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US NATIONAL BANK ALMOST KILLS ME

When I showed up at the front desk on the trading level of US National Bank, the secretary recognized my face but not my name. No matter, it wasn't good news.

“May I help you?” she asked it in a way that let me know clearly that she had no intention of helping me at all. Instead, I had the feeling that she might have already called security. She looked just the way my mom did when she had caught me stealing the pennies from the free penny dish at the convenience store. This was not going to be a happy conversation.

Me: I have an appointment with Samuel Wilson.

Skeptical Receptionist: Sure you do, Mr., uh, Charles Flank, who not longer works for Wakeman, Butterman and Bailey. You have a special meeting with, um, Samuel Wilson, who doesn't work here?

Me [protesting]: No, really, I do have an appointment with him. He does work here. My name is Harry Banes.

Skeptical Receptionist: No, really, you don't have any appointments here, Mr. Banes. There's no Samuel Wilson at US National Bank. Never was. And there's no Harry Banes here, either.

Me: Yes! Yes there is a Harry Banes at US National Bank. And if you double check, there is a Samuel Wilson here too.

Skeptical Receptionist: Should I call Mr. Sutherland and see what he thinks about your appointment with Mr. Wilson?”

Me [looking dumb]:

This left me with very little to say. I most certainly did not want to miss any news about how Samuel and Harvey and the rest of the US National Bank trading crew were handling the trade to sell the EUR/USD at 1.2200. When would that trade open? It could happen today, for sure – even though the currency pair would have to move 200 points upward to get to the entry. Why were they selling all the way up there? Craig had said they could get an order sooner than that. Why wait that long? And where was Mr. Wilson? How could I get in there without her calling the police?

Worse than calling the police would be to call Mr. Sutherland. Pissing him off would end my chances forever of seeing the trading floor here, or anywhere else, for that matter. Mr. Wilson was probably waiting for me, expecting me, and I was going to ruin the opportunity if I didn't get in there. So I decided that I would beg.

“I promise. Last time I didn't see Mr. Sutherland. I know. I lied. I lied to you, I lied to my wife earlier last week, I lied to my boss and to some other people that I can't remember right now. But you gotta let me in that door. I swear Mr. Wilson works here.”

She had transformed suddenly into the Angry Receptionist. “I've already called security,” she told me very matter-of-factly. “Don't you think I know who works here? Don't you think I would have checked first? Now would be a good time to turn around and leave. ”

I heard a ding and the sound of elevator doors opening, and heavy footsteps behind me.

“Would you please call Mr. Wilson and tell him that I am here? If it says that he doesn’t know me then I will go. You can handcuff me or arrest me. You can just page out to the trading floor, or look up your directory again.”

Now I was really hoping that Mr. Wilson did not suffer from any form of senility. I mean, he had looked older than anyone else on the trading floor, and it was possible that he had forgotten all about me. For sure he would have left my name at the front desk. Wait a minute! He hadn’t told them that I was coming! No wonder I was having all this trouble. Certainly he had forgotten about the appointment. Just as I imagined – he was generous and helpful but not very bright.

It was not just one minute before noon and I was positive that I was never going to get in – he would probably not even be at his desk any longer, since he worked shorter days. He was an old man. Needed a nap or whatever.

By then, two security guards were standing by my side and I must have been giving Angry Receptionist the most pitiful look ever, because she did pick up her phone.

“Judy, there’s a psychopath out here in the lobby and he wants to know if we have a Samuel Wilson at the firm.” Then a pause.

“No, not a real psychopath. He’s just demanding to see a man named Samuel Wilson, says he works on the trading floor.” Another pause and I thought my bladder would explode from the tension. I held on, knowing that I only need a few more seconds before she’d realize her mistake, I could use the restroom, and then I’d be whooshed through the giant mahogany doors, where I’d find a happy Mr. Wilson ready to instruct me in the

ways of secretive, rich, master traders who would take me in as their own and raise me up to be the greatest trader who ever lived.

Or not.

