**Wanted – charity shop manager to process donations and manage dozens of volunteers. Wages – poor. Perks – none. Must possess the patience of a saint.**

Someone is heaving an ancient, stained mattress out of the back of his van. Then he staggers across the pavement to prop it against the door of my charity shop.

I bang on the bus window.

“No one will ever want to buy that! Have you never seen The Bidding Room?” I screech, even though he can’t possibly hear me.

The bus turns a corner and I wince. My head is very sore.

It was Yasmina’s leaving do last night. There were over sixty of us at the restaurant, shop managers and volunteers. That’s how popular she was.

Did I actually stand up to make a toast?

I did.

“You were the best County Leader we ever had. We will never have another of your elk – I mean ilk,” I said and slammed my glass on the table and my colleague Maggie nudged me and told me to sit down and finish my pizza.

Yasmina told us what she is going to do next (an archaeology degree, so not much different to her day job then, ha ha – she’ll still be getting her hands dirty) and we gave her a new Kindle and one of those massive cards and she said how much she’d enjoyed working with us and two people cried.

Most people left after that, which meant I was totally obliged to stay and finish the wine with Yasmina, Maggie and three other managers, Dale, Aisha and Beryl.

“I can’t imagine why you want to spend the rest of your life digging up old spoons, but I’m sure you will enjoy it. And we will certainly – probably – learn to love our new County Leader. Please, tell us everything you know about Candida,” said Aisha.

Yasmina choked on her wine and had to be patted vigorously on the back by our charming, young Italian waiter. When she’d recovered and he’d gone – after winking at Aisha – she said, “I certainly could, but really I should tell you about your new boss instead. Her name is Candace. Candace Cartmel.” She made us all repeat it.

“No one has been in the charity shop business as long as you, Maggie, but Candace is very experienced. She started out as a shop manager for the Red Cross near Birmingham and then moved to a bigger shop in Leeds. A Thriftworks shop – so she knows all about us and how we do things. Then she applied to be a County Leader – twice.”

“You mean, she got turned down?” asked Aisha and Yasmina said, “yes -but hardly anyone wants to be a County Leader. Ever.”

We all nodded. The workload is huge, and the pay is terrible.

“Then she decided enough was enough – I don’t blame her really – and she got another job as a shop manager for CRO,” said Yasmina and we all sucked in our breath.

CRO – the Charity Retail Organisation - is the Harrods of the charity shop world. They’ve been around longer than anyone else and where they go, everyone follows – usually several years later and on a fraction of their budget.

Their shops are easily recognised on any High Street because they all look exactly the same. Each shop is fitted out with their trademark colours – peach and plum – and they have faux wooden floors and matching wooden hangers for the clothes, which are arranged in size ascending order.

The women’s clothes are always at the front of the shop, with accessories down the right-hand corner, men’s clothes on the left and books and bric-a-brac at the back. You wouldn’t know if you were in Lands’ End or John O’Groats.

You might not even know you were in a charity shop at all…

Thriftworks shops – our shops - are nothing like this. They all look different because our bosses don’t like spending money on refits. So, we improvise. Dale’s shop used to be a butcher’s and the walls are still lined with blue and white tiles – very hipster but freezing cold in the winter.