

# Mildred

*Romancing the Odds*

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# – Contents –

- CHAPTER ONE – Cowboy
- CHAPTER TWO – Witnesses
- CHAPTER THREE – Anticipation
- CHAPTER FOUR – Interview
- CHAPTER FIVE – Moving On
- CHAPTER SIX – The Search
- CHAPTER SEVEN – Recruiting
- CHAPTER EIGHT – The Hunt
- CHAPTER NINE – Ready
- CHAPTER TEN – Set
- CHAPTER ELEVEN – Go
- CHAPTER TWELVE – Monday
- CHAPTER THIRTEEN – Touring
- CHAPTER FOURTEEN – Grand Opening
- CHAPTER FIFTEEN – First Night
- CHAPTER SIXTEEN – Night Two
- CHAPTER SEVENTEEN – Saturday Night
- CHAPTER EIGHTEEN – Ready to Meet
- CHAPTER NINETEEN – Stereotypes

CHAPTER TWENTY – American Association of Retired Persons

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE – New Morning

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO – Life Changes

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE – Moving Forward

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR – Deep Cover

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE – Deeper Cover

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX – The Rain in Spain

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN – Baptism

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT – Changes

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE – Clean-Up

CHAPTER THIRTY – Day Two

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE – Life is Full of...

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO – Help

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE – Math

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR – Tuesday at Two

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE – Slow Night?

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX – Another Day

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN – Dating

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT – G Lot

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE – Status

CHAPTER FORTY – Luckily Sunday

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE – Monday Off

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO – Another Tuesday

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE – Cupid in the House

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR – Many Thanks

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE – Two Lines

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX – Back Lot D

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN – R.I.P

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT – A Tuesday Every Week

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE – Last Night

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# — 1 —

## Cowboy

*“Zero Zero Seventy-One, please report to Security.”*

Mildred Petrie looked up from her second dessert in the Ivory Winds Casino buffet and looked directly into the security camera. Pointing at the chocolate crème pie, she held up her index finger and mouthed, “In a minute.”

Mildred had worked undercover security at the casino for a year, and she was startled. *They have never paged me before; it is kind of strange. They should know there is nothing that warrants throwing away good pie.* Mildred did speed up, but was confident that if it were so important, they would walk down the stairs. She finished her tea, stacked the dishes on the buffet tray, and cleared the table. With a quick stop at the restroom, she started toward the secret door that led to the inner workings of the casino.

It took only one light knock on the door and it was thrown open. Belinda Jasper, a uniformed and enthusiastic young woman, stood at the open door. The two women had worked together since the beginning of Mildred’s tenure.

Belinda smiled. “Took you long enough. How was dinner?”

Mildred closed the door behind her. “What’s up, Sweetie Pie? You guys were counting my desserts again, weren’t you?”

“I’ll have to ask the crew. I lost count six months ago. Actually, Bud wanted me to page you. He just came back from meeting with the new CEO and told me to get you in here. He went straight into his office and has been on the phone ever since.” Belinda shrugged as she walked Mildred over to the office door. “He wants you to go in. Don’t forget you are to share the details with me after.”

“I know, I’ll keep our women’s alliance since we are the only women in this department. I’ll honor the sisterhood. We should get a drink when you get off tonight.”

Belinda answered, “I have to work later than usual, so maybe next time. This new CEO is a slave driver.”

Mildred walked past the row of screens, behind the security officers and tapped on her boss’s door. She opened the door and walked into the tiny office. Bud Moses, the head of security, looked harried as he motioned for her to sit as he ended a call.

Mildred moved a stack of files to the only clear corner of his desk. “Well Mr. Moses, I see you have a new motivational poster, very nice.” The yellow and blue poster of an ocean almost took up the entire wall. “Is that a sunset or a sunrise? It makes a difference.” “We will say sunrise, but there is no time for chit- chat. I just talked with the new CEO, and

they want a formal report on the work you have been doing for us.” Bud ran his hands through his hair and sighed. “I explained our initial plan for your position and how it expanded. I did brag about your successes over the past year.”

