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Chapter 1

NEW DIRECTION

Seated in the third chair from the door, Mildred clutched her bag that held the folder of recommendations, and in her other hand, the completed application. It took effort to maintain a calm expression as her mind reeled with anticipation. Mildred never expected she would be looking for work at the age of seventy-one, but there was no denying her need when she had to consider hocking her wedding ring to buy groceries.

She had loved that old man, but her grief had turned to anger the day they read the will. Then the bill collectors had started to show up.

The interviewer opened the door and called, “Mildred Petrie, please come in.”

Maybe this was the time to stop obsessing over old Dick, and to put on a smile. Mildred had sat long enough for her muscles to stiffen and her joints to creak. She hoped it wasn’t too obvious as she limped in. Smiling through her discomfort, Mildred greeted the interviewer and sat in the single straight back chair.

Fifteen minutes later, Mildred exited decked with a genuine smile and an employee packet. The receptionist gave her the schedule for training classes on her

way out. No one at the Ivory Winds Casino could know how grateful she was to be self sufficient again.

The casino was close to home and she could walk – saving money on gas – and with her erratic sleep patterns coupled with desperation, she could handle any shift they might offer. Mildred was invigorated with hope on her walk to the retirement village. Dick had decided they should sell their house and buy the small condominium just before his death.

Mildred had assumed it was to cut maintenance, plus they would have the money to travel more. He had died the day they were to move in. This was when Mildred started to learn his secrets, including the massive gambling debt that didn't die with him.

Her new employer had promised to send more information, but in the twenty minutes it took her to walk home her email had blown up. There were a multitude of forms, classes, and welcomes waiting for her. After an hour of filling in blanks, she checked the list of available positions: Server, Dealer, Cashier, Money Counter, and Risk Management.

With fishnet hose over spider veins dancing through her mind, Mildred was positive she didn't want to serve food or cocktails. The recognition of the passage of time (and gravity) caused her to imagine how it would require science and technology to reconstruct a cleavage. After this flight of self judgment and fancy, Mildred considered the Dealer jobs, but worried about the necessity for quick math skills. Finally, she requested Cashier, Money Counter, and Risk Management.

She pressed send, and the completed supplemental forms were out of her hands. With a sigh, she leaned back in her chair, proud of her accomplishments in a single morning. The reverie was interrupted when her phone rang with a recording. Mildred pressed one, yes, she would begin cashier training tomorrow at eight a.m.

Surprised at how excited she was for a simple job, she struggled through a fitful night and gave up at five. By seven, Mildred was dressed, fed and on her hands and knees searching for the box of orthopedic cop shoes. She hadn't worn them since her retirement from the department, but preparation to stand all day was always a good idea. She laced up the less-than-attractive footwear as the memory of thousands of mornings she had put on this type of shoe in her thirty-five year career as a meter maid washed over her. She recalled the day when men joined, and the division was renamed to the Parking Enforcement Department. The Maids had joked, "Same money, no new benefits, and twice the danger – in the locker room."

Sadness and anger returned on the short walk to the casino. It took Dick's death to learn the retirement savings were gone, along with the dream of a last contented life's chapter. Her greatest humiliation was not in being alone or old, but the need to turn to her sons for help.

The fresh air helped shake off the memories and anticipation. The irony of her employment at Ivory Winds Casino – this was the same place that had been instrumental in Dick's destruction. Almost everything they'd built over two lives was gone or mortgaged, and Mildred felt a smug satisfaction that she would recover on the same casino's dime.

She entered through the main entrance, a wall of thick glass doors held open by young and energetic parking valets. Mildred felt that she was passing from failure into a new life and was greeted with constant clanging and the smell of smoke. She was only slightly amazed that there was gambling at seven-thirty in the morning.

The first to arrive, Mildred took the seat next to the still-locked door marked Human Resources. Watching the younger applicants filter in; Mildred put aside her thoughts of the past, and tried to look composed. An odd assortment of hushed conversations started to fill the waiting room. All of the trainees seemed prepared for a morning of rules, promises, and tests; Mildred was the only one envisioning the free buffet lunch.