

## Tedium Averted

Rise at dawn, sleep dusk. Day in, day out.

Studying in the morning, working in the evening, studying at night. On weekdays, morning study was at university. On weekends, morning study was in the dorms with a book and music blaring through earphones. Some days there wasn't work, most days there was. Over and over, days turning into weeks, into months.

It was all so fucking *tedious*.

Hollywood paints this picture that college and university are all about parties and fun, discovering who you are and growing as a person. Reality is far more mundane. The idiots that party instead of studying flunk out.

Don't get me wrong, the studying wasn't difficult or anything. I've always been good when it comes to learning.

There was just so much of it.

So much to learn. So much work to pay for it.

No time for excitement or fun.

No time for *living*.

A girl can only take so much before caving in, ya know? What was the point of it all if I wasn't enjoying myself?

Sure, I was studying for the future, aiming to get my dream job. Yadda, yadda. But what was the point in that dream job if it took all this tedium to get there?

Not like I could flunk out, either.

I'd still owe student debts if I did, still have to work a dead-end job with next to no pay. The only thing that'd change would be that my studying hours would transform into more work hours instead.

Is this what being an adult was? Bland and boring tedium for the rest of my life?

Was there no way I could have everything? School and work, and time left over to be alive, have fun and enjoy myself? Or was having a happy balance in my life too much to ask for?

Day in, day out. The same thoughts. Same books.

Pay-check after pay-check, spent on food and bills and supplies. Never making quite enough to pay for it all.

Wake up in the morning, lay in bed until my alarm goes off, get up and go brush my teeth. Same old, same old. Put breakfast in the microwave, turn on the kettle and set a mug next to it ready to be filled with coffee. Tedium. Boring, repetitive nothingness. Walk to my clothes drawer to get clothes and-

Wait, what was that?

A letter?

Why was there a letter on my desk? It certainly hadn't been there last night. Had one of my roomies put it there?

It had my name on it, hand-written.

Curious, I picked the letter up, opened it, read.

*Tired of the tedium?*

My eyebrow raised. Sure, I guess. I kept reading.

*Done with your shitty job? Want to be done with debts and bills? Want to be free?*

Yes to all three.

*Freedom is an illusion. But money is very much real. Join my contest and I'll give you the opportunity to pay off all your bills and debts permanently. No more shitty job, no more need to study for a better paying yet equally shitty career. All you have to do is put this letter down and wait for the first challenge. To decline, simply tear the letter up and I'll not bother you from your tedium again.*

The shit was this?

Bullshit. Utter nonsense. Either that, or some rich frat-boy looking to entertain himself at my expense.

Contest. That implied contestants. Plural. Multiple participants.

Some big, stupid joke.

I moved to tear the dumb letter up, hesitated.

Even if it was fake – and I had no illusions that it was anything but nonsense – it might be a fun distraction from the constant boredom of studying and work. There wouldn't be money, even if I did win. This was all just some stupid joke. But still, it might be fun.

And if it turned out to be some stupid perverted bullshit, I could always just walk away.

Instead of tearing the letter, I rolled my eyes, set it back down on my desk, went back to my bland morning routine.

Shoulders slump, I pushed the door open and stepped inside my shared dorm room.

The others would all be asleep by now. They didn't have to work until stupid-o'clock in the morning. They had rich parents to pay for their education. Lucky whores. Must be nice to have everything you need handed to you on a silver platter.

I tip-toed over to my bunk, slowly began stripping down. Ever my teenage years, I've always slept naked. No nightie or pjs, and especially not bra or panties. Since my growth spurt, sleeping with clothes always felt restrictive and tight. Wearing a bra to bed always resulted in my having nightmares involving my chest being crushed.

Only when all my clothes were on the floor and I was climbing into bed did I notice the letter on my desk. An unopened white envelope with my name hand-written on it.

I glanced around the room, suddenly feeling like I was being watched.

Slowly, I rose, snatched the letter off my desk, tore it open and read.

I walked down the staircase, cold tingles running down my spine.

I'd never been to this part of the university before. Didn't even know that there were these underground passages.

Deeper and deeper I went, my phone providing the only light.

How long had I been walking down now? Two minutes?

How deep did these stairs go?

The letter had given very specific instructions. This was where I was meant to go. At the bottom of the stairs would be a door that I was supposed to go to. The first challenge was in there.

If I succeeded with the first challenge, apparently, I'd get cash equal to one month worth of my job's pay.

Unless the jackass who'd set all this up was super wealthy or something, it was nonsense. Likely, I'd be walking right into some stupid prank shit. Or worse.

My hand slipped into a pocket, clutched the pepper spray there.

I should turn back, I knew.

I'd taken this joke far enough. I should just go back to my dorm room and study. Like always. Every day. Unending.

No, might as well see this stupidity through.

At last, the staircase came to an end. A single wooden door blocked the way. Behind it was where the first challenge was supposed to take place.

What was it? What did the creep who'd set this up want from me?

I pushed the door open, stepped inside.

It was a small room. About the same size as my dorm room. No other doors, no way in or out except the staircase. No furniture save for a table in the room's centre.

Another letter sat on the table, next to a feathered quill, an empty inkwell, a small knife, and a large sheet of paper filled with cursive writing.

The fuck?

I walked over to the table, read the first few lines on the paper. My eyes widened.

A legal contract?

