could understand but really a few words on a bit of paper?  Perhaps I should wear paper dresses?  “Is she for real or are you guys just having a joke?”

Justin spoke up “She’s our new boss, and we all had our appraisals yesterday.”  Dan looked round the table.  “From Steve?”  “Hell no, Chantal was our boss yesterday so she was one of our managers during the last fiscal year so she did our appraisals verbally.”

I moved in for the kill.  After three years of lap dance club closing on a guy who wasn’t sure, he stood no chance.  I used my innocent peak from under my eye lashes routine together with a quick flash of white lace panty.  “If you could help me out by signing here for the transfer request and here to accept the training I’d be most grateful.  Shawn was older and was seated the other side of Dan.  “I think you’re about to accept the King’s shilling.” He said grinning all over his face.

I passed him the other form.  “Would you believe we don’t have any one on the team who has been through this back up course?  I found one that just fills out my training budget but just because it’s in the middle of nowhere no one wants to go.”  “Well it’s at a golf resort for god’s sake, I mean who would want to go there.  Plus she wants us to save on the airfare and stay over Saturday night.” chimed in Bob.

It was Dan’s turn to grin now.  “Want a transfer form as well?”  he passed one across.  “Let me guess it was just coincidence that these training forms fell out this way?”  I fluttered my eye lashes at him and smiled sweetly.

They joined us the following Monday, and settled into the team nicely.  I still hadn’t the faintest what they did but for the moment they attached themselves to me and my training.

The weekly project meeting wasn’t an issue, Bob wrote out my lines and I practised delivering them beforehand.  I can rattle off “We’ve been busy implementing best practises and thus we’ve seen an 8% reduction in complaints about performance compared to last year.” with the best of them.

The monthly meeting was different.  Management had decided to implement a spending, training and hiring freeze effective immediately.  Any orders, or training courses that had already been booked would be allowed to continue but no new ones would be allowed.  Oh and a directive had come down from on high that Fridays would be casual.

I reported back to the gang.  “I don’t know how it affects us but there is a freeze on.”  “Don’t worry you’ve spent all the budgets anyway. Why do you think you signed away the first day you were here?”  “OMG I spent the entire year’s budget in one morning over coffee?”  “Well there were signs of a freeze coming up so we thought it was best to spend it.”  “But what happens if we need money during the rest of the year?”  Justin looked at Matt.  “Well if it’s a new commitment then it comes with money, at the end of the year people whose projects are running late will be giving money away so it’s spent by year end.”  “Besides which we have some fund raising ideas, like go round with a hat.”  I felt out of my depth.  “Don’t worry we’ll look after you.”  “Well OK guys, I guess learning by experience is one method.  Oh by proclamation from on high it’s casual Fridays.”  Well I thought they ought to know not that they ever dressed in anything but the most casual of clothes normally.  Well washed and clean but definitely casual.

I worried about spending all the money in one shot, I worried about what I should be doing as a manager.  I worried about what my team were doing.  The upside of it all was Jason was worrying a lot more than I was.  He’d lost two of his team to me, one was leaving on paternity leave, one on maternity leave, and of his two remaining staff members one took a year off to become an overseas volunteer for as they said they didn’t have to be on call 24 hours a day seven days a week.  He cornered me once and asked how I bribed his staff away, “I brought them each a coffee once but that’s all.”  He wondered off saying he couldn’t understand how they’d even want to work for a woman.

I asked Dan about how Jason would manage without any staff.  He grinned, “Don’t worry before I left his section I hooked the servers up to MOM so we can discreetly handle any problems.  Just don’t mention it to him, it will do him good to sweat.  Oh I’m expecting someone to wake up to the fact that our scripts will need checking for security problems.  If they do volunteer us for the responsibility I have the automated tools all ready to run.”  MOM they’d taught me all about MOM, how it detected the problem and gave a suggested solution.  I continued my lessons and Matt arranged for me to sit the relevant exams. I found them quite easy to pass.  I mean you only had to learn one section at a time.  Matt approached me and mentioned with the new additional server memory we had some spare capacity on our database servers so if anyone needed capacity we could probably supply it.

