

The Bet
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The Bet - Anton Chekhov

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FADE IN:

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - GAME ROOM - NIGHT

Three men sit at a table, playing a game of poker. Each is holding a pair of cards, shifting their gazes between one another.

Inside the room is a fireplace burning in the background. They play on a real poker table, complete with green felt and all the markings. Several other games are scattered throughout the room such as a dartboard and a miniature golf hole.

FRIEND

(throws cards down; sighing)

I'm out.

The FRIEND (28) is a burly man, dressed in a simple T-shirt and jeans. He has a walrus mustache, and his hair is combed back.

He leans back in his chair and watches the other two men continue.

CEO

(to Lawyer)

Surely the death penalty is more humane than sitting in a prison cell rotting your existence away. I'd rather be the one that injects than dejects.

The CEO (30) is of an average build, again dressed in a simple T-shirt and jeans. He's loud and boisterous, fancying himself an entertainer.

The Lawyer (29) is dressed in an expensive suit and tie, with a suitcase sitting next to his seat. He's holding a beer in one hand.

He sighs, and takes a sip from the drink, visibly annoyed.

FRIEND

They're both designed to take a man's life. How can either be claimed as right?

CEO

(to Friend)

Well, society must be removed of its criminals somehow.

(CONTINUED)

LAWYER

He's right.

He throws his cards down on the table, and takes another sip from his beer.

LAWYER

About that at least.

Laughing, the CEO pulls all the chips towards him, adding to his already large pile.

CEO

This is too easy gentlemen.

FRIEND

Lucky bastard.

CEO

(angry)

I am no such thing. Its pure skill.
One of many I might add.

The CEO laughs again.

LAWYER

But he is wrong about one thing.

The Friend and CEO stop in their tracks and turn to look at the Lawyer.

Leaning back in his chair, the Lawyer has his head down and arms crossed. He then raises his head and glances at both men.

LAWYER

(to Friend)

You're right, they're both terrible.

(to CEO)

But if it were up to me, I'd abolish the death penalty. Living in a small, dark cell is surely better than no life at all.

CEO

(angry)

Its punishment. It's not meant to be luxurious.

LAWYER

(to CEO)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LAWYER (cont'd)
I merely defend thieves and
murderers. It's my job to save the
lives of scum.

The CEO slams his fists on the table, sending chips flying
in the air. The Friend swipes his glass off the table before
it can fall too.

Standing up, the CEO leans across the table and stares down
the Lawyer.

CEO
Save lives? That's absurd. They're
criminals.

LAWYER
A life is a life.

CEO
Is it now?
(shrugs shoulders)
Alright. How about I make you a
deal, a bet. You go five years
imprisoned in my basement, and I'll
give you one million dollars.

The Lawyer laughs, a cool and understated laugh. He looks
over to the Friend, who shakes his head.

LAWYER
I could last fifteen years.

The CEO laughs, and walks around the table next to the
Lawyer. The Lawyer remains seated, and looks up into his
eyes intently.

The Friend walks around the other side of the table and
stands opposite the CEO.

FRIEND
(placing hand on Lawyer's
shoulder)
Woah, come on guys.

CEO
(extends hand)
You put up your freedom, and I'll
put up two million dollars. Deal?

LAWYER
Deal.

The Lawyer rises from his seat, and shakes the CEO's hand.

(CONTINUED)

FRIEND

You two can't be serious.

CEO/LAWYER

(together)

Dead serious.

The CEO and the Lawyer stare at each other. The Lawyer remains calm and cool, smug even, with a sly smile. The CEO tries and fails to hold back another one of his laughs.

The Friend sighs, and strokes his hand through his hair.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Lawyer and CEO are walking side by side down the hall. The Lawyer has changed out of his suit and into plain white pajamas pants and a white shirt, tugging at the ill fitting shirt.

The hall is lavishly decorated, with high class and expensive paintings on the walls and vases lining tables. There are several bookshelves filled with novels and the occasional knickknack.

CEO

(laughing)

I think they look rather fetching on you.

The Lawyer picks up his pace. The CEO struggles to keep up with him, but manages to do so.

CEO

(eyes forward)

I'll give you the chance to back out.

(looking to Lawyer)

Don't throw the ten best years of your life away for nothing.

LAWYER

(eyes forward)

Its not nothing.

CEO

Voluntary confinement is a lot harder to deal with. Knowing you can liberate yourself at any time will poison your whole existence.

