Reduppity

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A rich girl tries to beat the odds in a game where the winner dies.

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Reduppity

"One, two, three, Reduppity," the whole room yelled and then the four figures in the circle threw down their five cards. Riley scanned her hand and fought down the rising panic.

"Seven, king, three, ten, and another seven." 7+10+3+10+7=37. Her cards were high. She quickly glanced at the other three players and immediately saw the fear on David's face. He had a high hand also.

"I'm out," Walter said, his relief clear. What had started as a slight gnawing in her stomach over the last few rounds was now beginning to grow into a full-blown stomach ache. Now she was really getting concerned. The game had started with twenty-three players. At the beginning of each round, the players threw down their cards. The one with the lowest card count left the game. So far, bad-luck had conspired to keep her in the game.

She swallowed and could taste the coppery bitterness she got in the back of her mouth whenever she got nervous or scared. She had never expected to get this far and be so close to winning. It wasn't supposed to happen like this.

Why had she come to the party in the first place? Boredom? Maybe. After all, there was only so much she could shop and she was tired of meeting Will's demands for oral satisfaction. She was ready for something different, something exciting, and there was nothing more exciting than one of the parties. After all, getting an invitation was in itself an exclusive and mysterious affair. So when the invitation had suddenly appeared in her mailbox, she was ready. What were the chances after all, of being the last one, the winner? She had heard too much about the parties to pass them up. And she wondered, who had invited her?

The sound of Damon shuffling the cards brought her back to the game. The twenty people sitting in a circle around them were a mixed group: frat boys and sorority girls with khaki shorts and white t-shirts; a few artsy types dressed in black; a couple of dopers; and of course the burnouts.

Stephen, a lanky boy with a massive nose ring and tattoo of a unicorn on his back, gave Riley a supportive smile. In the real-world she doubted they would have ever met. Here, she had done shots with the artists and smoked marijuana with the dopers. It was cool and almost poetic if the end result wasn't going to be so tragic. But maybe that was what fueled the all of the groping and bonding in the first place.

They sat in the largest room, the living room she guessed, of a small summer 1970s decorated summer cottage that sat right up to the beach. It was a nice place although in need of serious updating. The walls still had cheap fake grain paneling and the furniture looked like it came out of the sixties. One of the kid's parents owned the spot. She thought it was the perky girl's; Jessica was her name.

It was a scenic spot, a nice spot. Not like Cannes or St Tropez but a decent place to lie out and relax. It was a fucking shitty place to die.

Riley looked at her two opponents. David and Lilly. Lilly had an enormous nose ring and spoke constantly of her boyfriend in Brazil. Of course, it hadn't stopped her from shacking up with Brent. That was how it worked at these parties. Inhibitions disappeared. It was like drinking a bottle of Tequila and swallowing the worm.

And David, the writer. She had never liked the artsy type in college; she had preferred frat boys, but something about him was appealing. He was cute in a Val Kilmer kind of way. He also seemed to be into her, which was more interest than Wills had shown her over the last couple of months. She hoped Lilly won

instead of him. It would never work between them but maybe they'd meet in LA sometime. She could parade him around and make Wills jealous.

Damon finished shuffling the cards.

"Okay folks, here we go." He dealt them face down and Riley found herself thinking about Wills. What would he think of her going to a Reduppity party? He'd be shocked. He was a fitness fanatic and didn't touch drugs or alcohol. Imagine Reduppity? She couldn't wait to throw it in his face.

Low numbers, low numbers. He finished dealing and the three of them picked up their cards without examining the face values. The silence was broken as the room chanted.

"One, two, three, Reduppity!" Riley threw her cards down and quickly counted. Sixty-one. She bit her lip. It was too high, too high she knew but she hoped. She turned and saw that David had two kings and an ace. He was high also. Lilly threw down her cards in mock-disgust.

"I can't seem to win this game for the fucking life of me," she said although Lilly looked extremely relieved. Fuck her, the drama queen. Go ahead rub the fact that you're out in our faces. She would have never believed it, but she actually wished for a moment that she was Lilly. It only made her angrier and more afraid.

Now the pit in her stomach had grown a giant root and was digging into her esophagus. How could this be happening? Her eyes glanced over to the side of the room.

Resting on the tray on a ledge above the fireplace was a small red pill that the fueled the insanity. Reduppity. The winner, the one that outlasted the others in the crazy game of chance they played would have the honor of taking the pill.

She had read about the drug in *Newsweek* while waiting for her dentist appointment. The writer had tracked Reduppity's emergence to several third world countries, where despair and poverty had made it popular. Allegedly, Reduppity transported the soul to whole new worlds, whole new levels of consciousness. It was the ultimate trip, the ultimate one way trip. While the user was being transported to other dimensions, lesions quickly grew and spread across the brain. Within twelve to twenty-four hours the users mind disintegrated into a pulpy mess, resulting in death.

The third world ghettoes were not the only places without hope and Reduppity soon spread. Across Europe and North America, invitation only Reduppity parties began to pop up. It wasn't only the poor. The parties became trendy with the rich also. Several of her friends had gone and told Riley about the experiences. She remembered Megan gushing about it:

"It was amazing. The whole time you're wondering if this is it. You're brought to the edge of life and then allowed to live again. It's like having your head in the guillotine."