At the next monthly management meeting security raised the question of security issues in scripts.  They had identified some 3,000 that would need to be verified.  Jason had the responsibility but no resources.  Plus it was announced that there would be cut backs on the existing staff.  If enough volunteers couldn’t be found for early retirement then forced cuts would have to be made of around 15% on all sections with no exceptions.  I volunteered to take on the responsibility for checking the scripts without any additional resources much to the general amazement round the table.  I was thanked and the responsibility was passed over to me.  There was a general shaking of heads when I also volunteered we had some spare database capacity at the end when they asked about any other business.  I think they thought I was showing off or didn’t know what I was talking about.

I crept back to the gang and coffee.  I really didn’t like telling them that one would have to go, I liked the idea of deciding which one even less.  Still they deserved to know so I braced myself.  “They’re cutting by 15%.” I blurted out “So it looks like we’ll have to lose someone.”  Dan looked round the table, “Now who do we know who is close to retirement and likes playing golf?” He looked at me “I take it there are early retirement packages and such?”  I nodded.  Shawn was looking at his finger nails when I suddenly realised what they’d done.  Somehow they’d managed to add two guys to the team one of which would be happy for early retirement.  I looked round the table “You guys are bad you know that.”  They shrugged “Just don’t let on for the moment we have a sacrificial lamb that way they’ll raise the early retirement package.”  “Oh and we are now responsible for scripts whatever they are.”  I looked round again “You lot really are bad aren’t you, let me guess Dan is the script king and he didn’t want to work for Jason?”  Justin shrugged his shoulders “Fair cop I think.”  “You guys don’t need a manager just a spokesperson who says what you want them to and signs forms without question.”  “I wondered when she’d catch on, do you think we should tell her that having good legs was another requirement?”  “But why didn’t one of you guys take the job?”  “Hey get real, we have more fun with the techie stuff, we hate meetings, besides if we applied and were the only applicant they get suspicious.”  “The short dresses wouldn’t look the same on us besides which you can get away with a lot more than we ever could, we just have to suggest things to you.”

I wasn’t managing these guys I was more hanging on for grim death if they let me.  Still the pay was substantial and to be honest I was learning a lot faster than I would have anywhere else.  The next day as I dressed I resolved to show them who was boss.  I arrived in a prim long sleeved blouse, jacket and an ankle length skirt.  I overheard a comment from the other side of the partition “Now see what you’ve done you’ve upset her with that comment about the legs.”   It was only when we went down for coffee and I was seated where only the gang could see me that I relented and spread my legs slightly so the wrap over skirt fell apart to reveal silk stockings and attachment straps.  I fluttered my eye lids innocently as Bob who was next to me on my right spluttered into his coffee as he glanced down.  He looked around in panic mode.  Justin on my left gave a very gratifying reaction as well.  I always like people to notice when I’ve made a special effort.  I lifted the wrap over part of my skirt back to cover my knees again.  “Now then guys are you going to be good in future and explain things to me before they happen or do I start wearing long skirts permanently?”  Justin and Bob stared into space the others looked suspiciously at me.  “That’s blackmail.”  “She’s learning too quickly.” but they eventually agreed.  In the elevator as we returned to the office I placed one knee forward so my slit skirt fell open giving them the full effect of my stocking clad thigh.  “How am I supposed to concentrate after that?”  I smiled sweetly at Matt and took further revenge though by goosing him as he stepped out of the elevator.  Well goosing staff is a traditional manager’s perk isn’t it and these guys needed me too much to say anything.

