

Checking Out

by Laura McCollough Moss

Minnie didn't know her. The new girl on the job stood at her register, bored, hands in her smock pockets, staring into space. How long would this one last, Minnie wondered. In her twenty-seven years at Save-Mart she had seen hundreds of them come and go. These young kids had no work ethic, she thought to herself. Just here to pick up a paycheck until something better came along.

It was a slow evening. The weekly specials would come out in tomorrow's newspaper, so the locals knew to wait for the bargains. Besides, it was Friday night, and most people had better things to do. Everybody, that is, except for Minnie. And What's-Her-Name over there snapping her chewing gum.

She wasn't sweating where her crazy husband was right now. No doubt Carl was planted on his barstool, if he wasn't out running around on her. It wouldn't be the first time. He'd been on disability for three years, claiming a back injury but that didn't seem to hamper his screwing around. And here she was, forty-nine years old, working the four-to-ten shift with some high schooler. You tried to tell me, Mother, Minnie remembered as she sprayed down her conveyor belt with Mr. Clean. She liked to keep her work station tidy. She'd picked up the bottle after a customer dropped it in aisle nine. The cap had shattered and the sprayer was loose, but she liked to use up the damaged items so they didn't go to waste. Minnie was always trying to reduce waste and save the store money. Where did it get her? After she finished wiping everything down, she would study tomorrow's ad to be sure she was up on the sales. She liked to tip her customers off so that they saved money where they could. A lot of them didn't earn much more than she did, and every little bit helped. Minnie was a customer favorite. Hadn't she been 'Super Saver of the Week' twelve times?

"Looks like we've got some good deals on this week," she said out loud, feeling a little guilty that she hadn't said a word to the youngster all night. "How are you liking it here?"

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"I love it," the girl panned. "I've never had so much fun."

That's what you got for trying to be friendly. Minnie tried again. "At least it's been quiet tonight. And we've got just an hour left. I can count out and close up if you've got something to do after work."

That brought Miss Thing out of her shell a bit. "Well, my boyfriend is coming to pick me up. He hates to wait. It would be nice to leave on time for once." Minnie knew the kid left pretty close to on time whenever she worked. With her sour attitude, the customers usually took one look at her and went to another cashier. It didn't take long to count out her shallow drawer. Didn't the managers notice these girls with the low receipts?

Minnie looked at her co-worker's nametag. "Destiny," she said to her. That's a pretty name. It suits you. You're an attractive young lady. Is your momma pretty?"

"Not like I am," Destiny said as she smoothed her shiny black hair. "I'm honest about it 'cause it's all I have."

"All you have? What's that supposed to mean?" Minnie was stunned by Destiny's lack of modesty.

"I'm not smart. I don't work hard in school, but I don't need to. The teachers give me passing grades. And every boy in the highschool is in love with me. I'm beautiful. It's not my fault."

"Well I'll tell you something, Missy. I've never been pretty, and I've had to work for everything I've ever had. Harder than anyone else I know. Just so I can work here and get varicose veins and heel spurs and support my husband while he goes out with lookers like you. Well, they don't look like you anymore, but they used to. Now they're showing their age a bit. They're a little used up. Women who think the world owes them a living don't get very far once they don't have the looks to back it up."

Destiny stared at her. "Wow, Lady. You're bitter. Don't take your problems out on me!" She pulled out some lip gloss and turned her back to Minnie while she put it on.

"This boyfriend you have," Minnie sniped. "I'll bet he gets real grumpy if he has to wait more than five minutes for you. Bet he never comes to your front door when he picks you up. Am I right?"

"What difference does that make?" Destiny shifted her weight from side to side, fidgeting with the ends of her ponytail. "It's not like we're married or something."

"Honey, he doesn't respect you. Because he's only after you for one thing. You're nice to look at, but you've got nothin' else to offer. You're just this month's fling. He'll dump you when he's tired of you. That's one thing we have in common."

"What do you mean?"

"Men. They use us all for what we have to offer, be it brains, brawn or beauty, and then they're on to the next victim. Can't any of us count on them. That's what I told Charlotte last night on the phone."

"Wait. Who's Charlotte??" Destiny demanded.

"Carl's girlfriend. I called to have it out with her."

Destiny scoffed, "What kind of woman calls her husband's girlfriend?"

"What kind of woman doesn't? I won't have that hag make a fool of me in my own town!"

"I feel sorry for you. You've got issues, Minnie. I'm not really comfortable talking about this. And my love life is none of your business." Destiny pulled out her cell phone and started texting.

Minnie dug in her pocket for some money. "I need to go back and pick up some bread and cookies for Carl's lunch tomorrow. Would you ring me out? Then you can punch out if you want to."

"Sure," Destiny rolled her eyes. "This is my last night here anyway. I joined the Spirit Squad, so I have to go to all the football practices and games. This job sucks."

Minnie tried to hide her disgust, heading for the back of the store. She hoped they had some of those raspberry filled cookies left in the bakery. Carl loved those.