No one thought that they would be chosen. No one spoke of the losers. And no one spoke too much about the parties. The police were on the look-out and they occasionally made a bust. She had heard about one group being charged as an accomplice to murder. That just made the parties even more exclusive.

Lilly got up and left the circle and the enormity of what was happening hit Riley. It was down to 2 finalists and she was one of them.

"No," she mouthed the words to herself looking across at David. This couldn't be happening. It wasn't supposed to happen this way. Everything worked out in her life, it always did and it always would. Something

was seriously wrong here.

"Just two left," Damon said. Her mouth was dry and she started to think about what she would do if somehow she was the one. She would offer them all money; that would do it. Or, she could offer to put them in touch with her father - he would offer them jobs. Something would work. Things always worked out. Like the time she had gotten an AIDS test and it had come back negative. No surprise. Not because she hadn't slept around, but bad things happened to other people, not to her. Other people got cancer, or struck by lightning, or killed in car crashes. Bad things were for other people.

He shuffled the cards and she saw the others in the room staring down at them. Riley's left eye began to twitch and she struggled to swallow. There was no need to be nervous, she told herself. It would all be all right.

She looked over to David and realized he was going to have to die. It had really come to that. Too bad. He had been so confident yesterday that neither of them would be picked. They had snuggled in each other's arms and he had talked about going to Mexico. It had been romantic even if it was a bit naïve on his part.

Damon stopped shuffling the cards and straightened them in his deck. He stepped forward and addressed the audience.

"Everyone here knows the rules. Riley and David play one final round. The winner will get the pill. The master bedroom is theirs for the trip. Just don't bleed on the bed, please."

Damon dealt the second set of cards.

Riley felt her heart beating wildly. She was having difficulty breathing and her eye twitch was a constant beat. Damon dealt the fifth card and David finally looked up at her. The smile and the affection were gone. His eyes were wild, like an animal struggling to escape capture, like a drowning man peering wildly for help. He could smell his own death and it was horrible.

Riley smelled it also and she suddenly puked onto the wide floorboard of the summer cottage. It came without warning, like a chocolate craving. Now her panic was fully sprouted, clawing out of her mouth, through her nose and into her brain. She was a fucking card-hand away from dying. No, she would survive, there are options, she told herself. If worse came to worse, of course. It wouldn't. Poor David.

No one budged. The strings of saliva dangled from her mouth and she absently wiped them away with her arm. Beside her, the loose puke spread across the seams in the wooden planks. She wasn't mopping it up, that was for sure. She dimly heard the words.

"One, two, three, Reduppity." Silence and then Damon spoke.

"Riley, you have to flip your cards."

"Fuck you," she said softly. "Fuck all of you." She saw a gun pointed at her and knew they would shoot. It had happened before. The rules had to be enforced or the game lost all meaning. At least that was what Libby had said earlier in the weekend over a beer. It had been all fun and smiles then.

"Flip the cards, Riley," Damon said.

"It's just a fucking game. I don't want to play anymore." No compassion, no sympathy on any of their faces. Hard stares, uncaring stares.

"Flip the cards," Damon said again.

"Why are you doing this to me?" she sobbed. She felt the tears flowing from her eyes as she looked down at her cards. Now all she heard was his voice.

"Turn them over. Turn them over Riley, turn them over."

"No," she moaned, not even sure if she was talking to herself or anyone else.

"King, queen, three, seven, seven," Damon said. "Thirty-seven." Silence. Her heart felt like a wrecking ball in her chest. Everything seemed so distant. This was not supposed to be happening. Bad things happened to other people. Other people got in accidents, other people went to jail, other people got cancer - not her. It just wasn't possible.

"You win Riley," she dimly heard someone say.

"No, this can't be possible. Something is wrong. Please, you've got to understand. It wasn't supposed to happen this way."

Somber faces.

"Please, please, I'll pay you. My father is rich. He can pay all of you." They looked at her as if she was already dead and now she was truly scared. The odds were so small. She was one of twenty-three. What was she going to tell Willis? How could she tell Megan about the entire experience? What would happen to her father when she didn't come back home?

"I have to go, I have to leave." The circle pulled back and now she stood alone against the wall. She should never have come, never!

"Riley, it can be done peacefully, or not so peacefully," Damon said.

"Please," she whimpered.

"Take it." She tried to run but arms grabbed her. She kicked but there were too many people in the room. She was pinned to the ground and someone pinched her nose. Gasping for breath, she opened her mouth and something was wedged in, flattening her tongue against her teeth and opening a straight path from her mouth down her throat. She tried to move but they were too heavy.

Damon held the red pill in front of her face for a moment.

"Surrender to your fate Riley. Go in peace." He dropped the pill into her throat and she felt the lump go down. She tried to cough it up but they kept the pipe in her mouth for what seemed like eternity. Finally, they pulled it out of her throat andreleased her arms and legs. But she hardly felt it anymore.

She rose and rose and continued to rise until they were all far below her. She looked downat the house and could see them all melting into the sea.

"It can't be me," was her last thought before the drug took over.

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