

THE COUNTDOWN

By

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FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Sparsely furnished. A tattered picture on a wall. An ashtray on a windowsill.

IAN (59), well-worn suit, steps on to a stool, slips his head through a noose, pulls the noose tight.

MOMENTS LATER...

KEVIN (35), janitor's overalls, enters, sees Ian, backs away for a moment then freezes.

After an awkward moment Kevin goes to tidy Ian's desk.

KEVIN

Am I alright to move these papers?

Silence. You could hear a pin drop.

Kevin avoids eye contact and starts polishing the desk.

IAN

Aren't you going to say anything?

KEVIN

Weather's a bit shit at the moment.

IAN

What?

KEVIN

The weather. A bit shit.

IAN

Are you on a wind up?

Kevin sizes him up.

KEVIN

That rope won't take your weight.

(off Ian's reaction)

Just saying for a man of your erm, volume, it won't be strong enough.

Ian self-consciously sucks his belly in.

IAN

I can't believe I'm getting shit right to the end. Would you mind fucking off and leaving me to it?

KEVIN

Sorry no offense. It's just... if you want to do it right, that isn't going to do the job.

(thinks)

I've got a better idea. That's a fucking big window over there, yeah?

Ian glances over to the window.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

And the lock on it hasn't worked in all the time I've worked here.

IAN

And?

KEVIN

And if I can't give you a reason not to do this, then I won't stop you from taking a running dive out of it. How about that?

IAN

You don't think I'm serious?

KEVIN

I think you're too serious.

IAN

And you're not serious enough.

KEVIN

Buddy, I couldn't give a shit if someone wants to top themselves, their choice. But I can't afford to get in trouble again.

IAN

Again?

Ian notices a crudely etched tattoo of a swallow on Kevin's hand.

IAN

You're on probation?

(off Kevin's nod)

What was it mugging the elderly? Drug dealing? Or are you just not right in the head?

KEVIN

Who's the one here with a noose  
around their neck?

IAN

Point taken.

Ian composes himself with a deep breath.

IAN

You come near me and I'm heading  
for the window. Is that clear?

KEVIN

Crystal.

Ian pulls his head free, climbs down, sits on the stool.

They stare at each other in silence, separated by Ian's desk.

KEVIN

Ian, isn't it?

IAN

How did you know that?

KEVIN

Chitchat around the office. Plus  
you wrote in my birthday card last  
week.

IAN

Oh yeah. It's erm, Gavin--

KEVIN

Kevin.

IAN

That's it, sorry.

KEVIN

No biggy, you've clearly got other  
things on your mind.

Kevin points to the rope.

KEVIN

Why?

IAN

Why not? What's the point of it  
all.

KEVIN

Of what?

IAN

Life. Forty years of working like a bastard. Same boring conversations. Same boring people. All in the hope of getting enough saved to escape this shit. Then the banks say no more and you're fucked. How's that for starters.

KEVIN

I hear what you're saying, but we're all in the rat race together. That's just life.

IAN

Next you'll be telling me it's not that bad.

KEVIN

Is it though?

Ian glances at the window.

IAN

It's my 60th tomorrow and I don't fancy being around for it.

KEVIN

Guess that saves me a few dollars on the collection.

IAN

Funny fucker aren't you. Shall we be serious for a minute.

Kevin nods.

IAN (CONT'D)

You said you'd give me a reason not to kill myself, right?

(off Kevin's reaction)

Then go for it. Or stop wasting our goddamn time!

KEVIN

OK, alright.

(Kevin stands)

Just gimme a moment.

IAN

You have until midnight. Or the only thing hitting 60 will be my head on the pavement outside.

Kevin glances up at the clock.

KEVIN

That's only five minutes.

Kevin watches closely as Ian walks over to the window and opens it wide.

IAN

Better make the most of it then.

KEVIN

Ah fuck... fuck!

(scans the office)

Let me call my mate, he'll know what to say.

IAN

This isn't Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, and you can't phone a fucking friend.

KEVIN

Alright alright, calm down.

(points to wall)

What about the photo?

IAN

Photo?

KEVIN

Your wife I'm guessing. At least you've got someone. Cliff, the guy upstairs got cleaned out by his business partner, who then fucked off with his wife.

(satisfied with himself)

But you don't see him jumping out of windows!

Ian forces himself to look at the photo. First time for a long time.

IAN

Sounds familiar. We split up a few months ago. She met someone at the gym after I bought her the bloody membership.

KEVIN

You just need more time. Or Tinder.

IAN

Tinder? Who's going to swipe up for this old twat.

KEVIN

Right.

KEVIN

Right, left, up, down, doesn't matter. No woman is going to want to look at a guy who's got a face like Gordon Ramsay's bollocks!

Kevin stifles a laugh.

Ian rises to his feet.

KEVIN

OK, alright, I shouldn't have laughed.

Ian gives a slight nod and after a short pause, slowly sits.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

I think Cliff could be a good role model for--

Ian looks Kevin straight in the eye. Kevin knows to leave it there.

