

Quarters

© Copyright 1999 by Wiseguy

Susan found Karen in the kitchen, taking the plastic cover off a cold cut platter. "Does this look okay?"

Karen pushed the meat aside and transferred her attention to her new roommate. Susan had changed into a white T-shirt cropped to just above the navel. A pair of denim shorts hung loosely around her hips. Instead of panty hose and shoes she had opted for white anklet socks and plain white sneakers. "That's fine," she answered. "I told you, this is a pretty casual bunch. Nobody would have cared if you hadn't shaved your legs."

"What about the hair? Too dustmoppy?" Susan's blonde hair hung straight down from her head in neat layers that helped to round out her long, slim face.

"Your hair is fine too," Karen assured her. "Relax, will you?"

"I'm trying to," Susan answered honestly. "I just want to make a good impression. They *are* your friends, after all."

"Sure, they're my friends. So are you, as of two days ago. This party is for you, so I want you to be comfortable and to have a good time. Remember, you live here now – that means the onus is on them to impress you, not the other way around."

"Okay." Susan didn't look entirely convinced, but she did seem to calm down a little. "What else can I do to help?"

Karen looked at her watch. "Can you put out the munchies on the coffee table while I change? Rita and Marco are coming straight from work, so they could show up at any time now."

Karen slipped into the back bedroom of the 2-bedroom condo she was now sharing with Susan. Trying to match the other girl's casual look, she pulled on a cream colored ribbed tank and a comfortable pair of jeans. She was deliberating on footwear when she heard the doorbell ring. Grabbing a cassette tape from on top of the dresser, she stuffed it in her pocket and hurried back to the living room to spare Susan the ordeal of meeting the first guests alone.

Susan heard the doorbell too and hesitated, wondering if Karen would come out to answer it. *This is stupid*, she told herself, *they're not going to eat me!* Putting on her best friendly face, she hustled to the door and swung it open just as Karen appeared behind her from the bedroom.

Standing at the door were a man and woman, both in their mid 20's (as were Karen and Susan). The man looked striking: tall and lean, with black hair cropped short above a square jaw and a Mediterranean skin tone. His companion was a pretty Latina, small and slender, with fine black hair carefully gathered behind her head in a thick ponytail.

"Hi, you must be Susan." The man's deep voice was pleasant, friendly. It gave Susan some confidence.

"That's me," she answered. "Come on in, please."

Holding out his right hand, the man bowed slightly. Susan moved to shake hands with him, but instead he brought her hand to his lips and kissed it gently. "I am Marco," he said, "and this is Rita. We are most honored to make your acquaintance, Susan." There was a singsong quality to his voice, just the slightest hint of an accent.

The woman took careful aim and jabbed Marco sharply with her elbow. "He tries that Latin lover crap on every new woman he meets," she explained to Susan in an aside. "He owes his Don Juan looks to an Italian great-grandfather."

Everyone was laughing as Susan ushered the new couple into the living room. A blonde leather sectional unit dominated the living room, each side running six feet from the corner. Inside the L formed by the sectional was a large, square coffee table containing an array of pretzels, chips, cheeses, and other assorted snacks. A wall system placed against the opposite wall held a moderate sized TV with VCR and a modest rack system for audio. Marco and Rita sat together near the inside angle of the sectional with Susan and Karen taking places on either side.

"Let me try this again," Marco began. "Hi, Susan. It's nice to meet you." Leaning gingerly across his companion's lap, he took Susan's hand and shook it instead of kissing it. This time Rita nodded approvingly.

"That's better," she said. Then, turning to Susan, she added, "You've got to watch this guy every second. You won't find a slicker con man outside of Washington."

"Yes," Marco agreed, "but at least I have you to pull me back from the brink of moral turpitude."

Karen interjected. "Hey, guys – are you trying to convince my new roommate that I hang out with sleazy, degenerate people?"

Rita shrugged. "She has to know the truth sooner or later," she answered, sending a broad wink Susan's way.

The foursome passed about twenty minutes in friendly small talk. Marco, it turned out, was a car salesman. Rita worked at the same dealership in the finance department. "It's a full time job keeping this guy honest," she proclaimed. "But at least he's not a lawyer."

As she was saying that last part, the door opened and a tall, thin, sandy-haired man walked into the condo. He had bright blue eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses. His dress shirt was open at the collar but his slacks were still sharply pressed. Susan assumed that there was a matching jacket and tie discarded somewhere out of sight. "Even the Bar Association has standards," he quipped. Then, offering his hand to Susan, he added, "I'm Steve, long-suffering friend to these two and Karen's current main squeeze."

"Hi, Steve. What kind of law do you practice?"

"Intellectual property. Nothing that makes for great party conversation."

"But he makes up for it in other ways," Karen added, putting her arms around him for a strong squeeze. "For instance, he's really good at serving drinks."

