

CHAPTER ONE -THE BEST THING ABOUT BENNETT

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Bennett Hall's sudden departure one Friday went unnoticed. This did not surprise her. She had become more and more invisible as the years went by. To be honest, she was relieved that it was lunchtime and her cubicle neighbors weren't at their desks, sparing her the humiliation of whispered comments as she was escorted out by a security guard.

There had been a time, earlier in her twenty-seven years with Bancroft, Chandler and Co., when the future had looked bright. In recognition of her Superior Performance Review, she was moved to a windowed cubicle. Her confidence surged. Seeing people outside walking briskly, often arm in arm with a companion, inspired her to find ways to reach out to her colleagues. She filled a bowl on her desk with candy, but only the young receptionist stopped to take one when she delivered office mail. So Bennett brought a dozen donuts and placed them next to the coffee machine. They were gone in an hour with no-one the wiser as to who had left them. After that, Bennett waited until she saw people going in for coffee.

"How nice of you," they said, though the women often smiled and added "I really shouldn't."

Bennett was pleased, though she wasn't sure how to expand on these bits of conversation. Then one day her store-bought offerings were upstaged by homemade pastries brought in by the young receptionist, who placed them temptingly on her desk and seemed to have a lot to say.

Despite her social setback, Bennett felt professionally encouraged when she was asked to participate in an important new effort—the only woman so chosen. In the end, her conclusions

were set aside as not being in the interest of the Company. The injustice of this assessment, combined with recognition that she might never have personal adventures to share or jokes to tell, almost defeated her, but for the sake of the Company and its goals, she pulled herself together. She continued to do what was asked of her until the very day she was deemed “redundant.”

With little expectation of happiness, Bennett was saved from desperation by the very restraints she put upon herself, somewhat like cattle soothed into acceptance of their path to slaughter by the narrowing of their confines.

Bennett looked up at the security guard tasked with accompanying her downstairs, and straightened the last, unfinished report on her desk. To make sure the guard understood she wasn't stealing it, she showed him a leather folder beautifully embossed in gold, with the words: *Bennett Hall, Bancroft, Chandler and Co.* before placing it in the oversized handbag she always carried.

“Sounds like a grand place,” the guard said.

She nodded, not bothering to tell him that Bennett Hall was her name, not a place. She'd had enough of that.

As she passed through the marble-floored lobby a voice called out.

“See you Monday, Miss Hall!”

“Not this time, Frank,” Bennett replied, wondering whether she should explain. She'd bought her morning newspaper from Frank all these years. Although they'd grown old together without knowing a thing about each other, Bennett would miss him. Frank had been the only one who'd always greeted her when she arrived and wished her well when she left. So perhaps she should explain after all. But if she did, Frank would have to say he was sorry even if he wasn't, and their relationship would end in awkwardness. It was best to let things be.

