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The Perfect Society

Goodness looked at the enormous clock sitting on the wall. It stared at her at every minute. Sometimes she thought it would stop, just for a moment, as if to tell her a secret. But she always kept walking. There was no time for stopping.

She soon stood in front of room 205, her assigned sleeping room. A short blonde woman reached over Goodness's shoulder and unlocked the door. Her room was bare since it only held three things: a bed, a suitcase, and a sink. She pulled her suitcase from under the bed and changed into her social time gown. She had sewn the long white dress years ago when all the girls on floor 2 were ordered to sew social time gowns. Before then, she only had one gown, but after that, she had two, so she was happy. She slipped on her straw sandals, clasped the suitcase back, and shoved it under the bed.

She heard a knock at the door. Goodness smoothed down the top of her long strawberry blonde hair and took one step to touch the door. Curious stood there smiling. "Social time." He said with no emotion.

Goodness shut the door behind her, and they walked to the end of the hallway. They went down the set of stairs to the basement where social gatherings were held. Strict walked to the front of the room and led an exercise while Goodness and Curious moved chess pieces across the board. "Check," Goodness said. Curious winced and thought for an absurdly long time. "I quit," he finally said.

"Come on, Curious." She said. Curious launched into an explanation of his *stressful* day. Playful had accidentally hit one of the bulbs, and it broke. He told The Board what had happened and Playful was soon removed from the industrial department. It didn't bother him; he liked being alone downstairs. Though, he wasn't actually alone. Intelligent monitored him often. He would walk around the industrial room and look over Curious's shoulder. As if he needed monitoring.

"That was just one time." Curious said out when Goodness pointed out that perhaps Intelligent monitored him because he caught him sneaking downstairs one night. "And anyway, it's not like I'd do that again." He said aloud, but every night he suppressed the urge to tiptoe down the stairs and explore the back rooms.

Strict stood up and announced social time was over. Everyone snapped in unison. Standing in a single file line toward the door, the girls walked to their sleep rooms for their midday nap. Goodness liked the planned out schedule. She never had to wonder what to do next. She was often bored but perhaps that was better than not knowing what was next.

As she got ready for dinner, Goodness smoothed out her tangled hair. She could never sleep during midday nap. She would lay on her side and stare at the wall, counting cracks and crevices and listening for any noise outside her door. Finally, she would hear a knock to signal midday nap was over.

Goodness stepped outside room 205 and proceeded down the hallway and down the steps to the dining hall. She walked through the doors and searched for Curious. The boys didn't have midday naps; instead, they were to proceed to work. Curious was not in the dining hall yet. She walked through the line, grabbed a carton of chocolate milk and a package of crackers, and sat down at her assigned table. She wished the harvest would come; milk and crackers never satisfied her. An unfamiliar boy sat down in front of her. He set down his lunch tray and looked up at Goodness.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," he replied.

"I'm Goodness." She responded. "I don't think I've met you yet."

He smiled and let out a soft giggle. "Goodness," he said, "of course you know me. It's Curious."

"No," She stammered. "You're not Curious. Where is he?"

"What's wrong with you?" He said, eyebrows furrowed. "Maybe you need to lie down; you don't seem alright." For the first time ever, Goodness was speechless. Her head was spinning, trying to decipher what was going

on. *Who is this odd boy sitting at our table? And where is Curious?*

She sat at her sewing table, fixing a pair of pants for Peace. Usually, she adored her workspace: a small wooden table, just big enough to put her legs under. On top of the table was her weaved box with her needles and thread. In the basket beside her table were pieces of fabric that made her happy. All sorts of shades of white and tan. Cotton and wool and linen.

But today, she couldn't stop thinking about Curious and where he was. Goodness stopped her work for a minute and discreetly pulled out a small leather-bound notebook in her dress pocket. When she designed her first dress, she was given specific instructions from Leader. A simple, long cotton dress. No embellishments or anything out of the ordinary. But this notebook. One day, when she was really little, she was throwing away her trash in the dining hall and it was poking out of the trash can. She never had paper to write on. So she kept the notebook. Her very own notebook. She discreetly sewed a little pocket in the side of the dress. She couldn't risk someone finding the notebook in her room.

She grabbed a pencil from her basket and jotted down some words. *Curious was not at dinner last night.* She folded the cover back and shoved it into her gown pocket. Returning to her sewing, she licked the end of the thread and wove it through the needle. Someone tapped her shoulder.

"Leader needs to see you," Strict said behind her.

She laid down the needle, walked down the flight of stairs, across the lobby, and down a hallway, into the office rooms. Leader's was in the very back. She had only been called one other time and that was for her first (and last) checkpoint, when they decided because she wasn't excelling in her classes, she would no longer attend school. Only those with the highest marks continued their schooling, so she became a seamstress. She knocked on the door.

"Come in," Leader's voice rang from the other side. "Sit down," she spoke as Goodness closed the door. I wanted to speak with you. She looked at the ceiling and sighed. "There" she paused for a second to gather her words. "There has been peace here forever, and we want you to remember that. We want you to remember that we expect only goodness from you, right Goodness?"

