Withdrawal

by Paul de Denus

Jhen, the teller at my bank, has a way with words.

“I can offer you this,” she says. “Sex… on me.”

The bank is small and quiet, empty and full of money. Jhen waits patiently, head at a slight tilt, hands flat on the counter. She reminds me of a Black Jack dealer, white shirt and all. Jhen is small and exotic and beautiful with short dark hair and a mouth with turned down corners bracketing an almost smile. Her eyes are sleepy and I imagine us in bed.

“Is that a hypothetical?” I say.

“I'm sorry?”

I pause, think about repeating the “sex on me” comment, consider I may have misunderstood. I count my words in small denominations.

“I'm sorry. What was your… offer? Again?” I ask.

“Checks… no fee. We offer that with any new account.”

She touches her hair at the back of her head the same way Sheila does when she's nervous. Or about to explode.

“I don't need a new account… do I?”

“Your wife is on this account, a Sheila Douglas. There's a note with a request to close the account and to inform the parties of any… transactions.”

“Sheila's my ex-wife,” I said. “We're getting divorced.”

“Yes. Would you like to open a new account?” Jhen says.

I wonder if Jhen is single. Her fingers are absent of rings, and she's not layered in makeup like Sheila. No, this girl is not made up. Jhen is real and seems willing to let me handle money and open cash accounts without all the questions. She looks happy, responsible, on top of things.

“Sir,” Jhen asks again, patiently, ”Are you interested in a new account?”

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A new account? I wonder if Jhen would let me transfer everything into a new account, without Sheila knowing. If I could just get my hands on some money, withdraw it, take it, and hide it… hide it under my new mattress, the one I picked up at the recycle store for my new apartment. I think Jhen would like my mattress especially with all that money under it. It'd be our secret. Like money in the bank. Shelia wouldn't have to know. She'd think I was making another mistake. This is what it's come to. One, or two mistakes and suddenly our marriage is over.

Jhen would understand mistakes. She probably makes them all the time working in this bank.

“Are you Japanese?” I ask. “You look very exotic.”

She gives me a coy look, a look dispensed to hundreds of men before.

“My mother is, yes,” she says, laughing. A pause. “Does a new account interest you?”

The bank is very quiet. There is a flat-screen TV in the corner on mute. It shows the world still revolving. On the Jerry Springer Show, an animated couple yells and swings at each other. I can't bear to hear them. It's all too familiar.

“Can you save me?” I say to Jhen, worried I might cry.

“I'm sure we can, sir,” Jhen says, eyes lowered, scanning the computer screen. “We do offer a savings account, but again it will require your wife's okay on the transaction.”

It will be okay I tell myself. It'll all work out. And Jhen? I think I may be wrong about her. She is beautiful and she enjoys money but she is not prone to mistakes.