I was sick of solitaire so had just switched to playing with MOM one day when one of Jason’s servers lit up like a Christmas tree.  I clicked on it to see the problem was fairly minor and one I knew how to fix so I grabbed the ticket and followed the instructions to get the server back up on line.  I think I had it back up within five minutes, I kinda got a buzz out of doing it all by myself but afterwards I checked with the guys to see I’d done it correctly which I had.  I even brought in a cream cake the next day for coffee time to celebrate.  “I knew no good would ever come of teaching a manager to do something useful.”  was one mournful comment.  “Managers should be heard and not seen doing work.”  I stopped cutting the cake up and stared hard at them.  “Careful I think she’s going to cut up her cake and eat it.”  “Now guys be careful what you say or I’ll remember that feeding you gooey chocolate cake is bad for your health.”  “She did it well though.” “Couldn’t have done it better myself.”  I handed the cake round, sometimes they were just mean.  Bob started to explain the procurement system and how to specify things so that purchasing didn’t mess things up by substituting what we didn’t want.  Actually they were pretty nice to me after Bob took me down there and I spotted someone buying a new database license when we had an old one that could be upgraded.  I’d been studying the price lists, well it was non-technical and something one of the profs had mentioned might be worth looking for.  Well we saved someone $60,000.  After that they referred all the database licensing requisitions to us to run our eye down them.

Yet another monthly meeting, I know meetings can be important but really.  At each meeting one manager has to make a presentation about their section and how it adds value to the company.  You got to hear the same old clichés about how vital their particular section was.  Boring, well no not completely boring, but I noticed a more than a few people nodding off during these presentations. Then the rah rah speech about making do with less.  Finally we got to any other business, I was dying for my coffee.  Jason mentioned “I have a concern on the 19th one of my servers had a problem that was resolved but the technician’s name was indicated as Chantal’s.”  I can get ratty when people come between me and my caffeine addiction.  “And your problem is?”  “Well from an audit point of view shouldn’t the name of the technically qualified person who did the work be on the ticket?”  “So someone with MCSE and MCDBA certificates would be considered technically qualified and that’s the name you’d like to see on the ticket?”  “Exactly what I meant.”  He was smiling now.  “Come back to my office and I’ll dig my certificates out of the filing cabinet for you.”  You could have heard a pin drop.  “You mean you hold those technical qualifications?”  he asked incredulously, I just smiled.

On the way out the suit at who usually sat at the head of the table put his hand on my arm.  “I’d like to see those certificates if you could bring them along to my office now.”  OK he’s the boss.  The team had a thing about not plastering the wall with certificates so I had them all in an envelope.  I just grabbed it and popped into his office and handed it over.  “I see you also happen to have picked up a few other technical qualifications as well, unusual in a manager.  Have you been spending your training budget on these?”  “It was more getting to know the guys on the team they explained it all then arranged for me to sit the exams so they could be sure I understood it all.”  “And Jason’s server?”  “It happens to be connected to our monitoring server and I just happened to notice a problem pop up on it that I felt I could handle so I did.  I had the team check out what I did afterwards to make sure I did it correctly.”  He handed me my envelope back “Perhaps you’d like to do the presentation next month.”  Perhaps, this was a royal command.  “Thank you I’d be pleased to.”  I smiled back with a fixed grin.

When I reached the cafeteria the guys had a double latte waiting for me.  “Heavy meeting?”  as I downed it in one.  “No, boring one except your old boss tried to imply that a non-technically qualified person had dared to touch his server.”  “So did you kill him?”  “No but I suggested he might like to come up and examine my certificates some time in front of all the others.”  “Oh dear I bet he loves you.”  “Not only that but the big guy asked to see them.  He also asked that I do a presentation at the next meeting on what we do.”  “Well that’s easy just put them to sleep with talk of nanoseconds and milliseconds.”  “Everyone else puts them to sleep.  I’d prefer to do something that might keep them awake.”  Shawn volunteered to put a PowerPoint together for me.  Oh I’d put his name forward as a possible target for an early retirement package as he’d suggested.  As Shawn said if HR approached him he was in a better bargaining position.