Mildred stayed quiet, but she couldn't help but mentally run through the list of cases and injuries she had endured in the past few months. They had stopped a local gang and broke up a covert money laundering scheme. Even though they had done great work, she couldn't stop the fear of being fired. Her mind reeled with the reason she had taken this job in the first place. Almost a year of wages helped significantly, but damn, her dead husband and the debts he left didn't clean up that quickly.

“Mr. Langley wants us to go in tomorrow when the full board meets. I'm working up a print-out of hours and our stats on effectiveness. There is nothing you have to do but be there.”

Mildred stood to leave. “Okay, Boss. Where is the meeting and do we go together?”

Bud looked up from his stack of paper, “It'll be at the airport Marriott, so if you can be here by twelve-thirty, we can ride together in the van.”

“Only two more questions. Will they be feeding us and do I need to be worried?” Mildred looked concerned.

Bud made a note on his desk calendar. “Yes and I have no idea. Over half of the board changed since Judge McCaffie and his family of thieves and thugs were arrested. Mr. Langley told me that they are going through departments and start with Security first.

His phone buzzed, and Mildred turned to leave. Belinda waved at her to come over, “I’m on the primary screen. I want you to look at this guy. Darn, I don’t see him where is he now? A young man exited the rest room a few minutes ago. The cowboy should be out soon. Here he comes, and then back to the chair as per his MO.”

“Let me go down there, and I’ll let you know. Looks like it could be some kind of a hand off.” Mildred took the back stairs and was in the chair by the fire place, with the good view. She settled in and then took out her phone to look busy as she watched. There was quite a bit of moving around, and the Cowboy seemed agitated. On his fourth trip to the bathroom, Mildred tapped her earphone. “Belinda, you there?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You were right. It appears that the young men are probably shoplifting and making a drop in the bathroom. The last one was quick, a walk in and out. I think we need an officer in there now. He looks as if his carry case is full and he can’t hide much on that skinny ass of his. If I’m right, he would be packing up soon.”

There was a brief pause, and then Belinda spoke, “Thanks, double-O. Larry is outside the main stage, and you should see him walking in any second.”

“Great. Cowboy is still in there.” Mildred leaned back into the chair and put her foot up on the raised hearth of the fireplace. She stayed in place in case there was a need for back up. Suddenly, she heard loud talking and a possible scuffle. Moments later, a muscular man in a security uniform walked out

holding the cowboy's arm and carrying the case. The cowboy's face was red and maybe starting to swell. He looked like he had been in a fight.

Her earphone buzzed, "Larry caught him in the act."

Mildred answered, "So they were shoplifting and transferring off to him?"

Belinda snorted and it took her a moment to recover and answer. "Larry caught him masturbating.

It appears that he was peeping at the young guys at the urinal. Not sure if he was hitting on them or what. There is porn in the carry case."

"Don't tell me it was sticky?"

Belinda answered, "Now I'm sick. Gotta go. I've got Detective Hampton on the line. He is doing a quick background check."

Mildred couldn't stifle the snicker as she signed off. She nodded at Larry and he turned his head away from her. Mildred tried to stop, but couldn't help but peek at the culprit to be sure he was adequately covered. Mildred visualized the confrontation when Larry apprehended him and was grateful she wasn't in her Oliver Brimstone little old man disguise because she would have walked in to handle it. Handle it? She snickered as they walked away.

Her earphone spoke, "Hey, could you ID any of the young men that were in the restroom? Larry said the last one punched the cowboy in the face."

"I'm on it. I got photos of the last three. They are probably at the event center for the DJ Spin Doctor show." Mildred pulled up the photos on her cell phone and made quick mental notes about the young men.

She expected them to be shoplifters and now it was necessary to consider them victims. “Damn- damn-damn that old pervert,” she mumbled as she walked to the ticketing area for the main stage.

