



YourEssence - MTRNTY - Chapter 01

Out of a job

November, Year 1

Sixteen months have passed since William was laid off from his IT job. In those months, William has steadily watched as his bank account diminished. The job market was simply too poor for him to find a replacement for his salary. He was starting to become desperate. As a single 32-year-old man, he thought he would have many options. Unfortunately, IT jobs were getting hundreds of applicants, and the positions were filled by overqualified people. William figured they must be taking massive hits to their salaries to take these jobs. The desperation of the act was not lost on him after such a long time out of a job. His severance and unemployment had run out a long time ago.

William's parents had instilled in him a "get out there and tackle the challenge" work ethic. So, he was regularly hitting the job boards. He had custom-tailored resumes for a variety of companies and positions ready to go, and he was often one of the first applicants to apply for any newly posted position. Responses from recruiters all took the same form, however. "Thank you for your interest in our company... we've decided to proceed with other candidates at this time... but we will keep your information on file..." Each new rejection hurt as much as the last.

William's hard work was finally rewarded one day as he got a call back for an in-person interview. He was thrilled to reach this step but was woefully underprepared for the prospect of dressing up in appropriate business attire. William's unemployment had been spent idle, and he hadn't been taking good care of himself. He needed a haircut, a way to lose ten pounds, and a suit that fit. Or at least a jacket. He could make two of these happen within the next three days. So

he set himself to task. A haircut was easy to obtain, and he knew of a men's suit shop nearby in an outdoor shopping center.

With a fresh haircut, William made the trek to the shopping center. As he browsed the suits, he saw several other men with fresh haircuts browsing the suits as well. He figured they must be in a similar situation as he was. Disheartened by the price tags on most of the suits on the racks, William ventured back to the clearance sections, hoping to get lucky. As he surveyed the hanger tag labels, he sought out his size 36R. Finally, one popped into his eyes. Pulling the jacket from the rack, he was dismayed that the coat was deep purple. "That must be why it's on clearance," he thought as he returned the jacket. The price of the jacket was definitely right, in any case. He'd still be able to stay on a budget getting it if he skipped a few meals that month—Something he was beginning to be forced to do more and more often.

William left the shop without a jacket, feeling disheartened by his financial situation. It would be too bold a statement to make to show up for the interview in a purple jacket. As he was leaving the store, he saw a new shop that was having its grand opening celebration. The shop was called MTRNTY; he was curious about what the shop was for and walked by. As he got closer, he began to understand the shop's purpose. Baby strollers, cribs, clothes, and other accessories adorned the aisles. As William went to turn back towards his car to leave, an employee handed him a card.

"We're hiring! You can apply inside and have a same-day interview."

"Oh, uhh, thanks. I think I'll pass, though."

"Fresh haircut like that, I can tell you're looking for a job. The market is crazy right now. This job has good benefits, pay, and flexible work schedules to accommodate your family life."

"That all sounds great, but I'm in IT. I'm really looking for positions in my field. Thanks though"

"Well, if you change your mind, you know where to find us," the employee said, shifting their attention to other shoppers in the area.

"Retail... I can't possibly do something like that. It would be beneath me," William thought as he approached his car. A sudden chill ran down his back. He couldn't sacrifice this chance at reigniting his career. William hurriedly made his way back to the men's shop. He swiftly returned to the clearance rack and walked out with his newly purchased jacket. Color choice be damned. He was going to look good for his interview.

William's interview later that week arrived swiftly. He had spent the intervening time freshening up on his craft, studying the latest technology and its applications. William felt prepared for his interview, and after getting dressed in a pair of black pants, he pulled on the purple jacket. William looked promising, given the circumstances. The suit color really popped, and he thought it might help him stand out. However, it was admittedly a louder statement than he would typically want to make. William introduced himself at the reception and sat amongst other men of various ages, but most seemed younger. William surveyed the room, and everyone except him wore a black jacket. The stares he got were immediate and intense. "What are they thinking? They must think I'm crazy."

William's name was called, and he went in for his interview. William tried his best to answer the questions asked of him. He even felt he had some excellent answers to some more open-ended questions. Ultimately, William's time away from industry work caught up with him. He wasn't swift enough with answers to the technical questions. Some questions, he didn't even know what the interviewer was talking about. Those stung the most as William recalled how he had been at the top of his field before he was laid off all those months ago.

Feeling dejected, William slowly walked back to his car. As he approached his car door, he heard his phone ding—an email. "Wow, they already sent the rejection note," he thought as he read the email. "Not a good fit... keep your resume... thanks for your time... blah blah blah." William reached for his keys in his jacket pocket and pulled them out. Along with the keys came a card. It was the card from that maternity store. Seeing the card after his rejection had William thinking differently about his future. "At least I'd be bringing in some money again..."

William drove to the shopping center and went to the maternity shop. As he entered, he felt all the customers' and employees' eyes on him. Carrying the card in his hand, William made his way to the customer service desk.

"Hi, I'd like to apply for a position?" William asked the woman at the counter, extending his hand with the card.

"Oh, wonderful. We need the help! Things have been so busy around here since we opened. I'm Megan, the store manager. What's your name?"

"Hi Megan, I'm William. Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too, William. That jacket is sharp, by the way. It looks terrific on you," Megan said with a bright smile.

"Oh, umm, thank you," William said, lowering his head to hide his reaction. William

hadn't had much social interaction since his layoff. Even the smallest of niceties had him blushing.

Megan had William fill out an application form with standard form fields and a brief work history section. William filled this all in dutifully and handed it back. "So tell me about this gap in your work history. Have you really been out of work for this long?" Megan asked William.

"Unfortunately, yes, I've been unable to find a new position in IT."

"So this is your last straw? You don't really want this job, do you?"

"Well, I wouldn't say it's my last straw. When I got this card earlier this week, I didn't think retail was right for me. I had a few days to think about it and realized that I should give it a chance. The employee who gave me the card was so nice and seemed like they liked working here."

"Don't worry, this can be your last straw. I just want employees who are being honest with me from the start. So, let's try this again. Why do you want to work here?"

William sighed a bit before his conviction kicked in, and he gave his most honest answer, "I've been trying so hard to stay in my field. I want to find an IT position, but I was just rejected from a job because I've fallen behind. My parents taught me to go after opportunities, though, and I think having some purpose will help me get my life back on track."

"Thank you, William. I can tell that was the truth and that you are doing what you think is best for you now. You can start tomorrow. What's your size?"

"My size?"

"For your work uniform. It's a sweater. What size do you need?"

"Oh, umm, large."

Megan went back to the back room while William stood around waiting. Looking around the store for the first time with an eye on details, William noticed that the store had dozens of heavily pregnant women shopping for all kinds of products. From what William could see, each section had a woman wearing an argyle sweater vest helping customers. "That must be the uniform Megan was referring to."

"Here you go," Megan said, handing William several sweaters. "Work starts at 7

a.m., and you'll have an 8-hour shift. You get two breaks and 30 minutes for lunch. Any questions?"

"Off the top of my head, no... I can't think of anything."

"See you tomorrow then!"