

Thrill of a Lifetime

Seeking adventure by diving into a new job opportunity, Mr. Cooper soon learns the position is far more spine-tingling than desired.

“Thrill of a Lifetime!” This ad lured me out of my excruciatingly dull job, where I had spent endless days watching the clock. For the past three years, nothing had changed. Wading in a river of a never ending flow of tedious tasks that I could do with my eyes closed. No surprises. I even would have welcomed a negative shake up here and there, just to know that I was, in fact, breathing and had a pulse. Falling into my hatchback alone at the end of each day, no longer feeling defeated as long ago I had given up any hope for an interesting day at the office.

Ah, but this new job! It would be in a high rise in the city! Commuting by train would open me up to new experiences! Different faces, smells, sounds! Each day would be different from the last.

“Once in a lifetime high paying opportunity!” I knew it was now or never, and threw my application into the ring. The listing did not contain any detailed job description, and this is what gave me the confidence to apply. My shortcomings of experience could not dissuade me if I did not know what skills this company was seeking. When I got the call to let me know the job was mine, I felt the first rush of excitement in over three years!

Now here I sit in this posh waiting area, ready to leap into my new life! On the 17th floor it seems I can see the whole city, brimming with life, hope, and anticipation. I hear the woman behind the closed door behind me. “I think we can make this happen if the price and conditions are right.” It sounds like there is some big deal going on, which may be a good sign that this company is doing well. While my old job was boring, at least it was assured. I wouldn’t have wanted to trade that security for a dead-end job.

This place is beautiful! I'm sure they've invested a lot of money to create this office which somehow makes a museum like space seem surprisingly comfortable. Contemporary paintings adorn the crisp, clean walls. Glass pillars and white marble half walls providing some illusion of multiple rooms in what is otherwise a wide open floorplan. I find it almost impossible to turn away from the multi-colored glass parachute floating from the corner of the high ceiling, carrying a man with the most exhilarating, and somewhat relief filled smile. This is how I feel right now, like this man, full of adventure and happiness!

The phone rings and a moment later the woman behind the door laughs. "No, the price is not negotiable. Have you been able to secure enough spectators? Are they aware that the fee is nonrefundable even if we need to cancel at the last minute or if they are disappointed in any way? Yes, I can assure you, the audience will be pleased. This is sure to be a mind-blowing experience!" Well, who am I to judge, but I'd have to think long and hard to agree to terms such as those. It must be some breathtaking sight for which people are willing to pay what seems to be a large fee that is not refundable due to any circumstances. Being that it is my first day on the job, I'm certainly not in any position to jump in and raise any questions.

"Be a real crowd pleaser!" the notice read. Well, that would be a change. I could miss a week of work in my old job and no one would ask where I had been. Monday mornings I would hear laughter over the reminiscing about the weekend plans my coworkers had together. My hopes for a promotion had long plummeted into annihilation after years of zero recognition for my loyalty or a job well done. Without any feedback at all I was not clear at all as to what the

administrators thought of me. They kept me along, which was my only indication that they did not hate me. I was definitely no “crowd pleaser,” that’s for sure. This could be my chance to shine!

The door opened and out walked Ms. Cabale, a tall and slender woman in a fitted black pantsuit with strappy silver high heels. Her black hair wrapped in a tight bun at the top of her head, stylish and serious. “Mr. Cooper, you’re right on time! We are just finishing up a few details for a sensational project we have been working on for a long time. It’s critical for the future of our company as it will raise a lot of revenue. I’m wondering if we could find a role for you to play in what is sure to be an eye-popping event.”

My spine started tingling! Day One and I might get the chance to dive right into an important venture! If I am able to make a big impression so early in the game, I could really make my mark here! “Yes, just tell me how I can help!” At the risk of sounding over eager, I wanted her to see me as someone she could depend upon.

“Fantastic to hear, Mr. Cooper, that you are so ready to spring into action to benefit the company. It looks like our hiring committee did a good job finding you. Let me just put the final touches on the plan and be sure we have a large enough audience confirmed. Have a seat, please. I’ll be back out soon so we can get started!”

“Unattached applicants need only apply.” There must be travel! Seeing the world, meeting new people, having new experiences every week! This position would offer me a brand

new life. I am painfully unattached, and have full flexibility for travel. I don't even have any houseplants that need watering. I realized that I had only existed, I was not living my life. This possible change could be just what I needed. I no longer wanted to feel untethered. I decided to take the plunge and apply.

A commotion outside got my attention. From the 17th floor I wouldn't have thought I'd be able to hear noise from the street below. Looking out of the window, I could see a large crowd gathering. Food trucks and balloon vendors selling their wares. I could hear periodic mumblings from megaphones, but could not quite make out the words. Once in a while the people would cheer loudly. I wondered what I was missing but did not want to appear distracted from the job I was here to do. I sat back down.

"I do believe he is on board... once I see that the funds have been transferred... 3500 people have paid and are gathering? That should be enough... yes, there it is, the money is transferred... it's show time!" Ms. Cabale enthusiastically rushed back out. "Please if you would quickly follow me, we have a short window to make the final arrangements and we don't want to lose our momentum!" I tried to keep up as I followed her down the hall. How she moved so effortlessly in those high heels I had no idea. We entered a large room where instead of windows there were large glass doors that opened up to what seemed to be a stage jutting out from the building. The steel door slammed shut behind us with an echoing bang. The room was empty except for two identical backpacks and a movie camera perched on a tripod, focused on the open glass doors. The hair all over my body suddenly stood up and I felt a pit in my stomach.

With the doors open to the outside I could hear the buzz of the crowd, as their excitement and anticipation seemed to float upwards with the wind and land in the room. The words from the loudspeakers were somewhat clearer “last chance to place your bets... stay behind the red lines... no personal cameras...you can purchase our recordings on your way out of the gates...”

Clearly pleased as she looked down at the crowd, Ms. Cabale turned to me and smiled. “We are ready and you, Mr. Cooper, are the main event. The people have paid a high price to be here, and are wagering on the outcome of today’s show. The health of our company is secure, thanks to you, from the entrance fees and the percentage of each bet we will take in. Your job is quite simple. You just need to choose a backpack to wear as you jump from the platform. Both backpacks are of equal weight, you will feel no difference between the two. Only one contains a parachute. If you survive the jump you will be paid a lump sum of twenty-five million dollars, generously donated by an anonymous sponsor. Not to mention the fame and endorsements that will naturally come to you from this accomplishment.”

My knees buckled and I broke into a hard sweat. “I’ve changed my mind. You’ll have to find someone else.” I started for the door only to find it was locked. “I’m sorry, Mr. Cooper, but we’ve come this far and we’ve disappointed many other applicants for this position. It’s too late to find another candidate with such short notice. We simply cannot disappoint the crowd. It would be extremely poor PR for our firm. There is only one way out of this room for you, I’m afraid.” She pulled out a gun and aimed at my head.

I suddenly longed for my cubicle and endless boredom.

I lifted both backpacks and to my disappointment, learned she was right. There was no discernable difference between the two. They each had a pull string, only one of which could save me. Without a choice, I grabbed one and strapped it to my back. Somehow I found the strength in my wobbly legs to climb out on the platform. Now here I stand, with a pistol behind me, a cheering crowd below me, the smell of cotton candy wafting up to me, and potentially nothing but the wind to carry me. With my hand on the pull string, I close my eyes, listen to the sound of applause, and step off.