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VELATION

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DEAD PEOPLE
ASSOCIATION # 1

Eduard Meinema

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1

The sun had set quite some time ago, but the heat of the warm summer day lingered in Miami's Art Deco district. Fans and mist spray were used on the patio to try and keep guests cool. But only inside, in the air-conditioned section of the restaurant, was it truly pleasant.

Jordan Nash sat outside. He dabbed beads of sweat from his upper lip with his napkin. "Dessert anyone?" he asked his guests. He raised an eyebrow and glanced unashamedly at Nena and Ilse, the two young, scantily clad women sitting across from him and his good friend Marlon Keene.

The girls giggled innocently.

Jordan's friend tried to force a decision. "If it were up to me..." He frowned, simultaneously moving the Ferrari key fob slightly forward.

The girls looked at each other. "Okay," Nena said, the girl with the blond hair. Her accent was unmistakably German. Her too-short tank top left little to the imagination; the view was generous, revealing the slightly sunburned skin on her breasts. A patch of whitish skin betrayed where her tiny bikini top had been. Her bright red lipstick had mostly faded after dinner, visible only as a print on her empty wine glass.

"Yes?" her dark-haired friend asked, dressed more modestly in a halter top that barely covered her bust, with a smile and a mock ignorance. "Really?"

“Sounds real enough to me,” Marlon noted eagerly.

Jordan chuckled. He was enjoying this life. A few smart, risky, but successful cryptocurrency investments had earned him enough money to do nothing but enjoy himself for the rest of his life. And he did. To the fullest. “Good,” he said with a chuckle. “Dessert will be enjoyed elsewhere.”

The girls giggled nervously and even louder as they took turns teasing each other on their bare thighs.

Jordan beckoned the waiter. “Can I have the check?” As the waiter, a young man with short black hair, walked to the cash register, Jordan signaled his friend. “Would you mind going to the valet parking to have the car picked up?”

“I will,” Marlon said, holding up the Ferrari’s key fob, keyless, and twirling it around his finger. “I’ll see you ladies in a sec,” he said to the two German tourists they’d picked up earlier that evening as he and his wealthy friend drove down the boulevard in Jordan’s four-door Ferrari Purosangue with the windows down. The two young women couldn’t resist the temptation and climbed in.

“Here you go,” the waiter said. He offered Jordan the bill on a small plate, covered in refreshing candies. Jordan grabbed his smartphone and, without even bothering to look at the bill, held it up to pay wirelessly.

After a few seconds, the waiter looked at his screen. “Something went wrong, sir. The payment was unsuccessful.”

Jordan stared at his own phone in surprise. “That’s strange. Well, then let’s try again...” He held up the phone again. The waiter ran the scanner through it once more. The result,

however, remained the same. "Sorry," he said. "Payment not accepted."

Jordan looked at the waiter as if he saw the impossible. He shrugged and dug into his jacket pocket for a credit card. "I'll just pay the old-fashioned way then," he joked, holding up the credit card casually, but clearly visible.

The German girls nudged each other. "Platinum," the blonde said to her friend, rolling her eyes knowingly.

The waiter became a little uncomfortable when he had to repeat the cancellation. "Declined," he said curtly.

Jordan frowned. "Declined? This card doesn't even have a limit."

The girls nudged each other again. "No limit!" Blondie whispered, almost excitedly.

The waiter showed the display that said "Declined." "Maybe we should *really* pay the old-fashioned way then?"

"Excuse me?" Jordan said, surprised, but mostly annoyed by this embarrassment.

"Cash?" the waiter said with a grin.

"Oh, like that..." Jordan sighed deeply. He dug into his other inside pocket and pulled out a roll of banknotes held together by a rubber band. The two girls nearly fell off their chairs. "Hmm... How much?" he asked casually, waving the roll.

"Three hundred and sixty-five dollars, sir," the waiter said, trying not to show his admiration for the wad of cash Jordan was carrying.

Jordan pulled four hundred-dollar bills from the roll. "Keep the rest," he said.

"Thank you, but... I still need to check these," the waiter said apologetically.