These events had grown and there was a long line of teens waiting to enter the showroom. A pounding beat of the pre-recordings throbbed through the lobby. She scanned the crowd for a dark-haired male in a black tee-shirt, which described seventy-five percent of the guys. Mildred checked her watch. This isn’t going to be easy and they would open the doors any minute. Since everything was happening so quickly, she hoped the three she saw go into the restroom would still be in line. They looked too young for the gaming floor and the nightclubs weren’t active yet. The apparent exceptions to the age requirement were usually at the hotel, with parents, shopping or maybe dinner. As she sorted out where to look, she realized kids couldn’t afford most of the activities unless it was prom night. They only came to the Ivory Winds as a crowd for entertainment and music events.

Mildred stood back and scanned the line of animated teens. There were a few couples, but mostly it broke down to a noisy swarm of girls, and then a morose mob of guys, more gals, and wait, four guys, talking and patting a dark-haired guy on the back. She double checked her photos.

“That’s him!” Mildred tapped her radio. “I think I’ve got one, wait. He is with another one.”

“Go get them.” Belinda’s voice cracked through the earphone. “I’ve got a new guy coming down. Keep them in view.”

Mildred approached the group as they opened the door to the event. Afraid she would lose them in the theater, she made her move. “Excuse me, gentlemen, I’d like to speak to you for a moment.”

The boys stared at her, and then the lighter-haired guy’s face flushed. “Why? I didn’t do nothing.” She saw his body change to aggressive.

“No, you are the ten thousandth customer tonight and we have free tickets for you.” The other boys patted him on the back and nodded. “I just need you to step over here and we will get your information. Bring your friend because he is ten thousand and one. We will only be a few minutes, and then you can catch up with your friends.”

She cut the two out of the group and took them to one of the outside tables for the adjacent café. As they chose chairs, Mildred called in. “You there?”

Belinda answered, “Yes, I heard you. Bud is coming down now.”

“Can you send passes for them? No Glen Miller or old folk stuff.” They all sat at the table. The boys looked anxious. “Gentlemen, I need your names, addresses and contact numbers. Our manager is coming with your certificates.” She handed the dark-haired boy her leather-bound notepad. It took a couple of minutes and Mildred stalled, afraid she would lose them as the crowd filtered into the venue. Just as they were about to give up, muttering bullshit and other profanities, she saw the door to the stairs open. “OK, here we go. I’d like to introduce you to Bud Moses, our prize coordinator.”

“Thank you, ma’am. I’ll take it from here.”

Bud gave them each two tickets and then sat in the fourth seat at the table. Mildred left to continue to search the area anxious to find the first guy that was in the restroom. The photo was blurry, and so many dressed similarly.

On her second pass, as she made a spin through the slot machine. Mildred saw Detective Hampton enter through the main doors.

He approached and spoke softly while looking away. "Where are they?"

"Bud has witnesses near the sidewalk café in the events center. The perp is in interrogation." Mildred pointed over to the room with a nod and then whispered, "Follow me."

Hampton started to walk toward the interrogation room, "I know where it is. Good work, thanks."

Mildred went a few steps and then uttered, "This was Belinda's find and I just followed directions. Do you have anything on this guy?"

Hampton looked at the slot machine and answered, "Not much time to search, but we found a record. Vice said they are familiar with him and sending someone over."

They continued the same direction as if they weren't walking together. Hampton tapped her shoulder. "Thanks again."

Mildred turned to the gift shop, and Hampton went on to the interrogation room. She continued a patrol into the restaurants and the hotel lobby, turning back to the casino.

# — 2 —

## Witnesses

Less than a half hour later, Mildred walked back toward the event center and saw the detective had joined Bud and the two boys. She bought five drinks and placed them on the table where the men were interrogating the young witnesses. She removed the iced tea and settled a couple of seats away. Bud looked and nodded a thank you. Even though they were keeping their voices down, she was close enough to hear what was going on.

Bud handed some paper, possibly the incident reports, to Hampton. Bud said, “Officer, is there any problem if we give them certificates for the next show?”

“As long as it isn’t more than a refund and drink.” Hampton took a drink. “We don’t want it to look like there were any bribes.”