KEVIN

What about work then?

IAN

Haven't you listened to anything I've said?

KEVIN

I know it's not great now, but you could rebuild it all. Can't work for work's sake be a reason?

IAN

Would it be for you?

KEVIN

Fuck no! Cleaning shit and getting ignored by people who think they're better than me... I wish I took school a little more--

IAN  
--Seriously? Story of your life.

KEVIN  
(pretends he didn't hear)  
But you can make some proper money  
and get a one way ticket to  
Thailand in no time. Start again.  
What I'd do to be in your shoes.

Ian slowly rises to his feet. Kevin mirrors him.

IAN  
Relax. You still have a few  
minutes.

Kevin slowly sits, glances up at the clock then anxiously  
watches as Ian walks over to the window.

IAN  
You asked me why don't I work at it  
again?

KEVIN  
Yeah, I mean can't you get that  
drive back?

IAN  
It's not a fucking boomerang,  
something you can just get back. I  
put my life into this company. And  
for what? Bankers and politicians  
to play silly-buggers and let the  
economy go tits-up.

KEVIN  
(points up to office above)  
You're not the only one, remember?

IAN  
You know you still haven't said  
what you went down for.

KEVIN  
(reluctant)  
Property management.

IAN  
You went to... Oh, ah I see. Theft?

Kevin looks away. A mix of shame and embarrassment.

Ian walks back to the desk, sits, looks up at the clock.



IAN  
Seems like you think you have a way  
with words. Kevin even your real  
name?

Keen to dodge the question--

KEVIN  
Two minutes.

IAN  
That explains why you're so anxious  
about being here if the police turn  
up.

Kevin knows he's got to take back control of the situation.  
If he ever had it to begin with.

KEVIN  
So there's no family and work is no  
longer enough?

IAN  
Correct.

KEVIN  
Any friends?

IAN  
Any friends I had I lost contact  
with years ago. Minute and a half.

Another dead-end.

Kevin stands and nudges the box back, frustration setting in.

Ian watches Kevin as he walks to the window.

KEVIN  
Then I don't know what to say. You  
got no friends, no family, no work,  
a face like Gordon Ramsay's  
bullocks... and no money?

IAN  
Sounds like you finally get it.  
(stands)  
So if you could leave now, I'd  
appreciate you not telling anyone  
on your way out. I think it'd be  
better for both of us that way.

Kevin offers a dejected nod and heads for the door.

KEVIN  
(spins around)  
Fags?

Ian looks at Kevin quizzically.

KEVIN (CONT'D)  
You're a smoker, right?

IAN  
How did you--

KEVIN  
Empty packs in the bin every night.

IAN  
So?

KEVIN  
Ain't that enough?

IAN  
I'm trying to quit.

KEVIN  
I don't mean just fags. What about  
the simple pleasures like beer,  
steak, that kind of stuff?

IAN  
Ha! Good try, Gavin. But I've  
always led a fairly hedonistic  
lifestyle. And whilst I admit it's  
not without its merits, I've had my  
fill.

Kevin acknowledges Ian with a spiritless nod.

IAN (CONT'D)  
One minute.

KEVIN  
Give me more time, mate, Ian.  
C'mon, five minutes?

Ian shakes his head, raises to his feet, lines himself up  
directly with the window.

KEVIN  
You can't do this.

IAN  
This was your idea wasn't it?

KEVIN  
Yeah, but THIS-

IAN  
Thirty seconds. I'd like you to  
leave now.

Ian fixes his gaze on the clock.

KEVIN  
This ain't right!

IAN  
Let me have this moment to myself  
will you.

KEVIN  
I can't. I can't let--

IAN  
--You tried. You failed. Welcome to  
my world.

Ian turns to face the window and they both stand motionless,  
watching as the seconds hand counts down...

Eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two...

Ian takes a deep breath in as the minute hand strikes  
midnight then rushes for the window.

Kevin launches himself at Ian and tries to tackle him. Ian  
presses Kevin's face into the floor and shakes himself free.

KEVIN  
Come on, not on your birthday!

IAN  
Enough!

Ian charges at the window again but a moment before launch  
the figure of a MAN drops past.

Ian skids to a halt and braces his arms against the window  
frame.

IAN  
What the...

Kevin jumps to his feet.

KEVIN  
Who the...

Ian looks out through the window.

IAN  
Poor bastard.

Kevin pushes past Ian and takes a look. Winces.

KEVIN  
That's--

IAN  
Cliff? KEVIN  
Cliff.

IAN  
Looks like Cliff jumping really is  
as dangerous as they say.

Ian pulls out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, takes one out.

IAN  
He really went to pieces.

KEVIN  
You're not wrong.

Ian lights up a cigarette, offers Kevin one.

IAN  
Still think he's a good role model?

Kevin gives a wry smile and takes a cigarette.

KEVIN  
(looking down at Cliff)  
Everyone has their off days.  
(beat)  
My real name is Rick by the way.

Fade out.