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Forty-One

Last month's wages were spent on something stupid, in two months Jill wouldn't remember what it was she bought. The thought of whether it was that stand mixer, the prescription, or new seat covers was broken by the grating siren song of the intercom. Lifting her delirious head from the sink and stumbling out into the cluttered living room, she slumped into the opposite wall and held the intercom's switch.

"Hey, I can't talk right now. Can I get a glass of water, do this in ten?" Jill said, the fog already starting to form at the back of her head.

"Jilly, it's Bern. Can you open up?" Bernie asked. A stout man with a shrill patter, barely able to reach the com. "Look I'm sorry about the job and all, but we have to talk."

"No, I really can't. I'm having a lot of trouble right now, can you please come back later?"

"I really, really can't. I got a single mother dying for my company and I want to wrap up my collections."

The word 'collections' rang like a church bell inside her head, the clapper cast from the promises of a two-month grace period given not two weeks ago. Jill's breath started coming in short bursts. "Bern you promised. Please, I'm pushing for two more contracts right now!" She said, digging her forehead into the wave textured wall.

"You know that cat don't sit, Jill." Bernie sounded dead tired. "I'm coming by tonight, be decent."

The intercom went silent. She stood against the wall far longer than she probably should have, her forehead beading with sweat. The two-room apartment couldn't possibly be worth it. With dated baseboards, furniture that creaked, and the play-set sized oven. Nothing here warranted a grand and a half.

After gathering herself, Jill attempted to weave her way between the haphazard chair and coffee table, getting a bruise on the shin for her troubles. Papers strewn across the couch crumpled underneath her when she finally reached it, not having the presence of mind to clear the cushions before collapsing. If Doctor Ward had let her know about the foggy headedness, the drowsiness, the intermittent sleeping, she wouldn't have filled that prescription. The migraines were Hell, but at least she'd still have the job. "He probably did say something," Jill said, her vision listing up to the stucco ceiling. "I guess I wasn't listening."

Jill drifted in and out of her haze, trying desperately to compose a reply for contract work at any of the complexes around town. She was saying anything to hook a new client, but contracts are hard to come by with a thirty-six-million-dollar black spot on your record. Forty-one minutes spent in one of these hazes cost the museum more than she would see in her life.

The hours passed with little thought, with only minor details sparking any interest. The cracks in the armchair's back, the chips taken out of the hardwood floor, the notifications from her mother on her phone screen just out of arm's reach. "I can't bother her, not now." Jill said with her face jammed in between a pillow and the couch's arm.

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Six PM felt like it came around earlier than usual, and the migraines came with it. The infernal pounding finding its way from the base of her skull to her lower jaw by way of the temple. It beat in time to a horrible pounding that resonated through the seven-hundred-forty square foot space. The intercom began wailing in a diametric chorus alongside the pounding. Grabbing the blister pack that lay on her notebook, Jill popped the pills out, throwing them back with as much vigor as she could muster. Taking a deep breath and launching herself off the couch, she strode toward the door and threw it wide to see the short dog-faced man standing at the threshold.

“Hey Jilly, turns out the gal really wanted a secondary Dad, not my immeasurable wiles. Good time?” Bernie asked, splitting his face wide in a smile only somewhat sincere.

Jill sighed, at least the medication would keep her focused long enough to talk her way out. “I guess, Bern. Don’t mind the mess.” she said, putting her back to the wall and letting him pass before swinging the door closed with a cacophony of squeals.

“You really living like this now?” He said, pawing at the assorted junk mail and blister packs.

“I just enjoy adjusting my area sometimes, it’s a drastic kind of look.” She said, huffing as he relaxed into her chair.

“Okay let’s talk turkey. I got three properties needing security, but I’m not paying the rates you trump up. Shit is gonna be tough on you with that botch job you made but I know you.” He said. “You ain’t no junkie and you need some time to get back up.”

“What?” She asked, barely able to get back onto the couch fast enough before Bernie’s speech started to beat into her. “Bern, I swear I’m getting these other contracts. Rent will be fine.”

“It ain’t about that. I would’ve asked you three months ago but I hired some college kid. Terrible idea. What’s all this you got?” Berine said, waving a hand at the discarded prescription packs.

“Riza-something, for my head. Migraines have been killing me.” Jill said, digging her heel into one of the larger chips in the floor.

“So, this stuff gets you all wacked out, sleeping all the time or what?”

“I think so, Ward up on Second gave it to me last month. The whole narcoleptic gig started after a week or so on it.”

Bernie leaned back in the old armchair, blowing a thin stream of air between the gap in his teeth. “You got to start reading Jilly.”

Taking a tenuous glimpse at the package, Jill groaned. ‘Take one tablet by mouth every six hours.’ Looking to Bernie, bemused, she asked: “I shouldn’t have been taking three, huh?”