

## Two Too Many

1974

### Saturday Night

Poker games only came a couple of times a year. Set on a night when no one had work or a girlfriend commitment, the time betting and counting chips relaxed the crowd while reconfirming a history that said they could beat each other's ass.

That history right now was a deck of cards, a stack of chips and varying kinds of bottles being passed. Vampire and drunk was damn hard to achieve. Vampire and 'damn I'm feeling good,' was easier.

The thick smell of expensive cigars hung in the air. In the living room, their stereo played *The Doors*.

"You guys are morons," Evan said, leaning back in chair, his shoulders slumped.

Quinn smiled. The baby of the family could pout just right when he wanted to.

Jason stared at his hand, pulled the cigar out of his mouth to blow smoke above their heads. "This from the guy who lost the last five hands."

"Least I don't have your kind of woman problems," Evan said, staring at the pot.

Quinn smiled at the jab, his own cigar in his teeth. He stared at his two pair and debated whether it was worth it to stick in the game. Five card draw didn't leave a lot of wiggle room and fours and twos might not be worth fighting for. Picking up his chips anyway—three red—he tossed them into the pot.

"The problems I have with women," Jason chuckled, "you can only hope for." He matched Quinn's bet and raised. Stuart went next.

Evan laughed and tossed his cards face down.

"Don't," Stuart said as he stared at his cards.

Quinn saw Evan fold his arms and sulk.

"Don't what?" Quinn asked Stuart.

Stuart's smile held tight, and he tilted his chin. Bracing his arms on the table, he looked to be trying to hide behind his cards.

"Jaaason," Evan said, dragging the word out long. "What's the name of the girl you're seeing right now?"

Stuart slapped his cards down and groaned.

Travis kept fanning his. "I think it might be nice to live alone," he said as he pulled out two cards, putting them face down on the table.

"That was a good game," Stuart said to Travis. "I think I might have won."

"Carol Anne," Jason said. "Why?"

Quinn let the name settle over him then began to think of the implications, not really liking anything that came to mind. He chuckled a little and lowered his cards, to stare at Jason. "You're dating a girl named Carol Anne?" he asked.

Jason's gaze left Evan's and came up to Quinn's. "Yeah, couple of months now."

Quinn narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips, letting the obvious sit between them. "Not a common name. Sounds like a name you might inherit from an old aunt," he said.

"Okay," Jason chuckled.

Evan smiled while Stuart got up from the table and headed toward the refrigerator. Travis leaned back and braced his hands on top of his head.

"It *was* a good game," he muttered. "And I would have beaten you, Scotsman."

Quinn ignored Stuart and Travis.

"My girlfriend's name is Carol Anne," Quinn said. "Has been for about a month and a half."

Jason took the cigar out from his lips. "We both nailed the only two Carol Anne's in Seattle?"

Quinn slapped his cards down. "I'm thinking no."

Jason stared for only a few seconds. "Ah, shit," he sighed, his shoulders slumping, his cards hitting the table. "Brown hair?"

"Yeah."

"Brown eyes?"

"Yeah."

"Little strawberry shaped birthmark on her—"

"Yep," Quinn moaned. "Damn." He looked up at Evan. "You're a brat. You know that, right?"

Evan laughed and went to the kitchen for another beer.

"Radio Shack?" Jason asked.

Quinn shook his head. "Produce section of Queen's Market." He raised his gaze to Jason. "She wanted to know if her melon was ripe."

In the kitchen Evan covered his mouth and snickered. Travis controlled his laughter with a tight smile.

"How did you know?" Quinn asked the rotten kid.

"Because you're both losers. Both of you came in on a Sunday—different Sundays—and told me about this amazing chick and what she did for you. Made me promise not to tell."

"You told," Jason said.

"Of course, I told. About ten seconds after you fell asleep." Evan laughed harder.

"And no one said anything," Jason said, pointedly looking at Travis, their fearless leader.

Travis shrugged. "Never actually had this problem before. We kept hoping one of you would bail and the other would never find out."

"Because we do secrets well in this house," Jason almost sneered. "That's harsh."

"Like I said, we've never done this before. We weren't really sure what we should do."

Jason looked at Evan. "She was available because her mom was out of town."

"Her mom died four years ago," Quinn chuckled.

"Maybe she didn't know she was seeing both of you," Evan offered behind his smile.

Stuart snickered. "She might not know that you two know each other but she damn well knows who's been heating her sheets and she knows there's more than one. You haven't seen a third hanging around, have you?"

Jason stared at Quinn then Jason picked a quarter off the table and polished it with his thumb.

"Flip for her?" Jason almost smiled.

Travis just about barked his laugh. "Classy, Irishman."