I shook my head, turned my attention to the letter. I tore it open and read the contents, stomach churning slightly.

My first challenge, it said, was to sign the contract. Not just that, though. The inkwell was empty on purpose. The letter suggested that I use the knife to cut my finger, sign the contract with my own blood.

That, apparently, would earn me a month's worth of income.

I don't like blood. Never have. Makes me dizzy to just think about. But, on the other hand, money is always good.

I closed my eyes as I cut the top of my thumb, wiped it on the tip of the old-timey quill. Opened my eyes long enough to write my signature on the dotted line.

No point reading the contract. Not like it'd be legally binding or anything. Contracts require witnesses, right?

A shiver ran through my body when I pulled the quill away, my signature written bright-red on the contract.

I shut my eyes again, pushed down my queasiness.

After a few minutes, my phone vibrated.

A message from my bank, letting me know that money had been deposited into my account. A month's worth of income, transferred by an anonymous party.

The next letter came a week later. It contained nothing but a place and time. The room my next challenge would take place in.

Another strange area of the university. A maze of corridors and side-rooms. Too many to keep track of. Before I knew it, I was utterly lost – only the letter in my hand to guide me. Take the first left, second right, continue to the end of the corridor, enter the room there, walk through the door at the other end of the room, turn left, walk until until you reach the first right turning. On and on it went, the corridors growing darker and dirtier the further I walked. Rooms got dustier, door handles got rustier. There were no windows, no lights.

Finally, I reached the place.

A black door with a handle rusted red. I reached out, turned it and pushed the door open.

Another small room with no other entrances or exits, with another desk at its centre.

Only this time, someone was sitting at the desk.

Pale skin, black hair and eyes, a jet-black business suit and stark white shirt. His face was lean, angular, sharp. He was handsome in a no-fun, all-work kind of way. Professional.

"Ah," the man smirked. "The contestant. Come in. Stand over there, please."

Every instinct I had told me to turn and run. My chest seized with panic and dread, pure unrelenting terror. This man was *dangerous*. I could feel it, taste it in the air. If I didn't run away now...

My body moved, stepped inside the room, stood still and obedient before the man.

I tried to turn, tried to sprint away.

My body wouldn't listen.

"Signed and sealed in blood," the man said, eyes locked on to mine. His gaze was smouldering. "You should read contracts before you sign them. Especially ones that require you to sign with your own blood. Selling your soul for a month's worth of income. Not a smart decision, that."

Selling my soul? What was this creep talking about?

"What's going on?" I asked, heart pounding in my chest. Fuck this. I wanted to

leave, go back to my boring dorm room, my boring and tedious life. Anything to get away this man. "Where am I? Who are you? Why can't I move? Fucking creep. What's-"

"Shush," the man said, waving his hand. Instantly, my mouth locked shut. "Sure do have a mouth on you, don't you? I'll put that to good use later. For now, I think you deserve an explanation."

The man stood up, started pacing the room slowly.

"I'm looking for a wife, you see. It's around the time I should be having a son, and I can't very well impregnate myself now, can I? No, I need a wife. You, along with a few others, have been chosen as candidates. You're in a very special place. As to who I am – well, I have many names. You can call me Mr III, if you'd like. Or Dave. Whichever you prefer. And you can't move because I told you to come in and stand there. I haven't told you that you to stop standing there, so that's why you're unable to move from that specific spot."

The man stopped pacing, looked at me. There was no lust in his eyes, no desire. He was looking at me like I was nothing, judging if I was worthy of his time.

For some reason, that terrified me more than if he'd just stared at my chest like most guys did.

"The second challenge of this contest is quite simple. I need to make sure my future wife is aesthetically pleasing. For that, I must see you naked. Please strip for me."

Months passed, a challenge every few days. One was a simple medical check-up to judge my fertility. Another involved running on a treadmill to test my endurance. Every challenge, I passed. And with my passing each challenge came a healthy bump in my bank account balance.

It was night when the final challenge came.

I was laying in bed in my dorm room. My roomies were all out for the night, which was unusual. That'd been the first warning. I should have left, hidden somewhere. But He'd have found me no matter where I'd gone.

After I'd worked out exactly who 'Mr III' was, all hope of ever being free again vanished.

Either he'd discard me as unworthy, and I could forget all about this mess I'd gotten myself into. Or he wouldn't.

My dorm room door creaked open, a chill flowing from the crack.

My skin tingled as the shadows closed in on me, wrapped around me. I could feel His chill, the warmth of him on top of me. Wave after wave of pleasure filled me, blissful torture. My mind retreated, my body reacting instinctively, writing under Him.

Electricity flowed through me as climax after climax hit.

The shadows tickled my skin, toyed with my nipples and clit. They suffocated me, choked me, gagged me. It squeezed my breasts and my ass, flipped me over onto my hands and knees.

My body bucked back against the darkness, hungry for what the shadows wanted to give.

When it was finally over, the shadows drifted out of my room.

I lay there, not sure if it'd really happened or if I'd just imagined the shadow. Imagined Him.

Only a month later, throwing up into a toilet, period no-where to be seen, was I certain it had happened. Since that night, I'd heard no word from 'Mr III'. I went to the shop, bought a pregnancy test. Sure enough, it was positive.

Looking at that plastic stick, the symbol it showed, I knew my life would never be the same again.

No more boring tedium for me.