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"Isabel. Here."

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I look up. A retired senior military officer is discreetly holding out 20 bucks. It's a hard thing for a guy to do discreetly with a woman under any circumstances, and harder yet in this big open work area, where people are even now popping out of their workstations and moving toward us. Well, they're moving toward us only incidentally: They're really moving toward the folding table just behind us, jammed up against the wall.

His body language is willing me to take the bill, but I make no move to reach out. I do narrow my eyes slightly: my own body language for "Huh?" Not enough narrowing to strike fear, you understand, just enough to communicate quizzicality. He answers my unspoken request for elaboration.

*"You've been buying  
a lot of doughnuts."*

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I have indeed been buying a lot of doughnuts. Before 8AM every Saturday for the last month I've left my little house in Edmonton's Whyte Avenue area, climbed into my little blue Mazda, swung by the little doughnut shop on 109<sup>th</sup> Street, and driven downtown with a big box of doughnuts to put on the folding table along the wall, the better to feed an away-from-home proposal team of 10, my dear.

Does America really Run on Dunkin'™, like it says in the ads? I don't know, but proposal teams run on junk food, especially late at night and on weekends. People will eat anything, including—especially?—food-like substances they normally wouldn't.

*Cheese (sic) sticks. Chips: potato, taco, and (improbably) sun. Granola bars. Red licorice. Real peanuts. Candy-coated peanuts. Cookies, homemade and otherwise. Boxed crackers. Bulk flax-seed crackers that look like dog treats (and taste like them, after a while). Picked-over leftovers from executives' meetings: wizened veggies and now-suspect dip, cheese and fruit cubes, sandwiches quartered into triangles, dried-out muffins, sickly-sweet dessert bars. Boxes of Toffifee™ on deep discount after Christmas. (Not that I was responsible for this particular inundation: The drugstore's poor inventory management was responsible. Root causes and all that.) And, of course, the aforementioned doughnuts.*

*All hope abandon,  
ye foods that enter here.  
- Inscribed above  
the door to proposal rooms*

If it doesn't move and it doesn't go in a printer or copier, it must be love. Er, food.

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We're still standing in our little tableau, so Buddy elaborates further.

*"You've been buying  
a lot of doughnuts.  
Let me get these."*

Ah. Not to quibble, although it is a core competence, but I've been buying them only in a technical sense: I fork over the cash, sure, but then I expense them. Thus reassured, Pay-his-fair-share Buddy puts away the 20 bucks. I even remember to thank him for the thought.

Of course I don't usually expense snacks when I'm working, but I figure the company is getting free work from this team of salaried folks who are working overtime hours but earning nothing for it. I figure the company can buy them a little morale-boosting treat, especially on a weekend morning. Call me crazy, although my boss never has. Well, not in so many words. Sometimes I do get a strange look. But he's never questioned this sort of item on my expense claims.

As the smiling hordes descend on the doughnuts, I smile too. Where else, I wonder, can you get so much bang for 20 bucks? Discreetly, I mean.

