

Cent'Anni

Characters

- MS. STACEY BENNETT: Director of Communications at Elderberry Senior Living Center. She is in her mid-40s, sticky sweet on the outside, impervious as hard candy on the inside.
- MRS. DIETRICH: A sharp-witted, no-nonsense resident of Elderberry Senior Living. She is determined to celebrate her 100th birthday in her own special way.
- GINA PRIMAVERA: A reporter for the local county daily. She is in her mid-30s, direct, impatient, and not in a "good place" at the moment.
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ACT I
SCENE 1

Mrs. Dietrich is sitting in a wheelchair next to a window in her room, drawing in her sketchbook. The prelude to Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" plays the background from a compact disc. There is a knock on the door that Mrs. Dietrich doesn't hear. The door opens slightly as MS. BENNETT peeks into the room.

MS. BENNETT

Mrs. Dietrich? Your visitor is here.

(Mrs. Dietrich does not respond. MS. BENNETT moves fully into the room and walks closer to MRS. DIETRICH.)

Hello? Mrs. Dietrich? I said, your visitor is here.

(Mrs. Dietrich, reaches over to the CD player and turns up the volume. Ms. Bennett responds with controlled annoyance and turns off the CD player.)

Mrs. Dietrich. I'm very sorry. I know you love your music but there is a visitor waiting to talk to you. And, well, it's very important that you cooperate today. You know what today is, don't you?

(Mrs. Dietrich, finally stops sketching and looks at MS. BENNETT with distain.)

MRS. DIETRICH

Of course I know what today is. It's Wednesday.

MS. BENNETT

And ... It's also your milestone birthday.

MRS. DIETRICH

Yes, that, too. So, Whoopi! Happy Birthday to me!

MS. BENNETT

Happy 100th Birthday! 100!

MRS. DIETRICH

Yes! I know. One hundred. You don't have to shout it!

Well, we have so much planned for you today. Including a special interview with the Progress Press. The reporter is waiting outside to talk to you. So, I'm going to bring her in. Okay?

MRS. DIETRICH

Must we really make a spectacle of this, Ms. Bennett?

MS. BENNETT

It's not a spectacle. It's a celebration -- of you ... and of our new residential wing and state-of-the-art community center, which by the way, I've decorated with all your lovely drawings.

MRS. DIETRICH

I suppose I should feel greatly honored. La Bella Donna of the Nursing Home.

MS. BENNET

Now, now ... Of the Senior Living Center.

MRS. DIETRICH

Oh, *pardonne-moi*.

MS BENNETT

So, let's bring our reporter in, shall we?

(As she heads to the door)

Where are the those beautiful roses I gave you this morning?

(She finally opens the door and is startled to find GINA standing right in front of her -- erect, arms folded, and wearing a scowl.)

Oh, my God, you scared me!

GINA

Why? You know I'm waiting here.

MS. BENNETT

I know. But, I ... oh, never mind. Come, please ... Mrs. Dietrich, this is Ms. Primavera from the Progress Press.

GINA

It's Gina.

MS. BENNETT

Right. *Gina* Primavera. She going to ask you some questions about your extraordinary life. *(to Gina)*. I'm sure you saw her bio in the press packet.

GINA

Yep ... Got it right here.

MS. BENNETT

Great. *(to Mrs. Dietrich)* And I certainly hope you will tell, uh, *Gina*, how very happy you are here at Elderberry. *(to Gina)* Our new community center is going to completely revamp the residential experience. I've listed in your packet all the new amenities we'll be offering and ...

GINA

I've got. I really do. So, can I now please have some alone time with Mrs. Dietrich.

MS. BENNETT

Alone? Oh, well, we usually sit in on interviews with our

residents. You know, to help fill in the gaps for things they may not quite recall.

MRS. DIETRICH

I quite recall *everything*, Ms. Bennett.

MS. BENNETT

Oh, uh, I didn't mean to imply that you're in any way forgetful.

MRS. DIETRICH

Good. Now, don't you forget to close the door on your way out. Thank you.

(After an uneasy moment.)

MS. BENNETT

Well, I guess I can make an exception for this most exceptional event. So, I'll be back in a bit and then we'll head to the new community center for the dedication program and our big birthday celebration.

