

STAKES: THE WINNER

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

As you thought about it, a third man sat at your side and gave you a tip: Give up this paltry prize and put the two grand in a common pool. Then both 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 sponsor the bet, to avoid any squabbles, you see. It's more or less the principle of the Grand Martingale, he said.

It sounded like a good idea, but you kept winning and your rival kept raising the stakes. So the cash pool ended up being five hundred grand, and the same amount of money is weighing down each of your bags. Or at least, it should be: You couldn't put together more than half of that sum, not even by pawning off everything you own. Yes, you threw yourself in without a safety net, clinging to the conviction that your winning streak couldn't possibly end today. You've already agreed that this will be the last bet, 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 just to tread all over you. Your job won't save you, your friends will think you've hit rock bottom, you'll have to push your family away if you don't want to drag them down with you. You'll be left with nothing, not even an answer when you wonder about tomorrow. 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. Are you really 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 that horse can turn the world upside down, so can you. Victory is waiting for you.

Narrative task

Before the start of the *Payout*, flip a coin and tell everyone the *Mood* hanging over the room after the end of the race. What kind of winner have you been so far?

The Jockey

Heads: Solemnity - *Tails:* Suspicion

The Commentator

Heads: Irreverence - *Tails:* Trepidation

The Criminal

Heads: Intimacy - *Tails:* Uneasiness





STAKES: THE SPONSOR

This started out as a bet between two people. They weren't playing for peanuts, but it was all under control: One grand each, winner takes all. But the loser wasn't okay with it, so he asked to raise the stakes.

That's where you came in. You sat by the winner and gave him a tip: Give up this paltry prize and put the two grand in a common pool. Then both of them 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. You offered to sponsor the bet, to avoid any squabbles, you see. It's more or less the principle of the martingale: Raise the stakes until you win, 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 swapping places. What are the odds of that? So the cash pool you carry ended up being five hundred grand, and the same amount of money is weighing down each of their bags. But half of the loser's money 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, but you did. You swore you'd be a neutral party, and you broke that promise. What are you hoping to prove? Maybe that a single man can put a wrench in Lady Luck's plans, or that you're the greatest idiot in the history of gambling. It doesn't matter.

Now you're playing the game, and your only hope is 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've all agreed this will be the last round, your masterpiece or your tragedy as gamblers. 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 just to tread all over you. Your job won't save you, your friends will think you've hit rock bottom, you'll have to push your family away if you don't want to drag them down with you. You'll be left with nothing, not even an answer when you wonder about tomorrow. You'll be alone.

To tell the truth, you don't even know if you can trust the loser. Though you do have one thing 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 is giving you the ultimate thrill, you wonder what price you'll be forced 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: One grand each, winner takes all. And you lost. But you weren't about to give up, so you asked to raise the stakes.

As your rival thought about it, a third man sat at his side and gave him a tip: Give up this paltry prize and put the two grand in a common pool. Then both 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 sponsor the bet, to avoid any squabbles, you see. It's more or less the principle of the Grand Martingale, he said.

It sounded like a good idea, but you kept losing and raising the stakes. So the cash pool ended up being five hundred grand, and the same amount of money is weighing down each of your bags. But the money you put in isn't all yours: You'd never have managed to put together so much cash, so you were about to give up after the last bet, when out of the blue the sponsor took you aside 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?

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 just to tread all over you. Your job won't save you, your friends will think you've hit rock bottom, you'll have to push your family away if you don't want to drag them down with you. You'll be left with nothing, not even an answer when you wonder about tomorrow. You'll be alone.

But this time your rival has bitten off more than he can chew. He put all his money on Second Best. All you need is for that old nag not to win, and you'd be bringing home a million and a half. You wouldn't just get back all the money you've lost until now. You'd show your the others what you're truly made of, you'd show yourself you can get what you want. The secret is to never stop holding on. 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 eaten enough dust already, you won't take any more shit from Lady Luck.

