

Payments

by Miguel Lasala

What it was for, didn't matter. When Susan walked into Fred's house every few weeks and start talking, he'd just nod and say, "Sure, I know how tough it is out there, baby." Then they'd drink some wine and put on some music, and he'd give her a little money when he could. It had become a routine, a routine that couldn't continue.

It was getting tougher out there for Fred, too, and he couldn't give Susan anything this time. He had done the calculations, and it looked like he'd be flat until atleast the following week. When Susan showed up, he'd tell her all about it. He'd show her the figures. She'd understand. She'd have to.

When Fred heard Susan's high-heels strike the pavement, he stood up and opened the door and gave her a little smile. She walked in, made herself a drink, and looked at her ass in mirror as she asked him how he was doing.

"Tired, constipated, just drove in from El Paso."

Susan looked at her ass in the mirror again.

"You got what we talked about, baby?"

"Looks like I spoke too soon."

"What does that mean?"

"That means that I'm short."

"Short?"

"I'll make it up to you next week."

"Next week doesn't matter," Susan said as she swung her arm down against her thigh.

"Listen. You're not the one who needs to find four hundred dollars in an hour. I was counting on that money tonight."

Fred waited a full two seconds before he spoke. He knew what he wanted to say. He wanted to tell her that he had been a generous man when he could be, and that it would be nice to see a little gratitude coming from her direction on occasion.

"Now you just put me in a real peculiar situation, baby."

Just then a vehicle approached the drive and Susan ran to the window and looked out.

"They must have followed me here. Now you see what you've done."

Fred got out of his chair.

"Fred, if we don't produce the money this is going to be it. You understand me?"

He looked at her. Her eyes grew black and distant and afraid. He grabbed a shotgun from underneath his chair, cocked it, then carefully walked to the door and opened it.

"It's just the god damned neighbor. You trying to give me a heart attack?"

Fred sat down and laid the gun across his lap.

"Who exactly are we worried about tonight, Susan?"

"In about half an hour, I'm supposed to pay someone back four hundred dollars."

Susan explained. The night before, she was sitting in her car minding her own business and scratching off a Pick Ten, when all of a sudden a bunch of kids came running out of the Circle K at full speed, and one of the motherfuckers fell on her hood before he rolled over spilling a huge Big Gulp all over her Mazda.

"I was standing there about to become a witness and all that crap for the cops, when I saw some loose twenties on the ground near my tire. There was about twenty of them. I mean I fucking farted when I saw them. Does that paint a picture for you? When the attendant ran back inside to answer the phone, I reached down and got the fuck out of there."

Fred looked at her. "You do know how many cameras they have at those places?"

"I was going to give it back. But I owe Marcy, and I just had to give her something because her pet lizard is sick with cancer or something. I had to pay her back or the goddamned lizard was going to die. So I figured, if I could just get on a roll, you know? I mean I knew the good Lord would take care of me. I swear, I knew he would

show me the way, Honey. I just knew I could double it in an hour, maybe two, tops."

Fred leaned forward. "Are you telling me that you went to the casino?"

Susan shook her head.

"I was so close. I mean I had it. I was sixty dollars away from doubling it. I could smell that fucking cash, baby. I had it right there in front of me."

"You didn't have shit, baby."

Fred put the gun away and walked outside through the garage and began brushing the sawdust off of his chop saw then loaded it up with some other tools into his truck.

As they drove down Patton Ave toward the pawnshop, the sun fell behind the mountains to the West just as they started to turn purple.

"So what's happened with the lizard?"

"It's dead Fred. The fucking lizard's dead. You happy about that?"

"Not at all, baby. Not one bit."