Jordan closed his eyes; his ego hadn't been so bruised in a long time. "Goddammit, what a night," he muttered to himself.

The waiter was back in a flash. "Okay. Thank you, sir. Have a pleasant evening!"

The girls giggled excitedly, but Jordan was fed up.

"Christ, Nena!" Ilse cried. "Your legs! That rattan has left welts in your skin." She glanced quickly over her shoulder at her own legs. "Not mine. Were you sitting next to the pillow?"

"I had no pillow," Nena said.

"You should have said that," Ilse said.

"Yes, I..."

"Sorry, ladies. Your legs will be fine. I see the car is being pulled up. Shall we go?"

"With pleasure!" the pair exclaimed, giggling excitedly.

Jordan charmingly held the door open for both girls. Then he sat next to his friend in the front seat of the bright red Ferrari. "Marlon, take me home. You take the car and... that stuff in the backseat."

Marlon Keene looked to the side in surprise. "What do you mean? Don't you want to... You know?"

"*Bumsen*," the blonde Nena yelled, half-drunk. "*Fuckie-fuckie*, yeah?"

Jordan closed his eyes and shook his head. "I have something else on my mind, Marlon. A little thing about wireless payments."

"Trouble paying? You?" Marlon asked. He knew exactly what his friend's net worth was. He whistled uncomprehendingly, started the car, and maneuvered the car through the line of cars on the boulevard.

"Does everyone here drive a Ferrari?" Ilse asked, surprised by the long traffic jam caused by red sports cars.

"Some people drive a Maserati," Marlon said.

"Or a Bentley," Jordan added. "But I felt like driving the Ferrari tonight."

"Oh?" Nena said. "Do you have, uh...?"

"Several," Jordan said disinterested. His evening was ruined. All desire gone. He let his friend drive him to his villa in Coconut Grove. He got out and, as he said goodbye, told Marlon to bring the car back tomorrow sometime during the day.

The two girls stared open-mouthed at the large house and the surrounding estate. "Aren't we going here...?" Nena asked.

"No, my house is a little smaller, but the bed is bigger," Marlon noted.

The girls glanced at each other. Before they could think twice, Jordan closed the car door and, thinking about the rejected payments, walked back to his house without looking back.

2

“Crap,” he grumbled into the emptiness of the large house. “Payment declined... What’s going on?” He walked to his office, sank into the large brown Buffalo leather chair behind the exorbitant glass desk, and growled into his computer’s voice system: “Mata, show bank balances!”

The VA, the virtual assistant Jordan had jokingly nicknamed Mata Hari, opened three large computer screens in a split second, displaying all of Jordan Nash’s bank accounts. Jordan’s eyes scanned the screens. Each account displayed the amounts he’d grown accustomed to. Nine figures. Nothing unusual. That was reassuring, but still... He pursed his lips angrily. “Mata, are you seeing something I’m not? Are there problems with the bank accounts?” he asked, agitated.

Mata Hari responded immediately. “Status stable. Balances correct.”

“Hmm. Yeah. That’s what I thought too. Damn, then why was my payment declined tonight?”

“Not enough data.”

“That wasn’t a question, Mata. I’m just talking nonsense...”

“Question not understood.”

Jordan sighed loudly and rubbed his forehead wearily. He looked at his Rolex Pearlmaster. “Damn, too late to call the bank.”

“Call a private account manager?” Mata suggested unsolicited.

Jordan thought about it for a moment. “Hmm-Yeah. Go ahead,” he said. “Why not? Let those guys do something for their money,” he chuckled. As if he’d put any effort into amassing his fortune himself.

Not even half a minute later, Keira Wishaw’s soft, gentle voice sounded over the speakers in the ceiling of Jordan’s office. “Mr. Nash? Is there a problem?”

“You could say that, honey,” Jordan said before launching into the conversation. “I paid with my fucking phone first, then with a credit card. But they both got rejected. I looked like a fool with my millions in the bank!”

“That... is indeed extremely frustrating. My apologies,” Keira said. Jordan’s forceful, aggressive tone caught her somewhat off guard, but she quickly recovered. “Although I don’t know if the fault lies with the bank or the provider responsible for processing the payments. Let me check this out. I’ll get back to you shortly.”

