



Confessions of a Serial Banker

A Memoir

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*This book is dedicated to all the people who work 9 to 5 every day,
who know what life on a treadmill feels like, and to all the bankers
of the world, who understand...*

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Prologue

I could have been anything. A ballerina. A circus clown. An astronaut.

I used to lie in bed at night and dream of all the things I could be in life. A scientist. An opera singer. A midwife.

I became, instead, a bank teller.

Easiest job in the world, when you think about it. You greet people. You count money. You make sure it all comes out balanced in the end.

It would prove the biggest challenge ever. It also turned out to be my biggest regret.

At times, I felt like I was balancing on a high beam without a net, juggling cantaloupes at the same time. At others, it was like running a marathon by myself while the crowds screamed for me to go even faster.

And after having performed a small miracle at the end of the night, cash till in balance, everything locked up firmly at the end of the night, I carried home the miniscule paycheck they gave me and collapsed into bed at 9pm.

I wasn't always this unhappy. I remember a time when I smiled and was a real person. Not a machine. For all I knew, I had become an ATM one night in my sleep and didn't even know it. People certainly treated me like one, swiping their cards and jabbing angrily at the buttons on the pinpad, barking orders at me. "Direct deposit," they snapped. I held my tongue. What they meant was a straight deposit. Straight in. No cash back. A direct deposit was a paycheck electronically deposited into their checking account from their employer. Any banker would find this error ignorant and

downright hilarious. We would probably all laugh about it later in the break room over coffee.

But what did I know? To them, I was just a mannequin behind the counter. And why should I expect them to know bank lingo anyway? They didn't live the daily nightmare we all did.

And anyway, the customer is always right.

But we bank employees really can't fault clients. We don't appear to be human. We are men and women in suits concerned only with the bottom line. Blank faces with cash registers for hearts. We're mistaken for mannequins on display for their visual pleasure, something to look at while their transaction is being processed. It's understandable why they believe they have the right to ask anything at all. Sometimes we're treated like machines. We're simply automatons completely without feeling or need for courtesy and respect. Clients talk to their companions as though we cannot hear what they are saying. Couples make out within two feet of us. People talk incessantly on their iPhones describing in full detail their hernia operations and yeast infections. The three Victoria Secret girls from down the street drop their merchant deposit on the counter, flip their hair back and talk to each other about underwear. It's as if there is an invisible force field the separates us.

Some people definitely mistake us for ATMs. They walk up without making eye contact, swipe their ATM card, then stare at the PIN pad and instruct with their head down, "Two hundred dollar withdrawal, please," then wait as though expecting it to dispense cash. Very often they're surprised, when they finally do manage to pick their head up, to find a person standing there.

I used to go with my mother to the bank as a child. It was a veritable paradise. There was an entire section of the bank where water flowed like in a Japanese garden. An entire upstairs with high beams and private conference rooms. I doubted they were ever used, and it made it all the more mysterious as I envisioned secret

bank heists like in the movies, where the enemies would lurk in the shadows and attempt a bank robbery.

Even their ATMs were unique. It was the 80's and so the concept of electronic banking had still not quite caught on. My mother would drive up to a kiosk and press a button. There was a whirr and out popped a cylindrical container into which she would place her deposit ticket and check. She would put it back, press another button and whirrr away it went, sucked underground through a tube of some sort and wind up inside the bank.

I was always excited to see this process. Technology at its finest.

There were rooms in the back where they took you if you had a safe deposit box. You turned your keys simulatenously and like magic, the small opening would give and your box was slid out. And then you went into the secret rooms to pull baubles and riches from inside your treasure box. Except in our box, my mother kept our memories. Far more precious than anything else we owned. My grandmother's engagement ring placed there after she passed with the intention of being passed on to my sister or me when we married. And other jewelry from my birth country, remnants of a life I never knew. And most importantly, photographs. My sister as a little girl dressed up as my father, drowning in his bulky suit which enveloped her like his giant hug his silk necktie loose around her neck. She wore a top hat, a fake moustache and dark sunglasses, his trademark. And another of her posing as my mother, dressed in her soft red dress and jewelry, rouge tinting her face like a neon sign.

So it was no wonder I found the bank to be a magical place and thought how nice it would be to work in one some day.

Little did I know what I would be in for...