Bud nodded in agreement. “True, Mildred used the premise of free passes to pull them out of line.” The boys turned and looked at Mildred, and she blushed.

“Okay, Jason, you reported that you were the first one in?” Hampton held the report up.

The boy answered quietly, “Yes sir, I was.”

Hampton turned on a recorder. "Please Jason, state your full name and address."

The young man answered very low.

"And your date of birth?"

As soon as Jason gave his date of birth, Hampton stopped recording. "Since you are underage, we will have to involve your parents in a formal statement. Why don't you go ahead and tell me in your own words what happened?" Hampton set the recorder down and started to take notes.

"Me and my buds got here early, cause we didn't have tickets. The line wasn't moving and it was long. So, I needed to go to the can, and the guys held my place. I went to the one in the big hall. I was peeing, and I heard someone say something to me. I looked to the left, and I could see an eye peeking at me through the side seam of the door." It was evident that Jason was upset.

"I zipped my pants, and he came out, and he shook his wrinkled old wang at me. Then he offered me twenty bucks to touch it." Mildred could see the chill race through him and he looked down in shame. "I didn't say anything. I just left."

Hampton looked at him intently. "What happened next?"

"I went back to join the guys and didn't say anything. Then Anthony said he was going to go. So, I warned him about what happened."

Anthony interrupted. "So I asked the guys to hold my place and I went back. That old creep was jerking off in the stall with the door open, so I hit him in the mouth and left."

“Did he say anything?” Hampton asked.

“Maybe, I don’t know. I just punched him and left.”

Hampton looked at them and said, “We have apprehended him and he is being held. We plan to interrogate him after speaking with you. Is it all right if we contact you for formal witness statements if necessary?”

They both nodded, and Hampton gave them business cards. They stood to leave and Mildred could hear the show had started.

Bud stood up. “I’ll take you in. You can use the passes for the next show.”

Mildred waved at Bud and they stopped. She gave Bud her phone with the photo of the first guy. He turned back to the boys. “You know this guy?”

They both looked and shook their heads no. Anthony turned to Detective Hampton. “Can I have another card? Then if we see him, we can tell him to call.”

Mildred watched Hampton and Bud each give the boys business cards. Bud started to walk them into the showroom. He turned around and tossed Mildred her cell phone. “Now it is back to work, pervert.”

She saluted with her middle finger and went back on patrol. Spa, gift shops, slot machines, card rooms, she turned to the restaurants and the sports betting. The usual fake clanging of machines and easy listening music from Mildred’s youth accompanied the smell of smoke and anxiety.

The earphone squeaked. “Hey, G-Ma, it’s Arnie. I hear you had a pretty wild romp.” Arnie Arneson was

the night security supervisor. He had started at the casino when they opened. Talk around the employees was that he had turned down several promotions to keep the night shift.

Mildred smiled. "Ask Larry, he got the show. Some days I'm happy not to be in disguise. Can you imagine I would have walked in there? That cowboy gives me the heebie-jeebies. I'm kind of glad that kid clocked him. Do you know where that old creep is now?"

"We have him locked down in the secondary interrogation room. Hampton is going to take him to the station. No updates, probably be morning before we hear anything."

"Gotta go, Arnie. There is a crowd entering the main door. One more thing, are you going to the meeting tomorrow?"

Arnie answered, "Yeah, looking forward to being back here at noon; I get off after four. I'll apologize now for not being as handsome as you expect tomorrow."

"You know I'll forgive you. See you then."

Mildred clicked off and walked over to shadow the new group and overheard they were going for a late dinner. Angling off, she started back to the event center. It was almost two hours since the DJ started and it should wrap up any minute. The hall was thumping and there was no one milling around. The music sounded as if she had time to check the card rooms and the patrol continued.

After the initial excitement, it was a well-behaved night, considering the size of the crowds.