GINA

Wouldn't miss it.

MRS. DIETRICH

Nor I. No doubt it will be a birthday observance few will ever forget. A grand finale!

MS. BENNETT

That's the spirit! Mrs. Dietrich ... Okay then, I hope you both have a lovely chat ... I shall return.

(There's an uneasy silence as she moves awkwardly to the door and exits. GINA and MRS. DIETRICH look at each other for a beat and begin laughing.)

MRS. DIETRICH

My dear, If you ever happen to look into one of that woman's ears you'll surely see clear through to California.

GINA

Or at least Nebraska ... Look, I'm really sorry this is turning into a bit of a dog and pony show with the new community center and wing and all, but I have to begin by saying you must be pulling off the biggest scam in nursing home history here because I don't believe you are anywhere near 100 years old today.

MRS. DIETRICH

Ha! While my mind agrees with you, sadly my body says otherwise. These days I can barely move anything but my mouth.

GINA

If it's any consolation, your mouth works quite well.

MRS. DIETRICH

Yes, I am blessed with a clear mind, and I can still hear rather well, too, for this decrepit age. I don't know why. But everything else is just hideous. And that, my dear, makes for a very short and boring story. So, I hope you don't have high expectations for this article.

GINA

Well, truth be told, we all hate these 100 birthday features. I haven't done one in a long time. Usually you show up and the person is practically catatonic and either has no clue what's going on or can't articulate a single thought.

(GINA gets up and moves to the window.)

So you try to write around it. You know, describe the room, the decorations, the view out the window. Hmm, quite scenic out there. Bob's Big Boy, Rite Aid. Nice dumpsters ... It's just always so damn depressing. And, actually, I haven't been feeling

GINA CONT. |

very upbeat myself these days. Honestly? I wasn't happy about coming here.

MRS. DIETRICH

I certainly hope you don't think I was eager to meet you. Why would I want to lay these clouded eyes on someone filling up my room with possibilities -- all sunrise when my clock is striking midnight. But ... here you are, Miss *Primavera*. Miss Springtime.

GINA

So, I guess we're both in the same boat, huh?

MRS. DIETRICH

Same direction, perhaps. But completely different boats and timetables, dear.

GINA

Well, now that we've established we're not too thrilled to see each other, I guess we should just get this, as you say, short and boring story over with.

MRS. DIETRICH

As you wish.

GINA

I'll try to make this painless. I only need 15 inches, so it shouldn't take too long.

MRS. DIETRICH

Oh, it really is short! Then, I suspect we will be capsulizing a few events? It has been 100 years, you know.

GINA

Uh, yeah, but you're actually the sidebar.

MRS. DIETRICH

A bar! Well, cheers to me!

GINA

Ha! No, that's what we call a supplemental story to the main story, or mainbar.

MRS. DIETRICH

I'm learning things already! And what, do tell, is the main story.

GINA

The new community center and residential wing, of course.

MRS. DIETRICH

So, I'm just the carrot on Ms. Bennett's most unattractive stick?

GINA

Well, uh, I wouldn't put it that way, exactly.

MRS. DIETRICH

How *exactly* would you put it, dear?

GINA

You really *are* determined to give everyone a hard time today? Aren't you? I'm just trying to do my job.

MRS. DIETRICH

I am merely inquiring. In my day women didn't go to college. In Trieste we had convent school, finishing school and then a good quick shove into the fray. So, I am just curious, dear. What *is* your job.

GINA

Mrs. Dietrich, I'm sorry. You know, I'm not having the best of days ... months really.

MRS. DIETRICH

Try decades for me, dear. We know what *my* problem is. All you have to do is look at me! But what could your problem possibly be? If you don't mind me asking.

GINA

Hmm ... Yeah ... What could my problem be? I mean, do you *really* want to hear a young woman whine about being a young woman?

MRS. DIETRICH

I have nothing but time, apparently, and certainly nowhere interesting to go, so, please ... proceed.

GINA

Well, I don't know. You really want to hear this?

MRS. DIETRICH

I'm certainly not going to beg!

GINA

Okay. Alright ... Don't get snippy. Well, I don't know. It started with a pair of earrings.