## Tuesday Night

Jason's specialty was play. He could wine and dine a girl and make her feel like a million bucks and he did it with charm and sincerity.

In for the night at Carol Anne's apartment, Quinn smiled when he went into the tight spaced kitchen of her one bedroom. It was a nice place in a nice neighborhood that her nurse's salary could afford. The furnishing was wicker with macramé hangers holding her plants. It smelled good here. Strawberry and vanilla even when there were no source.

They may have met at the store, but he had first seen her in the children's ward where he worked as an orderly. Carol Anne had pulled out a sock puppet, talking through what looked like a toy monkey while Quinn had watched un-observed. The kid had laughed, his fear stilled while she walked with the wheelchair to the other room.

He liked compassion; he liked to see it radiate off a girl's face like it did Carol Anne's. It hadn't taken too much for her to talk him into a date and then bed.

He liked her. He liked her a lot.

Reaching into the refrigerator, he pulled out two beers while staring into the big plastic garbage can and seeing the tell-tale bag from the ice cream store up the street. The two large cardboard dishes on top still had the remnants of chocolate fudge on the inside.

He liked her a lot but he wasn't sure he liked sharing her with his best friend.

Quinn stared at the mess in the can, smiling a little as he got the bottle opener and took off both caps. He threw them on top of the leftover ice cream, figured Jason had chocolate ice cream to go with his fudge sauce because that is what Jason always had. Quinn grabbed both beers and headed back to the sound of the TV.

## Thursday Night

Quinn was a handyman around the house at home. When something broke, even Jason might ask him to help.

Jason sat in the chair across from the TV, looking at the shelves that hadn't been in Carol Anne's apartment before and took a swallow from his beer. His smile felt infectious. Three shelves ran on tracks on the sides. They already were decorated with plants and photos.

He looked over at her, watching *The Carol Burent Show* and used his gray matter to line up all the facts.

It wasn't hard.

He was seeing his best friend's girlfriend and didn't know what to think of that. He and Quinn were as close as two people could be and that would always take priority.

He met her two months ago when he was buying the new Diamond replacement needle for the stereo, she was looking for a new clock radio.

She gave him glances and smiles. Then she brushed his arm as she moved by him.

It was the laughing at his stupid 'neuron walks into a bar' joke that was the kick off.

He liked the way she looked, the confidence of a woman aware of her beauty without flaunting it. The sensuality he had suspected in the store had been confirmed just two days later when they became lovers.

He liked her.

He liked Quinn more.

"New shelves?" he smiled into his beer as he took a drink. "You should have asked," Jason said. "I could have done it."

Carol Anne looked at him, her big brown Bambi eyes blinking at him with pure innocence. She looked at the shelves and back at Jason. Jason required honesty in his relationships. She had lost him with the lie and the two timing.

"I didn't want to bother you. We don't get much time as it is."

## Sunday Night

Quinn came down the stairs with a hop to his step even though he didn't think he totally felt it. In three weeks, no quarter had been given. The double jeopardy in his love life, still remained floating somewhere above acceptable.

The thing was, he couldn't really be mad at Jason and that was annoying him the most. It was the seventies, he told himself. The *Joy of Sex* was on bookshelves. People lived together without marriage when he still remembered what it was like to be committed in a relationship.

"I wouldn't," Evan said from the table, his face planted in his book, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Quinn stopped short of the door and turned. "Why not?"

"I'm thinking it probably won't be worth your time and it could get embarrassing."

Quinn rolled his tongue in his cheek and looked around the room. "Jason," he half smiled.

"He left about twenty minutes ago while you were in the shower." Evan didn't look too put-out by being the messenger.

"It's my night. I had the date with her."

Evan's grinned annoyed Quinn as much as Jason's departure.

"He called the florist from that phone right there," Evan smiled as he pointed. "He wanted to make sure the order was ready. It sounded like a big fucking order."

"Florist," Quinn growled. "On my night? That's not playing fair."

He stood in the kitchen for another couple of minutes, watching Evan go back to his book. Quinn was pretty sure Evan wasn't really reading. Quinn was also sure someone should take care of that smile on the brat's face.

Instead, Quinn made popcorn, picked up the *TV Guide* and sat with Evan watching *Kung Fu*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Night Stalker*.

Evan went upstairs and Quinn stayed watching the TV until late into the night. The channel was obscure and independent but provided some brain numbing benefits.

He heard Jason pull up his too-small-sports-get-up into the drive. Quinn looked at his watch, then went back to the garbage on the screen.

The door opened, it closed and Quinn heard Jason come up behind the couch where Quinn was stretched out.

"That looks good," Jason said with a sigh. "High standard viewing."