Mildred settled into the seat of the Hungry Hippo slot machine. This was her favorite surveillance seat in the entire casino. The only thing that would have made it better would be access to desserts. It was centrally located with a view of the main entrance, the event center lobby and the gaming tables. She was prepared for when the DJ turned the kids loose. They were supposed to exit through the hotel lobby, but historically several tried to sneak into the slots and nightclubs.

*Minimum bet-spin, minimum bet-spin, minimum bet-spin* and here they come. She loved the sight of the young folks and they appeared to be lit up by the music. The guys weren't morose anymore, laughing and talking to the girls. Every face was flushed from flirting and dancing. Mildred mumbled, "This world needs to dance more."

"G-ma, you talking to me?" whispered in her earpiece.

"I'm sorry, I was just watching the change in the kids as they leave the show. They are so friendly and happy."

The whisper continued. "I know what you mean. I'm heading down for a patrol. Maybe next time we can dance."

"Excuse me, who is this? Larry?"

The gravelly whisper continued. "No, I'm not telling. Larry is at the cop shop."

"Arnie?"

There was no answer. Mildred clicked off and immediately wondered why there wasn't a camera in the video room for her convenience. She knew

the voice, being undercover there were only a few authorized to talk to her on that frequency. Mildred had to admit the invitation to dance made her feel almost cute again. It was a long time since she flirted. Needing to get back in focus, she watched the crowd of kids spreading in all directions. It was like trying to herd cockroaches. Once they hit the light, they took off in a hundred directions. She noticed Arnie and a couple of others on the security team trying to move them to exits.

Mildred saw a group of boys turn toward the machines. *Damn, it is hard to tell who is twenty-one and who is fourteen. None of them look old enough to drive.* She watched them pass, and then they took a quick turn to the kabob counter. The next group exited from the throng. The boys look older, even with the dark makeup and black clothes, but the two girls with them were clearly underage. Mildred watched as they went in the direction of the sports gaming, Arnie stepped in front and spoke. They turned to the main exit.

Mildred clicked on the general security contact line. *Whoa, here we go. Sneaky, dogs.* There were two young men in black jeans and Tee-shirts. They came out of the gift shop and then made a quick turn toward the gaming floor. She watched as they kept their heads down and walked as if they knew where they were going. Mildred made a last minimum bet, spun and pulled her gaming card from the machine. She started to follow the two and then called in. She tapped the earphone. “Two toddlers going to the blackjack tables.”

Her earphone clicked. “Okay, on it.”

Mildred answered, “Make it quick. It’s weekend busy in there. They’re dressed in black jeans, baseball Tee-shirts and black jackets. No leather. Both have dark hair.”

“Got it.” Mildred could hear the buzz in the call center, and a repeat of what she had just said.

Mildred knew they would take care of it and returned to the nightclubs. The action seemed to settle down, and most of the event crowd had moved on. *I might as well keep walking.* She bought a bag of churros near the exit and continued on patrol. Suddenly, there was a hand reaching into her snack!

“What the hell?” Mildred turned to see Melody, the undercover narcotic’s officer she had worked with before.

“Thanks. I was hungry.” Melody took the bag from Mildred’s hand.

“My dear, you scared me. What’s up? More problems with party drugs?”

The tiny woman with a purple Mohawk haircut and black leather continued to stuff her mouth. “Yeah, there is no defeating it. Take out one dealer, and another two fill the spot. It had quieted for a while, but now it’s full tilt again.”

“Kind of a sad job, isn’t it?”

The young officer nodded as she finished the churros. “Did you get a drink?”

Mildred continued, “No, sorry. Anything else exciting? Have you fallen in love, caught any murderers, read any good books?”

“Yes.” Melody’s eyes lit up with the answer. “But to get details, you have to spend more time with me.”

Mildred faked a look of shock at her friend. “Ahh, come on. That is just wrong. At least give me a clue.”

Melody crumpled up the empty bag from the snack and tossed it toward the can, missing by at least a foot. “Let me think, a clue. It involves a woman named Dana and a murder near the arctic circle.” She walked over, picked up the trash and placed it into the container. “Mill, my oldest and dearest love, remember I shoot better than I throw.” Then she disappeared into the night.