Ever notice how techies just do things some time?  I was looking at MOM when I noticed we were running another hundred and three databases so I asked Matt about them.  “Well it’s in the monthly management minutes that we had spare capacity so us low level types have been transferring them across from other servers.”  “Aren’t we supposed to do a capacity planning exercise first?”  “Could be but the new memory you ordered us has tripled our capacity so response times are fine.”  Sometimes I got the feeling that management was the last to know what was going on round here.

Shawn took me through the presentation he’d prepared, he’d sort of targeted each manager’s pet project then did a little bit on how we supported it.  He’d set it up to provide drill downs and things if I got asked any questions, it had a warehouse of data behind it.  We ran it through the gang and got input about what to stress and what to skip over.  You know little things about how our new hardware had arrived despite the freeze and stuff.  Finally I was ready.  I queried about what I should wear but the gang thought that the micro skirted dresses made their own statement and voted I should wear the charcoal grey one with the power stripes.  I should take fashion advice from middle-aged guys?  I thought about it long and hard then chickened out and just took their advice.

I was quaking in my shoes.  It was the first time I’d ever spoken in public and I was thankful Shawn had made me go through it so many times so I knew it backwards.  Matt had told me to choose someone non-threatening at the back of the room and make my address to them.  OK if you have normal sight but if you’re slightly short sighted like me and too vain to wear glasses the ones further away are blobs.  Now was the time to get real and order some contact lenses.  I started up and concentrated on a face I could see without squinting too much.  Bob’s comments about repetition especially with managers came to mind and I repeated what I had just said but this time drilling down the data to show his particular section.  I glanced to the right, these guys were looking awake and interested for some reason.  I did the next bit of presentation then winged a drill down again illustrating a different section.  Weird these guys seemed to like hearing about what their sections were doing and how we monitored and kept them running smoothly.

At the end of the meeting the suit at the end of the table caught my arm again.  “My office please.”  Darn I was going to be late for coffee again.  I followed the suit into his office.  “Could you open up your lap top and show me the drill downs again please?”  I opened it up and showed him the slice and dice as Shawn calls it.  “Would you care to comment on how your presentation happens to make use of data warehousing techniques since I wasn’t aware we had one?  Did you develop it yourself or did one of your staff put it together?”  I admitted that Shawn had created it.  I was dispatched to bring him back to the office.

“I have a request in front of me for developing a data warehouse at a cost of $3,000,000 and it is estimated to take two years to develop to give us the same capabilities as Chantal has just shown me, would you care to comment?”  “Well seeing as I’m taking voluntary early retirement at the end of the month the rest of the team has taken over my work so I just threw a quick data ware house together using standard tools to support Chantal’s presentation.”

“Assuming its scalable what would it take to keep you on to build a full blown data warehouse and how much will it cost me?”  “Well I’d get a year’s pay for taking early retirement.”  “As a bonus when you’ve finished, I’ll get you reassigned to the developer’s section.”  Shawn looked across the table.  “If I stay then I work for Chantal, the other members of the team have expertise in getting such a system to perform well.  I want to be able to retire whilst I can still play golf and normally with something like this the demands grow as people realise what it can do so I’d like an assistant.  Someone who is bright and can take over from me and I don’t want a computer science graduate who knows it all.”  The suit nodded.

“Does this mean I have to lay off someone else?”  The suit looked puzzled for a moment.  “Well someone will have to go.”  He looked at Shawn, and dismissed him with the words “Can you leave us to negotiate now.  If Chantal doesn’t get back to you with something that is acceptable you may come and talk directly to me and could you close the door behind you.”  Shawn closed the office door behind him.

