

Lockdown

By

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ONE

Ok, it's official. I'm dead. I'm actually going to be killed.

Then I'll lose my job, my important position complete with my beautiful nameplate, with *Leah Watton* in shiny silver print. Of course, this will lead me to get kicked out of my flat and I'll end up living in some cardboard box on a skanky street corner, drinking cider and trading war stories around a bin fire.

Or the much worse option, I'll be forced to move back to my parents' house.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

All for one idiotic joke. I can't believe it, I've nearly wrecked my career already, and it was only just beginning. I can really feel the panic welling up in my stomach now. After those three long years at university studying journalism, the thing I was so sure I was destined to do with my life, which in the end turned out I actually hated. Those long depressing months of sending out CV's to every stupid newspaper, magazine and supplement going—my parents had always made it very clear that they expected me to use my degree sensibly, especially as they may have helped me now and again, financially, after I got into a bit of credit card debt. I got rejected time and time again, even by a cheese periodical. Seriously, they said at the interview my lack of passion for the subject was apparent. I mean, what sort of person is passionate about cheese?

Finally I got a chance, well more like a small teeny tiny stepping stone, one that would actually go down well with my family. A news researcher. I mean, it's for the least watched local news program ever, in a small rural part of the country where nothing exciting ever happens, but it totally counts. I was so relieved, but definitely not happy to get this job. Still, I can't afford to lose it.

I'm such a fool. I only did this to impress Jake. Damn it. I've been trying to get his attention since I walked in on my first day and saw him smiling into the phone and twisting his hair in that cute way he does when he's concentrating. He's absolutely gorgeous—tall, dirty blonde hair, blue eyes, a smile that lights up a room. I was instantly smitten, and have since spent my days catching any glimpse of him that I can.

He definitely likes to think he's the joker in the office, so after spending hours every night trying to plan sexy outfits—which believe me isn't easy if you're 5'3", with dull mousy brown hair that match your eyes exactly and a figure that could do with losing about 10 pounds—to combine with flirting and trying to seem like a really cool girl with such an interesting social life—none of which caused him to even blink an eye in my direction—I thought I'd try a different approach to getting his attention.

He's one of those guys constantly emailing stupid YouTube videos to everyone, often with a fake news story attached, usually mocking one of our more recent, tedious stories. So I found a great one of a 'zombie' attack. It's brilliant. It looks so realistic and although it's in a foreign language and you can barely make out any words, the narrator sounds terrified. It made me laugh when I found it, and I knew Jake would find it funny, so I set it up.

But then came the error. I feel icy and uncomfortable even thinking about it. I accidentally sent it to Jamie King, the big boss. With a whole bloody news story attached.

He doesn't understand humour and I'm sure he's never heard a joke. He seriously does not tolerate messing around in the office. This can only mean he's either going to think I'm serious and I think this should actually go on television, on the news, like some idiot who doesn't deserve this job, or he's going to see it for the joke it is and instantly sack me. Oh God I don't

know what's worse, I can't cope with this.

I'm such a klutz. If I hadn't been talking to Michelle about the new blue high heels I bought at the weekend to go with my black swishy dress, and I was actually concentrating on what I was doing for a change, then none of this would have happened.

She's still talking to me about them now, and about a night out she's planning for someone's birthday, but I can't focus on a word she's saying. I'm just filling in all the pauses with "yeah" or "oh right" which seems to be satisfying her, for now. She always was the talker in the friendship.

The waiting is almost worse than the inevitable boot. I'm on the edge of my seat, tapping my fingers and shaking my legs nervously. I keep seeing Jamie pacing up and down in his office, but not once has he come into the main room. I'm so scared I could throw up. I can't concentrate on anything. I keep logging onto Facebook just to calm down, which is actually just going to add to my bollocking, I realise as I quickly click on the cross.

Ok this is getting ridiculous now. It's been hours and still nothing. Maybe, he just hasn't checked his email yet, or maybe my ideas are so insignificant he deleted it without even reading it. This idea bucks me up a little bit. In fact, now I think about it, he's been on his phone all morning, chattering away quickly and nervously. He looks really stressed out, and actually kinda sweaty. Gross, I screw my nose up in mild disgust. This man is far too important to be worried about some silly email from little old me isn't he? I start to chuckle to myself. I feel relieved, almost hysterical.

"What's up?" Michelle interrupts my thoughts.

"Oh, er, nothing." I realise I've been laughing quite loudly. My face flushes red and I pretend to be engrossed in a press release on my desk.

God, press releases are boring. If I worked in PR I'd attach some freebies or something eye catching with everything I sent to anyone in the media. Surely that's a way to ensure you'd get on the news? I'd find out who worked at each news studio and send them something they'd specifically like. For example, for me I'd send a nice new bag. Or, no that might be a bit much; maybe some new bath salts or something. If someone sent me that I'd make sure their product or story got on the news, even if it was really dull.

"Leah." Jamie's voice makes me jump out of my seat. Damn, I'd forgotten all about that email for a minute there.

I quickly close down Facebook. How did I end up on that website again? I'm reading everyone's gossip and not even realising it. I walk quickly to his office with my head down. Everyone is staring at me which makes me feel awful. Mind you, if I was sat amongst them I'd be staring at me too.

"Sit." I sit down very quickly. This is the end for me I can feel it.

The silence lasts for what feels like forever.

"I need you to explain this email you sent me."

"Well, it was just a, um, joke really. I was just erm." I can't stop babbling, my heart is pounding and my face is getting hotter and hotter.

"Where did you find the video?" he asks me as if I'm about five years old.

"Um, well, I found it on YouTube. On my own time of course. I was only messing around during lunch, trying to get a laugh, lighten the atmosphere a bit." I let out a strangled giggle; this could not be going worse. "I would never misuse company property. Except, well, the email. But that was just um, I didn't mean to."

"So, it's not something you have been working on for a story?"

"Er no, I don't think it's, you know—" Don't say it. Do not say it. "—real?" Damn it! Why

would he need that obvious fact clarified?

"Hmmm, well I want you to send me the video link so I can see what it is you lot are really doing when you're supposed to be working." The look he gives me makes me feel about two feet tall.

I'm shell-shocked as I walk back to my desk. What the hell just happened?

"What was that about?" Michelle whispers.

I shrug my shoulders as a confused reply. Jamie is furious. That much I can see. I can't tell if he really wants the link, or if he was just messing with me, trying to freak me out more than he already has, so I'll never do anything bad again. Well, it's working. I think I'd better do what he asked, just in case.

I suddenly look at Michelle's face and realise she's actually pissed off with the fact that I haven't given her any details to gossip about and help pass the day quicker. I feel totally sympathetic, so I fill her in on all the details.