(CONTINUED)

The two men stop as they reach their destination. A single door on a nondescript wall.

Taking out a key, the CEO unlocks the padlock housed on the door's knob. He opens the door. Light pours into the dark room, revealing a dimly lit staircase.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Looking down the staircase, the basement holds two empty bookshelves, a small table next to the single bed, and another table at the end of the staircase. The bed is dirty and unkempt, but not unreasonably so. The room is dimly illuminated by a small window, showing just how dirty it is.

The Lawyer steps inside, stopping on the first step and turns around to look at the CEO. The CEO reaches out his hand to shake, but the Lawyer just smirks.

Slowly closing the door, the CEO looks at his friend just stand there and continue smiling. The door closes with a loud thud, and the sound of the key locking the padlock echo through the basement.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CEO AND LAWYER

The CEO stares at the door. He then turns around, leans against it, and slides to the ground. He sighs heavily, and stokes his hair.

CEO
(whisper)
What have we done?

The Lawyer walks down the stairs, sliding his finger along the wall and inspecting the dirt and dust it accumulated.

When he gets off the stairs, he walks over to the book shelf and grabs a book. Unlike the shelf, it is not covered in dust and appears to be brand new. He puts the book down, and walks over to the bed and tests its firmness before lying down.

The CEO pulls out a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

CEO
(loudly)
I'm going to read the agreement one more time so there's no misunderstanding.

(CONTINUED)

(reading paper)
For the next fifteen years, you shall have no contact with anyone outside this door except me. You shall not be allowed any newspapers, television, nor computer.

The Lawyer leans up in bed and rubs his eyes. He can hear the CEO reading the paper, but there is no indication that he's listening. Instead, he merely fluffs his pillow and lays back down, staring at the ceiling.

CEO (O.S.)
(simultaneously)
You will be released in exactly fifteen years. The imprisonment starts midnight November 14, 2013 and ends at midnight in 2028. Any attempt to leave the room, will forfeit the deal and release me from the obligation to compensate you.

LAWYER
(loudly)
Don't worry, that's not gonna happen, I can assure you.

CEO
Very well then. God have mercy on your soul.

The Lawyer takes one last look around the room, before closing his eyes, and pulling the plain white blankets over him.

The CEO folds up the paper, puts it in his pocket, and lightly taps his head against the door.

He gets up from ground and walks down the hallway the way he came.

TITLE - YEAR ONE

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

The Lawyer looks the same as he did when he first entered. Only now his white pajamas are covered in a thin layer of dirt and dust. His hair and facial hair have grown as well.

(CONTINUED)

He's sitting on the bed, legs crossed, writing something on a crumpled, dirty sheet of paper. A book is lying next to him, open to somewhere in the middle.

The sounds of a piano and laughter echo through the basement. The Lawyer briefly stops to listen before continuing his writing.

TITLE - YEAR TWO

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The Lawyer is now ragged. His hair has grown to his shoulders, and his beard has grown out. He is dirtier than before, covered in grime, dirt, and dust.

The room isn't fairing any better. It too is covered in dirt and dust, excluding the bed. The only difference is now the bookshelves house several books and magazines.

The Lawyer is sitting on his bed, reading one of the books.

There is a rattling sound coming from the door, and the door slowly creaks open. In comes the CEO with his prisoners daily food ration. It's a simple meal of some kind of slop haphazardly placed in a bowl, a slice of plain white bread, and a glass of water.

He quickly walks down the stairs, and sets the tray down on a small table next to the door. Finished with his job, he starts heading back up the stairs, when the Lawyer calls to him.

LAWYER

(reading book)

Excuse me, can you bring down some classic literature. This modern stuff boring.

The CEO turns around and briefly looks at him. He averts his eyes just as quickly, opting to look at the floor as he speaks.

CEO

Certainly. Is there anything else you require?

LAWYER

(looking up from book)

No that's all. Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

The CEO nods, and silently walks out the door, slamming it shut and locking it from the other side.

The Lawyer chuckles and shakes his head before going back to his book.

TITLE - YEAR FIVE

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - AFTERNOON

The Lawyer paces back and forth in his room, shooting angry glances at nothing in particular. His anger boils over and he kicks over a neatly stacked pile of books in the corner.

