

Birmingham Airport

Flash Fiction for Guests of the WordFeeder

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"Excuse me," I said apologetically to the young man standing behind me. "I try not to run people over with my briefcase, but sometimes..."

"It's okay," he said, glancing down and then back up again at a similar model he had next to him. "I hope you have insurance?" He was kidding of course, and went back to checking his Blackberry. In his early 30s, tie still tight around his collar, the sleeves of his stylish, mostly blue striped shirt still rolled down to his wrists, his suit jacket neatly folded over one of his arms, he had to be new at this.

I was second, he was third in the crowded line at the miscellaneous foods stand that served the cul de sac of gates at the end of the "C" terminal. Pizza on one end, plastic wrapped sandwiches and bottled drinks in the middle, frozen yogurt behind the cash register on the right. The other side was a bar for suits who had given up on doing any more business for the rest of the day. I couldn't blame them.

My flight was running a few minutes late. I figured a frozen yogurt would be my only shot at something to eat before I'd be home after 10. How bad could it be? I took out five ones which should have been enough. I was ready, not wanting to waste any time when it was my turn.

"Hi. I'd like a cup of..." which is all I said before looking down from the menu to the face of the clerk behind the counter. If there was a smile that could arrest speech, and make really bad food taste good, it was hers.

"Hey," she answered my interrupted order without the least evidence she understood the power of that face. She was black, late 20s maybe, with the perfect color skin and electric eyes I couldn't escape.

I tried again. "I'd like a small cup of vanilla. Do you have anything to put on it?" It'd been a rough day. I thought I splurge, do myself a favor.

"Sure. We have, uh, chocolate sauce and M&Ms," she said tentatively.

"I'll have the chocolate." I heard myself talking, but wasn't sure I'd said it out loud.

She smiled back at me, this time almost giggling. "Sorry, but we're out of chocolate."

"Hey," I thought to myself. "She had a fifty-fifty shot of my never knowing, and went for it."

"Wait," seeing the feigned disappointment on my face, the not so subtle roll of my eyes. "Let me see what I can do," at which she turned, actually spun is more like it, squished out my yogurt

from the vanilla side of the machine, and attacked the hot fudge dispenser, pumping furiously. “Here. How’s that?” she asked me, holding out the cup to me, her arm fully extended with pride.

“That’s...” There were a few unsightly globs of thick brown something on top of the yogurt which, incidentally, I just noticed was an odd color gold. “...perfect.”

“\$3.78.”

I gave her the first four ones, which she accepted and counted by spreading them with her left hand while her right moved to the register, but then stopped, pulling out the third bill and waving it at me.

It was a ten I had stuck in my wallet out of place. “Ooo,” a not so clever response, but all I could come up with at the time. So I took back the ten and handed her the other one, and she gave me some change, which I was purposely slow to take. “Thanks,” I told her, “for everything,” which is what I wanted to say, but didn’t.

Not so as to hold up the line, I just rolled and stuffed the money in my pocket with the receipt, figuring I would get organized on the plane when the guy sitting in front of me leaned his seat so far back I couldn’t open my computer. (My office can’t stand it when I give them wrinkled receipts, but what do they know?) “Excuse me,” I said again to the man in line behind me, who had started to move forward just a second before I left. Yogurt in one hand, the handle to my briefcase in the other, I walked and rolled it away to the counter where they had napkins and the plastic spoons used only at the finest snack bars.

Fortunately in some respects, unfortunately in others, it would be an hour and a half later, at 37,000 feet that I would realize I’d lost my wallet, and taste for frozen yogurt.

About the same time, in a hotel room near the airport where the young woman had just arrived, she tossed the light jacket she was wearing onto the first of the two double beds even before the door had closed behind her. “Hey. Sorry I’m late.” She bent over to kiss the man who had been in line behind me before waiting for him to answer.

“Pretty good,” he told her, grabbing her cotton shirt to pull her toward him, rolling back onto the other bed where he had been sitting, the two of them just missing the wallets he had dumped from his briefcase, mine included.

“Hey,” she said, pushing herself off his chest, flashing that familiar smile. “Let’s get out of here and buy stuff before all these guys start landing. We can do this later.”

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