Jordan Nash leaned back, running his hand contentedly through his brown locks. “*Good for you,*” he thought. *It’s the middle of the night and this chick just gets out of bed to check what’s going on.*

Within a minute, Keira’s voice came back over the speakers. “Mr. Nash? I’ve been checking on a few things. And, uh, this is... This is strange. I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to come into our office to investigate this further.”

Jordan jumped to his feet. “What’s the matter? What’s going on, Keira? I logged in myself. I can see online that everything is as it should be. I don’t see anything wrong.”

“No. But... It’s, um, kind of complicated.”

“Complicated?” Jordan responded excitedly. He was getting angry again.

“Well, more like delicate. Yes, yes. Delicate is the right word. Sorry, Mr. Nash. I can’t help you right now. Our Wall Street office is closed and...”

“I’m in Miami, not New York!” Jordan interrupted agitatedly.

Keira paused for a moment to hide her own irritation at her customer’s behavior. “My apologies. My phone didn’t show a number, so I didn’t see where you were calling from.”

No, I’m calling with a blocked caller ID, bitch, Jordan thought. “Yeah. Fine. But anyway. Now, because of this little thing, I have to come to your office tomorrow to sort this out?”

“Let me just double-check...,” Keira said. She didn’t wait for approval but put the call on hold to quickly double-check something. In a flash, she was back. “You said Miami, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then you can come to our branch in Brickell, Miami’s financial district, tomorrow morning. I’ve scheduled an appointment with our bank manager, Ben Lancashire. Tomorrow morning at 9:00 AM.”

“With Lancashire? Why not with you?”

“I’m in New York, Mr. Nash.”

“Hmm. Lame excuses...”

“No, seriously, I...”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s fine. I’ll pull that Lancashire guy by his sleeve tomorrow. Thanks,” Jordan called, ending the call without giving Keira a chance to say anything or thank her for her time. “Great,” he said to himself. “So, I have a private account manager, but yet I still have to sit down with a stranger.”

“What exactly do you want?” The VA’s voice boomed from the ceiling.

“Oh, shut the fuck up!” Jordan yelled at his VA. He angrily stood up and walked away. Before he could even leave his office, he called the VA again. “Mata, run my bath!”

3

At a quarter to nine, Jordan Nash turned his *Storm Noir*-colored Bentley New Continental GT into the bank parking garage. Marlon hadn't returned the Ferrari yet. Some good friend; another annoyance. Although, he actually much preferred driving the Bentley himself. After checking in at the bank's intercom and the barrier went up, Jordan drove to the reserved spaces for exclusive clients, hurried to the elevator right next to the parking lot, and was whisked away to the 66th floor. The top floor of the bank building, but considerably lower than the Panorama Tower, which, at 85 stories, was still the tallest building in Miami.

Even before the doors were fully open, he stepped out of the elevator, flustered. A young woman, dressed in a navy pencil skirt, a neat white, fully buttoned blouse, and the management-mandated tights, was ready to meet him. He pushed her aside and strode further down the hall. "Yeah, I know the way. I'll have a coffee. Black with sugar. Two cubes!"

Without knocking, he yanked open the door to the bank's branch manager's office. "Well, just say the word," he began, not bothering to greet the manager. He yanked a chair from under the head of the conference table and sat down, his back to the manager, who was still sitting at his desk.

The branch manager tried to remain calm. He pressed the intercom. "Michelle, two coffees, please..."

"Sir, he already ordered, sir..."

“Sure,” Lancashire sighed, not letting his assistant finish. “Well, I’ll have an espresso, please. Extra strong.” He ended the call and rolled his eyes, hidden from Nash. Wealthy clients guaranteed his generous income, but seriously, sometimes the coffee just couldn’t be strong enough for him anymore. He mustered up his courage, faked a smile, and turned to his client. “Mr. Nash, good morning to you too,” Lancashire said before taking a seat diagonally across from Nash at the conference table.

