

Voices From a Playground

by Marda Miller

"Why are you here? Nobody likes you."

I'm the new girl being paraded around the office on my first day. I'm thinner now. I force myself to smile at everyone as though it's the most natural thing for me to do. Introductions seem futile since I won't be able to remember anyone's name. I clench my fists digging my fingernails into the skin of my sweaty palms. Just breathe, I tell myself.

"Boohoo she's crying now like a big baby."

Eye contact is essential because it shows you have confidence. I walk with purpose and hope that my skirt isn't too short. I'll never be comfortable dressed like this but I think of what my mother used to say, "Challenge isn't stirred by comfort." Does that apply to clothing, I wonder? Everyone is staring as their eyes all stab into me. I'm mortified - do I have something on my face? I paw at my nose discreetly, praying that nothing is dangling from it.

"Push her to the ground and let's set her shoes on fire!"

I learned to run really fast as a child. Part of me wishes I could do that now. I scan for the nearest exit, plotting my escape. Some of my coworkers make small talk and ask where I'm from. Far away from home I want to scream. I pick at the cuticles around my fingers making them bleed. Back at my desk, the IT tech comes by and to set up my desktop. He tells me he grew up with computers. Says they are friendlier than most people. I nod and know what he means.

"Your mommy can't save you now!"

My neighbor peaks his head over the cubicle wall and says hello. I learn that Pete has three kids and a fourth on the way. He shows me pictures of his family and asks if I'm married. I am not. I see his eyes drop down to the opening of my blouse and I feel sick. He's totally the office pervert. Pete the Pervert is his new nickname.

I am saved by the chubby girl who has a handful of files for me to sort through. She says to take my time with them and that there are

cupcakes in the kitchen. Do you bake, she asks? I shake my head. She smiles and seems relieved by that.

"If you ever come back here we'll kill you!"

I have my own voicemail and parking stall. Tomorrow there is a lunch to officially welcome me.

I guess I'll be coming back.