I felt a hand grip my right arm. Then another grabbed my left elbow. They were huge, meaty hands that could crush a man's dream of going onto the trading floor at US National Bank. I looked to my left and right – within ten feet there were windows on either side. We were 20 floors above ground. I wondered which side they were going to throw me out. This is not how I had planned to die, but it was possible that I was going to leave this world never having seen more than one Non Farm Payrolls jobs report. And with a planned order to gain glorious, innumerable pips from a sell trade on the Euro!

Priest: Dearly beloved, we gather here this May morning to celebrate the life of Harold Junior Banes III.

No, wait. That wasn't it.

Priest: Dear friends, Mr. Governor, Senators, Congress-men and –women, Mr. Sutherland, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Herbie Johnson: we meet this sorry, rainy May morning to mourn the pitiful life of Harold Banes Jr., destined to be the greatest trader who ever lived, et cetera and stuff like that.

[weeping]

Priest: Our only consolation is that the Angry Receptionist at US National Bank was fired yesterday for not knowing the names of the traders at the firm.

[more weeping]

The hands gripped tighter on my arms.

“There is NO Samuel Wilson at the firm.”

She was now Angry *and* Happy Receptionist, as if she at once took great pleasure in the fact that I would die a sorry heap of human flesh at the corner of Broad and Wall Streets below; and at the same time had been deeply offended at my insistence that she did not know the names of the people that she worked for.

“Goodbye, Mr. Banes.”

Oh, double crap. My entire plan was now totally backfiring. I did the only thing that I could, as the grip on my elbow tightened and I started to move backwards against my will. My feet were dragging on the floor as I was pulled into the elevator. I called out:

Me [yelling]: I am Charlie Flank too! Mr. Wilson, it's me, Charlie Flank, and Harry Banes! We are here to see you!

She hung up her phone and returned to do her work. Of course she could claim no hand in my murder, especially now that she was not paying attention to the situation. The World Wrestling Federation had nothing on these guys who were now pressing the buttons for the 1st floor, while holding on to me tightly, as if I could get away once locked inside the elevator. Thankfully I had not been thrown from the windows on the 20th

floor. But would the police be waiting for me outside? Would I have to call my wife to bail me out? How much of my severance package would now be spent on legal fees?

On the first floor, the doors to the elevator parted and they pushed me out. Then they walked me out to the main doors and shoved me onto the sidewalk on Wall Street. I fell down. People just walked over me, or kicked me. Luckily no one tripped. My head popped up and I could see the New York Stock Exchange down the street. I put my head back down.

I was never going to be a trader, I told myself.

“Sure you are going to be a trader,” a familiar voice called down to me. I lifted my head and saw an old, wrinkled hand offered to help me.

I looked up. It was Samuel Wilson.

“Harry Banes?” He grinned. “Charlie Flank?” An even wider grin. “Is that you?”

I did not smile back. I wasn't angry either. Just totally relieved that he was there. I looked up into his eyes.

“Help!” was all I was able to say. My eyes started to well up with tears. Why hadn't he told them I was coming to see him that day? Why did I have to struggle so much just to get ahead? I imagined that my trading platform had self-generated a Euro trade, and that it was now opening, that I was now selling EUR/USD at 1.2200, and it was just racing upward in a climb that would suck up all the remaining funds in my trading account. My wife would leave me, take all the furniture except my favorite reclining chair, which would then break, then the last light bulb in our apartment would burn out and I would sit in the dark until I died.

“No, Harry,” he told me, stretching his hand out again. “That is not going to happen. You are going to be a great trader. Perhaps the best ever. I promise that.”

How did he know what I was thinking?

How had he shown up at just the right moment?

Samuel Wilson knew who I was!

And he wanted to help me! In that moment I handed myself completely over to him, to do his bidding, to learn whatever it was he had to teach me. He was my friend in the darkest moment and that was enough, it was plenty enough to know that he wasn't going to leave me to die an embarrassing death on the street that symbolized all of my unrealized hopes. That he would stand up for me when I couldn't even stand up for myself. That he would appear in the exact moment when I was letting go of all of my impossible dreams. And then I realized, with a shudder of adrenaline that raced down from the tip of my head, through my entire body and down to my feet:

This man wasn't who I thought he was. This wasn't Samuel Wilson.

This was Harvey Winklestein.