The assistant came running with the coffee orders. She set down the cups and a bowl of cookies before quickly disappearing.

Jordan glared arrogantly at the director. “Well? Ben? How much longer do I have to wait for an answer?” He didn’t even bother to explain to Lancashire personally why he was there, assuming Keira Whishaw would have passed everything on.

Ben Lancashire sipped his espresso. Blinked. The hot drink was stronger than he’d expected. “You see, it’s like this... After your account manager, Ms...”

“I spoke to Keira Whishaw yesterday. Yes.” He nudged Lancashire to proceed faster with his hand.

“Yes, well, yesterday. Actually, in the middle of the night, that’s no problem. That’s what she’s your private account manager for. No, it’s like this. Um...”

“Jesus Christ, man. Hurry up with your statement. Did anyone get killed or something?” Jordan said. He dropped the sugar cubes into his cup from a distance, causing the coffee to splatter over the rim, spilling partly onto the saucer and partly onto the conference table.

Lancashire was visibly taken aback by Jordan's comment. "Um. A-actually, or n-not actually, but, well... actually, more or less, yeah."

Jordan stared at the man in disbelief. He leaned across the table toward Lancashire and hissed, "What are you talking about? Are you trying to tell me people *actually* died?" He shook his head stubbornly. "And besides, what does that have to do with my money?"

Lancashire cautiously raised his index finger. His lips moved, but no sound came out. Jordan leaned closer and looked at him even more sternly. "That actually is... *your* problem," the branch manager finally dared to admit.

Somewhat taken aback, Jordan slumped back against the back of his chair. After letting the director's words sink in, he burst out laughing. "My problem? *My* problem?" He leaned forward again. "I've got millions parked here, you bastard. Money I've entrusted to you. If for whatever reason I can't access it, that's *your* problem. Not mine!"

Ben Lancashire apologetically held his hands in front of him. "Unfortunately, Mr. Nash. This isn't something *we* can manage."

"What are you saying?" Jordan nearly lost it. "What do you mean, you can't do anything? If anyone can do anything to give me access to my money, it's you, damn it!"

"N-not... not if the account has been blocked by others," Lancashire stammered.

"Blocked?" The thoughts raced through Jordan's mind. "Who would want to freeze my account? Or rather, *why the hell*

would anyone freeze my account? I don't have any debt, man. There's no reason anyone would do that. Or even be allowed to do that."

"Well. You see, this is an automated process. Our system is linked to the government for checking personal data."

"Yeah, so? I gave you all my information a long time ago. You've been checking me out for a while now."

"That's true, but something has changed. In the government system."

"What? What do you mean? What's changed in the government that I can't access my money anymore?" Jordan grew increasingly angry. "What is this nonsense?"

Lancashire, feeling a little more confident now, brought his hands together and clasped his fingertips. "According to the government..." He removed one hand to scratch his nose. "According to the government, you are... you are... dead."

4

Jordan Nash glanced around, as if checking he wasn't the target of some candid camera program. The branch manager's office was modern and sleek, almost clinically tidy, and there was no one there except Lancashire and him. "Dead? Me?" he grumbled. He shook his head. "I'm sitting right across from you, idiot. Do I look dead? Well?"

Lancashire understood his client's reaction. A multimillionaire. One of his best clients. Carefully and as calmly as possible, he apologized. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Nash. Of course, I see you here—fortunately, let me say that—of course, I see you here in perfect health. But, this problem, this blockage... As I just told you, this isn't something the bank caused. It's something the government caused. I suspect a stupid administrative error. But... I... the bank, can't resolve this for you. You'll have to go to the town hall for that. Civil Affairs."

Jordan continued to stare at the bank clerk. He felt like grabbing the man, dragging him across the table, and shaking him vigorously. However, the branch manager's words slowly sank in. *Probably an administrative error*. Resignedly, he accepted the explanation. "Hmm. Okay... So, now I have to go to the town hall to straighten this out."

Lancashire stood up, relieved that Nash had calmed down somewhat. "That does seem best to me, Mr. Nash. The sooner you arrange this; the sooner we can lift the blockade."