"Of course," she replied. "I am only good."

"Yes, you are. And we want you to remain that way. Understand that there are evil forces that work—um—every single day around us. But we have the ability to fight them. We are better than they are."

"Of course we are," she said meekly. Leader stared at her for a second too long. Goodness looked down in her lap. She wanted so badly to go back to the sewing room.

"We simply want you to understand that. We want you to remember that. Okay? I'm glad to speak with you today, Goodness. How's work going?" She abruptly shifted from her cold, stale expression to a radiating smile.

Goodness wanted to ask, "Where's Curious?" But it scared her, so instead she said, "It's good, as always. I am currently sewing the hole in Peace's pants." It was kind of a lie. She *was* sewing the rip in Peace's pants, but things weren't going well. Her mind was scattered in a million directions.

"Oh, yes, Goodness. We really appreciate all you do for us. Imagine if Peace's pants were to get caught on one of the machines." She shook her head. "That should tell you how valuable you are."

"Thank you."

"Well," she stared one last time at Goodness. "It really is nice to speak to you. You may go and return to your sewing."

"Thank you." She got up and smoothed her dress and returned to the sewing room.

As Goodness finished patching Peace's pants, she couldn't stop thinking about Leader's words. Did everyone get called into her office to be "checked on" and personally encouraged? Goodness had never heard of that before. It was odd. The words replayed in her head.

During midday nap, she counted the cracks in her wall when Strict knocked on the door. She stood up, smoothed out her dress, and walked down into the basement. She surveyed the room for Curious, but he was nowhere to be found. She did, indeed, see the boy. The boy who introduced himself as Curious. The boy whom she did not know at all. The boy who consumed her thoughts in the worst way possible.

She sat down at the chess board to wait for her friend but minutes passed without ever seeing him. She kept looking at the boy who called himself Curious. She wondered where the actual Curious was. What had happened to him? Surely, nothing. She thought. Surely there's just been a mixup. He isn't feeling well or maybe his work is making him more tired or perhaps he is having to work extra hours since Playful was removed. There was a logical explanation. There always was.

Before long, midday nap and dinner was over. Hours turned into days and days into weeks without a single sign of Curious. He was gone, Goodness concluded. No one was ever gone. No one had ever left. Where would they go? There was nowhere *to* go.

Two weeks later, Goodness still worried about Curious. Her nights were sleepless. Her sewing was jagged. Nothing was the same. She missed him. It was lonely without him. She would watch people talk with their friends or play fun games while she sat alone. But what bothered her most was the fact that she had no idea where he was. Before she could control herself, she had yanked the covers off of her body and was standing in front of her bedroom door. She planned to simply walk downstairs to the industrial room and see if he was down there. She'd be back in a few minutes. It would be fine, she told herself.

She opened the door quietly and peaked into the hallway. Not a single light on. She tiptoed down the hallway, to the stairs, down one flight, down another, down a hallway, turned a corner, down another hallway. It was silent. Not a single sound except the drip in a pipe. The hallway was pitch black. No light. She knocked on the door to make sure no one was inside. When no one responded, she pushed it open, and shut it behind her.

The room was oddly lit. A little light coming from behind the mirage of pipes and dials, tool bags and control boxes. "Curious?" She whispered. "Are you in here?" No answer. The pipe continued its dripping periodically. He definitely wasn't here. There was no trace of him either. She peaked behind the pipes to find the light source. It was a tiny box the size of her sewing basket with light streaming in. It was a different color from a bulb, though. A bulb projected a yellow light whereas this was more of a white light. Odd. She thought.

She heard footsteps approach the door, so she stumbled behind some of the pipes, sat down, and held her breath. A figure opened the door and looked around. She tried to peek through to see who it was but she couldn't without revealing her presence. The person walked around the room and searched for something. Then, the individual turned and walked right out, closing the door behind them. It was odd. Many things were starting to be odd, unordinary.

Before standing up, Goodness realized she was sitting right beside the box of light. She tugged at the glue around the edges but nothing happened. She kept pulling, tearing the glue off piece by piece. Before long, it was off, and she tugged again at the box. This time, it wobbled a little. She pulled harder, and the square plank of wood fell to the ground. Light poured in, stronger now, and she heard sounds of rumbling and felt gusts of strong air from inside the box. She couldn't remember there being anything behind the industrial room.

Goodness peaked through the hole in the wall. Her eyes grew large and sweat gathered at the base of her neck. She poked her head out and saw a huge structure all around her. The bricks looked never ending. Her mind ran with ideas. There was nothing behind the industrial room. Nothing that she knew of. She squeezed her body through the opening and whipped her legs out. A bright light shone in her face in the midst of a blue dome. The ground was covered with tiny green sticks, not carpet. It was everywhere, bigger than she could have ever imagined anything to be. She let go and dropped to the ground. There was no way for her to reach the opening to climb back inside.