

## STAKES: THE WINNER

This started out as a bet between two people. You weren't playing for peanuts, but it was all under control: A grand each, winner takes all. And you won. But the other guy wasn't okay with it, he wanted to raise the stakes.

As you thought about it, a third man joined your table and suggested you give up this paltry prize to put the two grand in a common pool. Then each of you could bet the same sum on tomorrow's race, so the winner would go home with six grand, a decent amount of cash. And if the loser wasn't okay with that either, he'd have to put six more in the pot to keep playing. He offered to be the sponsor of this bet, as to avoid any disputes. He explained this was more or less the principle of the Grand Martingale.

It sounded like a good idea, but you kept winning and your rival kept raising the stakes. So the cash pool ended up five hundred grand big, and that same amount of money is weighing down each of your purses. Or at least, it should: You couldn't put together more than half of that sum, not even by selling or pawning off everything you own. Yes, you threw yourself in without a safety net, clinging to the conviction that your winning streak cannot possibly end today. You've already decided that this will be the last bet, your masterwork or your tragedy as a gambler.

If you lose now, you'll have them all breathing down your neck. Not just creditors or all the people waiting to see you fall so that they can tread all over you. Your job won't save you, your friends will think you've hit rock bottom and your family will have to give you a wide berth if they don't want to be dragged down with you. You'll be left with nothing, and when you wonder about tomorrow you'll have no one to cling to. You'll be alone.

But the truth is that you couldn't back out, and not just for the money already on the line. You humoured Lady Luck to finally get a straight answer out of her. Can you really call yourself a winner? Or were you just paving the way for someone else, like Second Best always does? It's why you bet on him against all odds: If he can turn the world upside down, so can you. Victory is waiting for you.

### Narrative task

Before the start of the *Ante*, flip a coin and declare out loud the *Mood* hanging over the room as you wait for the race. It also depends on your *Career*: What kind of winner have you been until now?

#### *The Jockey*

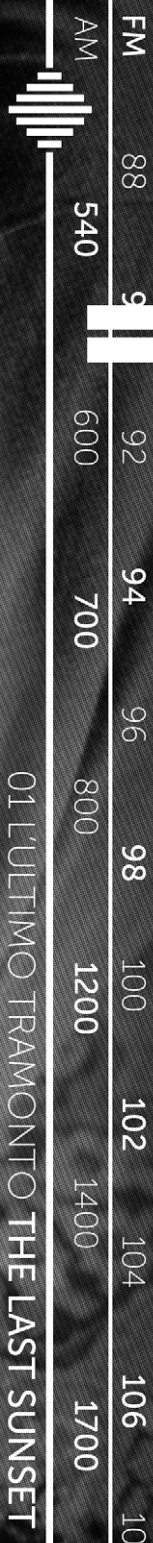
*Heads*: Solemnity - *Tails*: Suspicion

#### *The Commentator*

*Heads*: Irreverence - *Tails*: Trepidation

#### *The Criminal*

*Heads*: Intimacy - *Tails*: Uneasiness





## STAKES: THE SPONSOR

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This started out as a bet between two people. They weren't playing for peanuts, but it was all under control: A grand each, winner takes all. But the loser wasn't about to give up, he wanted to raise the stakes.

That's when you stepped in, sitting by the winner's side and suggesting he give up this paltry prize to put the two grand in a common pool. Then each of them could bet the same sum on tomorrow's race, so the winner would go home with six thousand, a decent amount of cash. And if the loser wasn't okay with that either, he'd have to put six more in the pot to keep playing. You offered to be the sponsor of this bet, as to avoid any disputes. It's the principle of the Grand Martingale: Raise the stakes until you win, that's the only way to get something out of a bet.

It sounded like a good idea, but one of them kept winning and the other kept raising the stakes, never changing places. What are the odds of that? So the cash pool you carry ended up five hundred grand big, and that same amount of money is weighing down each of their purses. But half of the loser's wager comes from your wallet: He was about to give up after the last defeat, so you took him aside and offered to put in however much he was missing to raise the stakes. Why?

You couldn't afford to risk that money, yet you did. You swore you'd be a neutral party, and you broke that oath. What are you hoping to accomplish? Maybe you want to show the world a single man can put a wrench in Lady Luck's plans, or that you're the greatest idiot in the history of gambling.

No matter: Now you're playing the game and you have to hope that Second Best will stay true to his name and lose this race. You don't know why the winner chose to bet on that old nag, given how much the odds were stacked against him, but he hasn't been wrong once in this long string of bets and you honestly envy his guts.

Whatever the case, you have established this will be the last round, your masterwork or your tragedy as a gambler. If you lose now, you'll have them all breathing down your neck. Not just creditors or all the people waiting to see you fall so that they can tread all over you. Your job won't save you, your friends will think you've hit rock bottom and your family will have to give you a wide berth if they don't want to be dragged down with you. You'll be left with nothing, and when you wonder about tomorrow you'll have no one to cling to. You'll be alone.

To tell the truth, you don't even know whether you can trust the loser, though you have something in common: Frustration after too many a slap in the face. Life is hard, it fills your head with promises and then goes back on every single one of them. Now that gambling endeavours to give you the ultimate thrill, you wonder what price you will be called to pay for it.

## STAKES: THE LOSER

This started out as a bet between two people. You weren't playing for peanuts, but it was all under control: A grand each, winner takes all. And you lost. But you weren't about to give up, you wanted to raise the stakes.

As your rival thought about it, a third man joined your table and suggested he give up this paltry prize to put the two grand in a common pool. Then each of you could bet the same sum on tomorrow's race, so the winner would go home with six grand, a decent amount of cash. And if the loser wasn't okay with that either, he'd have to put six more in the pot to raise the stakes. He offered to be the sponsor of this bet, as to avoid any disputes. He explained this was the principle of the Grand Martingale.

It sounded like a good idea, but you kept losing and raising the stakes. So the cash pool ended up five grand thousand big, and that same amount of money is weighing down each of your purses.

But the money you put in doesn't all belong to you: You'd never have managed to put that sum together, so you were about to give up after the last bet, when all of a sudden the sponsor asked for a word in private with you and gave you the money you needed to raise the stakes. You have no idea why he decided to help you. Can you really call this a stroke of luck?

You, destiny's laughingstock?

Whatever the case, you have established this will be the last round, your masterpiece or your tragedy as a gambler. If you lose now, you'll have them all breathing down your neck. Not just creditors or all the people waiting to see you fall so that they can tread all over you. Your job won't save you, your friends will think you've hit rock bottom and your family will have to give you a wide berth if they don't want to be dragged down with you. You'll be left with nothing, and when you wonder about tomorrow you'll have no one to cling to. You'll be alone.

But this time your rival has bitten off more than he can chew, putting all his money on Second Best. All you need is for that old nag to lose, and you'll bring home a million and a half. You wouldn't just earn back all the money you've spent until now, you'd show your fellow gamblers what you're made off and you would finally have proof that you can get what you want in life. You need to keep holding on, that's the secret. The soon-to-be-former winner is dead sure he's your opposite, so his defeat will be your triumph. And if the sponsor has a plan of his own, he'll regret not staying on the sidelines.

You've bitten enough dust already, you won't take any more shit from Lady Luck.