"Don't you just love how she slips that in?" Writing on an imaginary pad, Steve took the group's drink orders. He brought a beer to Marco and diet colas to the women, then hovered near the door while the others talked. The doorbell rang soon, rewarding his vigilance, and he opened it to admit a well-built man in a polo shirt and khakis. Everyone stopped talking long enough to hail

the newcomer. He returned their greetings with a friendly wave and smile as Steve guided him to the sectional. "This is Susan, Karen's new roommate," he said. "Susan, this is Tony. He's part of the gang."

"Hi, Tony." Susan noted how the shirt stretched to accommodate his shoulders. "You look as though you work out a lot."

"Some," he replied with a modest shrug. "It's a good way to beat stress."

"Judging by those shoulders, you must have a lot of stress," Karen chimed in. "You look delectable. Adrian is a fool."

"Thanks," he replied with minimal enthusiasm, taking the offered seat next to Susan.

Tony was the last of the expected guests, so Karen and Steve unveiled the sandwich makings on the dining room table. The group ate buffet style, fixing disposable plates and returning to the living room with them. The stereo put out a soft background of easy jazz, enough to create a light mood without impeding conversation. Marco kept the group entertained with stories of chicanery in the auto industry while Steve and Karen kept the snack bowls full and cleared away the remainder of the cold cuts. Having sorted out the various identities and relationships in the group, Susan began to feel more expansive. *These are people I can be friends with*, she thought to herself.

"So tell me about you," a voice said to Susan. "All Karen told me is that you're from out of town."

She turned to see the kind, smiling face of Tony focused on her.

"Not too far out," she replied. "Maybe two hours' drive due south. I'm an army brat, though, so I've lived just about everywhere at one point or another."

"So why move up here?"

She had been mentally rehearsing an answer for that one all day, but something in Tony's eyes prompted her to toss away the script and answer truthfully. "A man, of course. The wrong man, although it took me a while to figure that out. I was about to go back home when a great job offer came up, so I'm here to stay for a while."

"Good for you. What kind of job?"

"Radio," she answered. "Starting next month I'll be the voice of traffic and weather on WYYT."

"I'll have to adjust my listening habits. You have a pretty voice, I'll bet it sounds great on the radio."

"Thanks. The truth is, it's my first live broadcast job and I'm a nervous wreck about it. I hope I'll do okay."

"I'm no expert, but I think you'll do fine. If you're really uncomfortable, you can always get Karen to help you control the butterflies."

Susan was puzzled. "How could she do that?"

"I guess she hasn't told you yet. Our Karen is quite an accomplished hypnotist."

"Really? She told me she was an oral hygienist."

Tony nodded. "She is. One of the dentists in her office is a big believer in using hypnosis for pain control; he taught several of the staff how to do it. Every so often at one of our social gatherings she'll draft a couple of volunteers and put on a show. Some of the stunts she comes up with are amazing."

"Has she ever hypnotized you?"

"A few times. It feels really good when you wake up, like having an 8-hour nap in only 20 minutes."

"I can't imagine doing that," Susan said. Immediately after saying so, an image sprang unbidden to her mind of herself standing in front of the group, eyes blank, arms forward, ready to obey any order. Instead of fear, she felt a strange sort of excitement at the thought.

"It's fun, really. There's a certain comfort that comes from being among friends. And Karen's pretty considerate about what she has us do while we're under."

"What kind of things does she do?"

"Whatever strikes her. Last time we got together, she hypnotized Marco and made him incapable of using the words 'I', 'me', or his own name. You've had a sample of Marco already – not being able to talk about himself drove him nuts."

Catching the end of his remark, Rita leaned over toward Susan to add her piece. "I remember that, it was classic. Karen put me to sleep once and told me I'd had plastic surgery that made me look like Pamela Anderson. When I woke up they handed me a mirror and I looked exactly like her. Then Karen tapped me on the shoulder and I was back to being myself. That was a lot of fun too."

Seeing the beginnings of an interesting conversation, Steve joined them and offered his contribution. "My all-time favorite has to be the time she put all of us under and told us we were naked. We must have spent half an hour searching for our clothes while Karen rolled on the floor laughing her butt off at all of us. Then she said something and we realized we had been wearing them all the time."

"Didn't you see that everyone else was still in clothes?" Susan asked, perplexed.

"That's the most amazing part. Whenever I looked at myself or at anyone else, they appeared naked to me. Even the ones I'd never seen nude before – my imagination just made up an image. If Karen hadn't videotaped the whole thing and shown it to us, I'd swear we really were naked and just didn't remember getting dressed again."

"That was a mind-bender," Tony added. "In fact, Adrian never believed the videotape. She thought we really had been nude and that watching the tape was the hypnotic illusion."

Rita's eyes opened wide. "I never thought of that," she mused. "I wonder if she's right."

Susan wondered as well, feeling her own sense of increasing excitement as she pictured the group walking around naked in the living room.

Karen returned from the kitchen to find all of her guests gathered around Susan. "You people aren't giving my new roomie the third degree, are you?"

"Quite the contrary," Steve explained. "We are filling her in on some of your hypnotic escapades."

This pleased Karen a great deal. "Don't try to scare her off now, guys. I have a treat in store for you all."

"Are you looking for a volunteer?" Rita asked with barely concealed glee.