He is now beginning to look pale. His hair has been cut, but is now graying. The hair cut itself is shoddy, with several non-straight edges and is generally uneven. He is also looking thin, but not morbidly so.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The CEO and his friend are standing outside with their ears to the door, holding wine glasses.

LAWYER (O.S.)
(yelling)
Damn it.

FRIEND
How long has he been like this?

The two step away from the wall and huddle together, speaking in hushed tones.

CEO
A few months now. To be honest, its
exhausting. Watching a man slowly
kill himself, knowing you're the
one who put him there.

FRIEND
Why don't you let him go?

CEO
I tried, but he refuses. I even
offered him the two million just to
leave.

The CEO takes a few small, slow steps down the hall, sipping from his glass as he does so. The Friend follows behind.

(CONTINUED)

The CEO stops at a table, picking up a tray of the food he brings his prisoner. He looks it over, and places his glass on the tray.

CEO
(turning to Friend)
I don't suppose you can permit me a favor?

FRIEND
Uh... yeah. Yeah, I understand.

The Friend grabs the tray and walks to the basement door. The CEO walks to the door as well, taking a key out of his pocket and opening the door. The Friend walks in.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NEXT MORNING

The Lawyer is once again pacing up and down his room. There is a book open on his bed. He is grunting and breathing heavily.

LAWYER
(to himself; raising a finger)
Ha. I win again.

He drops his hand and walks over to a wall, and pounds it with his fist.

LAWYER
(to himself)
Which means I also lost again.

The Lawyer sighs as he walks to bed. He picks up the book in dramatic fiction, and jumps up landing in the bed. He begins reading to himself under his breath.

TITLE - YEAR EIGHT

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The Friend walks to the door with the tray of food in hand. This time, the tray contains a steak dinner, complete with mashed potatoes, green beans, a glass of wine, and a bottle of water.

He balances the tray in one hand while digging the key out from his pocket. The key slowly turns in the rusty padlock, the heavy door screeches open. The Friend steps into the black hole of a doorway.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the Lawyer is lying bed, staring at the ceiling. Surrounding him on the bed are opened books, crumpled up pieces of paper, and sheets of clean paper with ineligible scribbles.

He has again let his hair grow out, reaching past his shoulders. It's half gray now, his facial hair has entirely succumbed to father time. He has lost even more weight.

The Friend sets the tray of food on the table by the end of the stairs, and notices a single sheet of paper on the table. Picking it up, he asks:

FRIEND

Is this note for me, or him?

The Lawyer simply nods his head and mumbles unintelligibly.

The Friend takes the note, and walks back up the stairs into the hallway.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Friend steps under a light on the ceiling to get a better view. He begins to scan the letter.

LAWYER (V.O.)

My dear jailer, I write to you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know them, and let them read. If they find not one mistake I ask you to fire a shot in the garden tonight at midnight. That will show me that my efforts have not been in vein. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns within them all. If you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels from being able to understand!

MONTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Upon reading the note, the Friend takes it to several people in different locations to verify that the languages are indeed correct. Each of them are.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CEO'S GARDEN - NIGHT

It is not dark, as the full moon illuminates the backyard. There are several tall bushes, and lush flowers as any good garden possess. However, this garden appears to be slightly unkempt has overgrown.

The Friend takes out a pistol. He raises it in the air, twitches his hand as a countdown, and fires a single shot into the sky. As he does so, he looks to the small window of the basement, and lowers the weapon.

His face is puzzled, not knowing whether to smile or cry out. He decides to fall to his knees, dropping the gun to the ground, and clutching the letter in his hands as he cries in the night.

TITLE - YEAR FIFTEEN

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - GAME ROOM - NIGHT

The CEO and the Friend are sitting by a fireplace. The fire is going strong, its crackling and snapping interrupting the silence. The two men sit beside each other in low class folding chairs in front of the fire. The game room is now empty of all other contents, except for a small table near the door.

The CEO is no longer a carefree young man. He is now disheveled, and old. Gray hair covers his head, and a thick, manky beard does little to hide the wrinkles. His looks betray his age.

He strokes the beard, and takes a deep breath in, letting it out in long drawn out fashion.

FRIEND

I don't know what's worse. Your investment decisions, or your... gambling problems.

CEO

It doesn't matter, he's getting out in twenty four hours.

FRIEND

It does matter, you can't pay him and even if you could it would be pittance to him.

(CONTINUED)

The CEO looks over to his friend, his wrinkled face scrunched up in anger.

