



Dhaka Ltd.

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My own job was outsourced back to me yesterday.

I was as surprised by it as anyone. I was clicking through on Craigslist, looking for some freelance marketing gigs, when I saw the project I'd been working on right before Lackey and Dwyer Inc. had let us know we were all getting canned. Nothing personal, they'd told us. Production was just cheaper overseas.

"Where overseas?" I'd wondered.

"Bangladesh, mostly," they answered.

I asked what the hell they knew about writing ad copy in Bangladesh. They told me they knew enough about it to do it for a quarter of what they paid me and to have my desk cleared out by the afternoon. I was sure there'd be a public outcry about the rash of poorly written ads by non-native English speakers with no cultural connection to the United States—getting us all our jobs back—but it turned out nobody noticed. Go figure.

The freelance job was for Premium Mail, which is just like regular mail, except you pay for it. The company offering it, Savōr, has supposedly come up with a dynamic profiling matrix to specially tailor the contents of your mailbox to your personality, but all they really do is throw out all of the credit card offers and toss in an extra pizza coupon every week. We projected it to top the billion dollar mark within five years.

I'd decided not to mention my previous work on the project when applying, figuring it was better to go in without any baggage. The headhunter from Dhaka Ltd. liked my ideas, and we ended up with an agreement that paid me an eighth of what I'd previously made.

Now I just had to do the work. There was one problem, though. A quick calculation of the amount of money I was receiving for the project vs. my desired hourly wage meant that I had to wrap the whole thing up in 40 minutes to get my money's worth.

I considered deliberately bombing the project to make my overseas replacement look bad, striking a blow for the American worker, but my rent was coming up, and I really needed the cash. Still, my dignity wouldn't let me start work on the project when I was getting paid peanuts. So, I compromised by contacting the local community college about their student intern project.

It took me about five minutes to get my posting ready, then another five to throw out all of the male resumes and sift through the female ones looking for the one with the hottest name. By the time I called Cassandra Villanueva to let her know she had the job, I was down to 30 minutes.

Luckily, it only took Cassie a couple minutes to grasp the project. I told her that I was looking for something iPod-meets-cable-on-demand-meets-mail and stressed the fact that successful businesspeople need to be able to work without supervision. Then I disconnected my phone and spent the rest of the week playing video games. Brilliant, huh? I still had 20 minutes to proofread the thing before I sent it in.

The only problem? When I got the final product on Friday, instead of a marketing campaign, I seemed to have an essay on the history of mail. And a badly written one at that. To quote:

"Since the beginning of time, man has been looking for ways to communicate with each other. The first modern mail system was made in England in 1837 when the stamp was invented. Back then it only cost a penny to mail a letter, and it could take months for it to be delivered. We've come a long way since then. Or have we?"

I skimmed the rest. There were eight more pages of the same, including sections on the Pony Express and carrier pigeons. There was also a URL for best_term_papers.com embedded at the bottom of the page, along with a notice saying, "BE SURE TO DELETE THIS NOTICE."

I called Cassie.

"Hello?" she answered.

"I don't even know what to say to you," I told her.

"What do you mean?" she asked. It was obvious she knew what I meant.

"It's not that you bought the paper that bothers me. It's that you had so *little respect* about my ability to figure it out."

She started to cry.

"Don't think that's going to win me over, honey. You just cost me a lot of cash!"

"I'm sorry," she blubbered.

"Sorry or not, Cassie, I don't see how I'm going to be able to give you a passing grade here."

She started to cry harder. I could hear snot sounds coming over the phone, and then those little gasps someone makes when they start to

hyperventilate. “Now...I’ll...never...get into...the accounting program.”

Well, thank God, I thought. Who’d want a nitwit like her doing their taxes? But then I started to feel a little sorry for her.

“Cassie.”

“Oh, God,” she sobbed.

“Cassie, listen to me. I can’t just let this go—you screwed up. But it’s my fault too—I probably threw you in over your head. So I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. If you give me \$300, I’ll pretend the whole thing never happened.”

She sniffled at the other end of the line. “You’re asking me for a bribe?”

“Just look at it as the cost of doing business.”

She agreed, and that was that. I had the money to pay my rent, and since I’d already gone over the time I’d budgeted for the project, I just blocked the email address for Dhaka Ltd. from my inbox.

American worker, 1. Bangladesh, 0.