

The Elusive Pursuit of Maximum Bliss Side

(At Rise, MAX enters the room, greeted by a slightly nervous ELLE.)

ELLE

Mr. Chance.

MAX

Please, call me Max.

ELLE

(Tries it out.) Max. I'm Elle. *(Notices her sweaty hand. Wipes it off. Embarrassed.)* And I'm nervous.

MAX

No need to be. *(A beat followed by a playful smile.)* I've already given you my money.

ELLE

Yes. You have. Your grant meant so much. *(A bit of doubt.)* I just hope I don't disappoint you.

MAX

(A reassuring smile with a hint of tenderness.) It already feels like money well spent. *(Awkward beat as he wonders if he's been too flirty. ELLE blushes wondering if she misinterpreted his words.)*

ELLE

Come in then. I'll show you what I've got. *(Her face shows a slight regret with her choice of words.)*

MAX

(Looks around the room.) So, this is where the magic happens?

ELLE

I hope so. Guess we'll find out for sure. Any electronic devices on you?

MAX

My phone and my Bliss-Band. *(He rolls up his sleeve to reveal a watch-like device. He peeks at the face.)* 86%. Up a tick since I got here. Something's cheered me up a bit.

ELLE

Probably the smell of chocolate chip cookies.

MAX

(Smiles) My favorite. Have any left?

ELLE

Never had any. It's just a fragrance spray to make the lab feel homey.

MAX

(Looks at watch.) And I am back down to 85. *(Sighs.)* Pretty consistent for me these days.

ELLE

Impressive number. *(Slides sleeve to reveal a Bliss-Band.)* My happiness hovers in the high 70s.

MAX

I should've brought you real chocolate chips.

ELLE

(Laughs.) That would've helped. *(A beat.)* The band will be distracting though. You mind taking it off?

MAX

Taking it off is easy. *Leaving* it off is the issue. *(He removes it and hands it to her.)* Damn things are an addiction. Always checking the percentage...

ELLE

(Sets Bliss-Band on table. Sneaks peek at hers.) ...seeing how it corresponds with your current activity...

MAX

... waiting for that elusive 100% chime.

ELLE

It's a bit consuming, isn't it?

MAX

I think we were all happier before we had a device to tell us how happy we were.

ELLE

I think you're right. I heard one once, though. The 100% chime. Several years back now. A couple with a dog across the park near my home. It inspired my research. It was lovely.

MAX

Was it real, though? They were probably actors strategically planted to trick people into believing it's possible. 100% happy. I can't see it happening.

ELLE

Well, not from here. Let's get started and see if we can change that.

MAX

That's the kind of can-do attitude I admire.

ELLE

And funded generously.

MAX

You tried this all out on yourself first, right?

ELLE

I haven't, actually. Too nervous, I guess. It's difficult...

MAX

... to be both subject and observer.