CEO

That damn bet. Why hasn't he died by now? He'll take every last cent I have left, leaving me to the streets a dirty beggar.

He gets up out of his chair, and walks to the table behind them. On it is a bottle of whiskey and a chessboard. The CEO grabs a pawn from the board and brings it close to his face, inspecting it.

CEO

(to pawn)

I suppose this is checkmate.

FRIEND

What do you plan on doing?

The CEO grabs the bottle of bourbon and takes a swig from it, walking over to the fireplace.

CEO

I'll think of something.

He throws the pawn into the fire, and takes another long drink from the bottle.

The Friend remains seated, watching the fire consume the pawn before turning his attention to The CEO drinking himself silly.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

An alarm clock rings next to the CEO's bed. Its a small twin size bed, the CEO's feet are hanging off the end, and he's using his jacket as a blanket. He reaches to the alarm and turns it off, then leans up to turn on the lamp.

It doesn't come on. The only light illuminating the room is sunshine pouring in from the uncovered windows.

The CEO rubs his eyes, still tired from the poor night's sleep. He reaches into the drawer, and pulls out a key, pistol, and an ammo clip. Its the same pistol the Friend used years ago.

He inserts the ammunition clip into the gun and cocks it ready to fire. He leans his head against the top barrel of the weapon and closes his eyes.

After a few moments, he gets up from the bed and walks over to the door. The doorknob twists as the CEO opens it, walking out into the hall, slow from grogginess.

INT. CEO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT- CONTINUOUS

The door to the prisons cell slams open, bouncing off the wall slightly and leaving a hole. The CEO stands in the doorway, staring at the Lawyer whose lying on his bed.

The Lawyer is beyond his years. He is wrinkled, hair unkempt and completely gray. He has lost considerable weight, and his bones show through his skin.

A candle flickers next to the his bed, occupying a small table covered with open books. More opened books are scattered across the bed, floor, and bookshelves.

As he watches the CEO approach, the Lawyer leans up and sits at the edge of the bed.

On the small table next to the end of the stairs, trays of food are stacked up in a neat pile. All are covered in white and black mold. The pile collapses to the floor as the CEO brushes passed.

Finally, the CEO draws close to the frail lifeless man, with his hand in his pocket, clutching the loaded gun.

He stops three feet away from his friend, who remains seated, staring at him with lifeless eyes. The pistol is drawn, clutched in the CEO's shaking hand, and held at his side.

But before he can make a final decision, he notices a single sheet of paper laying on one of the books by the table near the bed. As he leans over to collect it, he watches as the Lawyer clutches a pencil in his hand, twirling it in the air as if writing.

The CEO picks it the paper up, and begins to read it in the light of the candle.

LAWYER (V.O.)

Tomorrow I regain my freedom, but
before I leave, I think it
necessary to say a few words.

CEO

(to Lawyer)

Why can't you tell me this
yourself?

(CONTINUED)

The Lawyer doesn't respond. The CEO waits for a brief second before continuing to read the letter.

LAWYER (V.O.)

I despise freedom, life, health,
and all that you call good in this
world. For fifteen years I have
been intently studying Earthly
life. Your books have given me
wisdom. All the unresting thought
of man has created in the ages is
compressed into a small compass in
my mind.

The Lawyer, still unmoving, starting to mouth the words that he so elegantly wrote for the world to see.

LAWYER (V.O.)

Death will wipe you off the face of
Earth as though you were no more
than a mouse, and your legacy will
burn in the fires once you've gone
from this place.

The CEO looks up from the letter and places it back on the table.

LAWYER

I'm leaving now.

CEO

But you've still got twelve hours.
Surely you can wait and--

The Lawyer ignores him, instead slowly climbing out of bed and walking towards the stairs.

LAWYER

It's all there in writing, I won't
try to come after you or anything.
Besides, I believe you already
broke the deal years ago.

The CEO takes another look at the letter, then over the trays of food lying on the ground. He then looks up the stairs, but the Lawyer is already gone.

He looks down at the gun still in his hand as if he forgot it was there.

Placing the gun on the bed, the CEO takes the candle to the letter, and watches it burn. He drops it just as the fire gets near his fingertips.

(CONTINUED)

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15.

The letter slowly falls the the ground, as the fire consumes it. Finally, its charred remains hit the ground in silence.

FADE OUT.