“I was going to leave this conversation until you’d completed a year in the job but it seems appropriate to have it now.  First a comment about your micro dresses, they don’t follow the established pattern.”  He sighed, “But there again nothing you do follows the established pattern.  You’ve managed to insert another step in the procurement process but everyone I’ve spoken to seems happy to have a slight added delay in fact I understand some managers are approaching you first before even going to procurement.  Having other managers request your assistance is a good indicator of a good manager by the way.  You staff turnover is zero when everyone else is unable to hang on to their technical staff.  I don’t know how you do it but others should be taking lessons.  You met the downsizing requirement without a blink, you’ve volunteered you have extra capacity and now I find a full third of our databases are running on your servers at no increase in cost that I can see.  We apparently had a major security concern about scripts which was handled very promptly I might add.  I asked your staff to evaluate you, we do this very rarely especially with technical staff as they aren’t afraid to be blunt about managers.  All I got was, makes good coffee, not bad, Machiavellian, we can survive with her, good, pulls her weight.  Compared with what the same team has said about previous managers that puts you in the 5 star rating category.  I like the Machiavellian comment good managers need to be Machiavellian sometimes.  I still don’t understand how you managed to get all your ordering done and training courses registered before the freeze but there again there are sometimes when I prefer not to know too many details.

With such a track record I’d normally recommend that you go on the accelerated management course which would rotate you through all our departments.  However in your case finding a replacement would be very difficult plus personally I’ve seen too many managers promoted before they were ready.  I suggest I leave the recommendation on your file so you can take advantage of it when you feel ready but for the moment I’d be happier if you stay where you are.

I do need to be seen to cut staff so what I’m going to suggest is with your agreement we amalgamate your section and Jason’s then eliminate one manager.”  My heart stopped beating, Jason had more experience than me and greater seniority but what did with my agreement mean?  “The new position will require both technical knowledge and management experience so your technical qualifications will ensure you get the job besides keeping my quota of female managers up.  Now the only thing left is to keep Shawn happy, I can raid the developer’s budget for another person year and salary for his assistant but it’s up to you to find him someone.  Off you go and sort it out, I think Jason had better hear of the amalgamation from me by the way.”

I left the office in a daze.  I gathered up the team and got Justin to sneak Jason’s last techie away for a coffee which we had at the cafe across the road.

“OK guys this has to stay within these four walls.  Carrie rumour has it there is a very strong possibility you might be transferred across to our team if that’s OK with you.  Jason knows nothing about it yet so don’t mention it to him.”  Carrie was beaming like she’d won the lottery.  “You mean I don’t get cut?”  “Your section does but not you.  Guys can’t you keep a straight face and not splutter into your coffee.  Officially we are being amalgamated.”  “Jason goes?” asked Shawn, “It was either him or you and just at the moment you’re golden boy.”  Shawn sat back with a self satisfied smirk on his face.  “Shawn’s data warehouse apparently is a hit so Shawn is to stay on for a few years before retiring.  Shawn’s idea was that he gets an assistant who can take over so he can retire, now where do we find an assistant?”  “Well if he’s golden boy he should be able to demand anything.”  “He is and he can.”  “Bright, young, trainable so no computer science background and good legs.”  “Shawn that’s so sexist.”  “So fire me?”  Sometimes a girl has to do what a girl has to do.  “OK guys let’s get back to work, welcome to the team Carrie.”  “Can I text the others about the amalgamation?”  “As long as they promise not to leak it to Jason.”

No where on earth was I going to find someone who was bright, not have a computer science degree, could fit in with techies, and had good legs?   I racked my brains and eventually remembered a shy retiring girl who had amazed us by not dating anyone on her course even though she was the only female.  I couldn’t remember ever seeing her legs though they were usually wrapped in cargo pants.  I could barely remember her name but by tapping the friend of a friend who knew the Physics department’s secretary I managed to get a message to her requesting that she met at Cafe Latte.  I crossed my fingers and was lucky Kimberly would meet me there.

Next I briefed the gang that we were going to an off-site meeting so they could meet someone and I wanted them to be nice.  I suggested to Shawn that I might have found him his assistant.