"It's three in the morning. Not a lot of choices."

"You'd be surprised," Jason said.

"I don't think I want to hear about it."

Though to be honest, Quinn wasn't pissed. Annoyed, but not pissed.

"I got her lilies," Jason chuckled.

Quinn's gaze jumped up to Jason's.

"Yeah," Jason smiled. "It took the florist days to pull it together and cost me a fortune but it was funny as hell when I got there with four dozen and she didn't have a clue what to do about it. Roses, she said. It was normal for a boyfriend to bring roses. My original plan had been to take them over yesterday, but the order was held up. I guess a lot of places don't carry that many lilies."

"Four dozen lilies?" Quinn laughed.

Jason smirked and nodded.

Lilies, representing death in the vampire culture.

Quinn sank back into the couch as he laughed. "I'm sure she was grateful," he said.

"I don't know if she was or not. She never got the chance to tell me. There was a guy in her bedroom closet. It wasn't his night either."

Quinn stared at the TV, not seeing the picture and laughed. "How did you know?" Quinn asked.

"Besides the Old Spice? He had a cold. Kept sneezing and trying to cover coughs. I pretended not to notice and stayed right where he couldn't get by me. She was so damn flustered and I pretended not to notice."

Jason came around the couch, bumped into Quinn's legs resting on the table. Quinn picked them up, let him pass and Jason plopped down. He reached over, picked up the popcorn bowl and ate the leftovers.

"So, you were screwing around in her room with #3 in the closet?"

"Naw," Jason said, setting the bowl down. "I just kept saying I was too tired while listening to him sneeze." He smiled. "It might have actually been better than sex."

He looked at Quinn. "Though to be honest, my interest in carnal knowledge with her waned about the time Evan folded his shitty hand of cards. Just didn't feel right."

"I liked her," Quinn said, looking at Jason. "Not a 'let's go steady, here's my pin', but I liked her."

"Yeah, I know. She was fun when she was fun. I actually thought all those nice qualities were part of her character and not just the entrance fee. I didn't see any long term there, but when you know for a fact, she is seeing your best friend and playing it, lilies are in order."

"I gave up the sex, too. Made out a few times but didn't go any further. Even that felt wrong."

"Didn't seem to bother her too much."

"She knew?" Quinn asked. "About the two of us?"

"She kept a diary in her nightstand. I think all the gloating she did in it was part of the replay for her amusement. I found it there weeks ago. Tonight, when she was in the kitchen getting drinks, I took a shot." He reached into his inside pocket and pulled it out.

"You shit," Quinn laughed.

"I'll mail it to her later. I just wanted to know how far she would take it. How surprised would you be to find out we weren't the first?"

“Shocked.”

Smiling, Jason opened the book to the last pages. “She thought you tasted better but me, she liked the playful shit in and out of bed.”

“Immaturity,” Quinn smiled. “Your strong point.”

“But Mark,” Jason pointed at the book, “His name is Mark. He was all around better in bed and everywhere else apparently, though,” he looked closer at the page. “Dolt. She said he had a big fat wiener but had the personality of a dolt.”

Laughing, Jason looked up.

“Big fat wiener? She said that?”

Jason held the book for Quinn to see. There it was, in her tiny flowery handwriting.

“And big fat wiener trumps a dolt?”

Jason’s humor waned, his face taking on the edge of serious not usually seen. “She saw us together at the White House Bar a while back.” He held up the book. “It’s in here. She was interested in both of us because we were so different. Her words. She couldn’t decide which she liked better so she tried both, making us two of the most gullible idiots to date.”

“Chicks got energy.”

“Does she get to walk on this?” Jason asked.

“Do we care one way or another?”

“We could scare the shit out of the two of them late one night, sneak in while they’re asleep with capes or something.”

Quinn laughed and leaned back. “I think I’m good. I had fun with her and it was never going to go further. Let her amuse herself with her big fat wiener.”

“She used us,” Jason pointed out.

“Maybe we used her.”

“What do you mean?”

“These last three weeks, were you having more fun not sleeping with her, or leaving ice cream bags at the house for me to find?”

A grin split Jason’s face. “Never thought of it like that, but yeah, I barely thought about the sex at all. It was more fun seeing what she was going to do next.”

“You know this free love shit, now?” Quinn asked.

Jason looked at him but didn’t comment.

“Used to be more fun, I think. With the challenge of meeting and getting to know someone. Then the sex was good.”

“You’re not into biology?”

“Are you?” Quinn countered.

“Carol Anne has her Mark. In six months one or both of us will have someone to talk to. I think we’ll be fine as long as we’re more careful.”

“Or not,” Quinn smiled.

