

Paying off a Loan

by Jim Gold

I charged into the bank Monday morning, frantically looking for money to pay off the loan shark swimming behind me. The teller said, "Go downstairs to the vault." I took the stairs three and four at a time with the shark snapping at my heels.

Luckily the vault was open. I raced in, tripped over a bag of coins, and fell headlong into a pile of cash. With a feeling of relief, I gathered the piles together and stuffed them in the loan shark's mouth. His huge jaws snapped greedily at the greenbacks. When he'd had enough, he swam clumsily out of the vault and up the stairs. His fin got stuck in the revolving door, but he escaped down Ocean Avenue.

I sat in the remaining pile of cash, sweating. That was a close call, I thought.

Just then a beautiful woman came toward me. She had long blonde hair down to her waist and a lithe, slender figure. Her skirt was very tight and had cash receipts printed all over it. Her legs were so close together, I could easily tell she was the bank mermaid.

"What are you doing here?" she gasped. "Help! Help! A robber!"

"Please! Please don't shout," I said. "My ears are very sensitive to pressure. I'm not a bank robber. I only came in for a quick loan. I had to pay off a debt in a hurry, and now that I have, I feel much more relaxed. Perhaps you'll sit down and we can talk?"

She looked me over hesitantly, then calmed down as she realized I was harmless. "We've had a lot of robberies lately," she said, perching on a stack of hundred-dollar bills. "I guess I'm a bit jittery."

We sat discussing the banking business, foreign currency, and the falling value of the dollar for half an hour. "Imagine," I laughed. "Soon those hundreds you're sitting on will be just about worthless."

"Yes," she answered. "It's a real problem. Sitting on dollars won't keep inflation down."

Her name was Esther. I wrote down her phone number as we left the bank together. We saw each other over the next few days. I was so happy to be free from debt. Now I could love again. And what a beautiful woman I had to love! It made me realize that banks can offer more than just money. On Friday afternoon, when I went to the bank to meet her,

I suddenly saw the loan shark coming after me again. “What do *you* want?” I growled. “I just paid you off!”

“Like hell you did!” said the shark angrily. “Those dollars you gave me ain’t worth nothin’ no more. I wanna be paid off in gold. Ain’t you heard about inflation?”

The old panic instantly returned, and I started to run with the shark snapping at my heels. How could I repay him? I ran towards the bank—it was my only hope! I charged through the revolving door and dashed down the stairs, leaping three and four at a time. Luckily the vault was still open. I raced in, tripped over a bag of gold coins, and fell headlong into a pile of cash. “Take the coins,” I yelled. “Take the coins!”

I picked up handfuls and shoved them into his greedy mouth. I could hear his sharp teeth grinding them into dust. As he swallowed, I knew that, soon, his digestive enzymes would compact that dust into gold bars.

Finally, the shark had had enough. He swam clumsily out of the bank and down Ocean Avenue. I remained in my pile of cash, waiting for Esther.

When she arrived, she looked concerned. “What happened?” she asked. “I was worried about you.”

“The shark was after his money again,” I said. “But don’t worry. I gave him the gold in the vault. He’s satisfied now.” I wiped my sweating brow with my handkerchief. “Why don’t we go out to supper together?”

“Good idea.” She took my hand. “You’ve had a rough day.”

I agreed. We headed for a nearby seafood restaurant, entered the back room, and sat down in a quiet corner.

“Relax,” said Esther in a soothing voice. The waiter was soon bringing out orders. “It’s all over now. Put your mind at ease, and eat your fish.” She looked closely at my plate. “Hmm,” she hummed thoughtfully. “Looks like shark.”

I studied my plate for a long moment. “You’re right,” I said, gleefully jabbing my fork into it. That night I ate with a vengeful smile of satisfaction.

from Carlos the Cloud

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