I intended to be there first but dressed in her faithful cargo pants was Kimberly already waiting for me when I arrived.  “I’m full of curiosity about what you want from me?”  Don’t you just hate it when people are so direct?  “I was wondering if you’ve found a job yet?”  If she could meet me at 11 am in the morning on a Tuesday I felt fairly certain she hadn’t.  “Not one that meets my all ideals at the moment but I’m just coming to terms with the breakup of a long term relationship about a month ago so it’s given me time to think.  With my First I’m hoping for a research post but that’s dependent on funding, why do you ask?”  Shawn came up and overhearing the last bit of conversation said bluntly “I’m after an assistant to make my coffee amongst other things.” Tact Shawn tact!  Techies just don’t seem to get the tact thing.  I coloured up red with embarrassment.  Kimberly just looked at him, “What other things?”  Shawn pulled out a scrap of paper as the rest of gang arrived and by the time they had settled down with coffee and slices of gooey chocolate cake all round including a slice for Kimberly I’d lost track of the conversation.

“OK so Shawn has shown me a training plan that seems to take up every minute of my time for the next two years but how much does it pay?”  What on earth was I supposed to answer?  “CS-1 rate starts at..”  “Yeah but depending on how good her legs are we could do better than CS-1, CS-2 perhaps?” Justin brought out an indecently short pleated skirt and laid it on the table.  “If we went to CS-3 same as Shawn though when Shawn retired we wouldn’t have to worry about her winning a CS-3 competition.”   “She’d have to have really good legs for a three.”  “Guys be nice.”  “We are, we’re trying to get more money for her.”   Bob told her the salary ranges for the different CS jobs.  “I noticed that you are now wearing a micro mini dress after living in jeans at college, so who’s assistant are you?”  “She isn’t, she just signs the leave forms.”  “The Boss?”  Kimberly asked in a puzzled voice.  “For my sins, yes I’m the section manager and before you ask I’m a AS-6 although it doesn’t mean much round here other than they pay me a bit more.”  I glared at my team.  “In this case what Shawn says goes as he knows a magic spell that will give the suit a data warehouse and save him two years of time and three million dollars.”  “Pass me the skirt.”  Kimberly picked it up and walked towards the ladies, as she passed Matt handed her another small package and whispered something to her.

When she came out you could hear a pin drop.  You could certainly see the guys’ jaws drop.  She stepped up to Shawn and raised her skirt a little at the front.  “Matt mentioned you had a weakness for seamed black silk stockings.”  God they practically got up on their hind legs and begged.  “I take it we are offering CS-3 salary guys?”  I added dryly.  “Earth to team, earth to team, come back to earth please.”  Kimberly lowered her hem line.  “You’d better pass your CV to Kevin so Justin can work his magic.”  “You mean this isn’t a formal interview?  I’m showing leg for nothing?”  “Don’t worry you’ll get a phone call but we have a process to follow that includes all jobs get posted on the web for a short period of time first.  Now don’t ask any more embarrassing questions.”  “We all get to train her when she’s wearing the pleated skirt?”  God do guys only have one track minds?  “You’ll need to talk to Shawn as he will be the one dictating whom she trains with and when.”  All eyes turned towards Shawn.  “Whilst I’m certain I’ll want to train her myself most of the time there will be bits that other members of the team might be better explaining.”

“Shawn I’m so pleased to see you’re wearing a wedding ring, that means I can tease you but if you go one millimetre too far your wife and I will be exchanging cookery recipes.”  Wow the girl had brains.  Shawn looked sheepish but then Kimberly cheered him up by placing his hand on her stocking clad thigh just above her hem line.  “Remember no higher than this without permission.”

Kimberly lent forward and kissed a blushing Shawn on the cheek before dismissing the team with the words “Well guys I’ll see you later I just have a few things to clear up with Chantal.”  She waited until the guys had left.  “You know it sounds like you really need me, I’m so flattered but I think we should discuss a few things at my place shall we say 7pm?”  “Is it anything we can’t discuss here?”  “Chantal, you must know I didn’t go out with boys at college, ever thought of the reason why?  Besides everyone knows to get on these days you have to sleep with the boss.”