"For this game," Karen announced, "everybody goes into trance. Including me."

"How can you do that?" Marco asked. "Don't you have to be awake to give the suggestions?"

"I found a way around that. You'll see. Give me a hand clearing the munchies, will you?"

With everyone pitching in, the coffee table was soon cleared of the snack foods and drinks. Karen placed a large cylindrical candle in the center of the coffee table. "Everyone get comfortable," she instructed, "then we'll start."

Susan watched as Karen's friends settled themselves on the sofa. She had only just allowed herself to realize that Karen was proposing to hypnotize everyone in the room, including Susan. The idea was frightening to her, but at the same time titillating. She just stood by the coffee table, indecisive, until Tony motioned for her to come and sit next to him. Lacking any more specific idea she complied, still not sure she wanted to participate but positive she wanted to at least watch.

Sitting cross-legged on the floor opposite the sectional sofa, Karen looked at each of her friends, making good eye contact. Seeing the nervousness on Susan's face, she gave her a comforting smile. "Everybody ready?"

Four heads nodded in unison. Susan hesitated, then nodded quickly herself. Karen was satisfied. Reaching over the table, she struck a match and lit the candle. A faint smell of vanilla started to waft through the room.

"Everyone, let your eyes come to rest on the flame at the tip of the candle. See how it dances, how it glows. Fix your eyes on it. Take a nice, deep breath and hold it. Now let it out slowly, feeling your whole body relax as the tension and anxiety seeps away, carried away by your breath. Keep breathing deeply as you listen to the sound of my voice. See how the colors in the candle flame shift and change, dancing and moving with the air currents in the room. Concentrate completely on the flame, ignoring all sounds except for my voice, ignoring all feelings except for deep, delicious relaxation. Let go."

Except for Susan, all of Karen's subjects were already thoroughly hypnotized. Karen had conditioned them all to enter a deep trance whenever they saw that particular candle burning. The induction patter was for Susan's benefit, and it appeared to be working. She was very still and quiet, some of the tension gone from her face, eyes locked on the candle flame.

"As you continue staring at the flame, feeling a deepening sense of calm, of peace, just continue breathing deeply and slowly. If any thoughts come to your mind just let them float away with your breath so that you can concentrate fully on the flame and my voice, my voice and the flame." Karen was pleased to see Susan blink and reacted accordingly. "Staring into the flame can be tiring," she continued. "Even now your eyes are becoming tired, wanting to blink. And that's okay. It's okay to blink. It's natural to blink, especially when your eyes are becoming so tired, so sleepy. Blinking helps to soothe your tired eyes. Each time you blink your eyelids become a little bit heavier, and a little more difficult reluctant to open again. Each time you blink you find yourself sliding further into deep relaxation, feeling less and less need to keep your eyes open."

Susan was blinking often now, her eyes taking longer to open each time. Her pupils did not move, remaining fixed on the candle flame. She looked ready.

"Take one last long look at the candle flame," Karen continued. "As you study it once more, committing the image to memory, I am going to count to three. When I reach the count of three your eyes will close for good, but you will still be able to see the candle in your mind's eye. One, eyelids growing heavy, so heavy ... Two, you feel a wave of sweet, delicious sleepiness enveloping your mind ... Three, eyes closed, picturing the candle flame, watching it continue to dance before you." Karen was pleased to see that all of her regular friends had gone completely limp, heads and limbs resting on anything handy. They had been that way for most of the induction, thanks to their prior conditioning. Only Susan remained upright, eyes closed and face slack, leaning forward a little and still facing the coffee table. Karen knew it wouldn't take much effort to get Susan to the same level as the others.

Getting up quietly, the hostess made her way around the coffee table until she stood over the newcomer. "Relax, Susan. Take a deep breath please ... hold it ... now let it out, sinking deeper and deeper ..." On the exhale, Karen gently pushed down on Susan's shoulders. The entranced girl responded by tipping forward as her neck and shoulders relaxed. Holding her upright, Karen repeated the technique several more times until Susan was too limp and heavy for Karen to support anymore. Gently pushing her roommate's body against the leather cushions of the sofa, she was pleased to see the girl's mouth drop open and the flutter of rapid eye movements under her closed eyelids.

"You are very relaxed now, Susan, completely relaxed and ready to play our game. You continue to relax even more with every word I say, and you will find that when I ask you a question you can answer me, speaking clearly, and even doing that will help you to relax even more. Do you understand, Susan?"

The girl's lips twitched slightly, then her mouth slowly formed the words "Yes, Karen" before falling open again.

"Very good. Do you mind that I hypnotized you, Susan?"

"No," came the slow response. "I feel so dreamy."

"Would you like me to hypnotize you again in the future, Susan?"

"Yes, please."

"As you wish. From now on, then, whenever you see that candle burning, you will remember this feeling that you have now and you will find yourself falling back easily, gently into this deeply relaxed state. You won't question the feeling or try to resist, because you know how sweet and dreamy the candle makes you feel, and you like that feeling. Don't you like that feeling?"

"Yes, I do."

"Will you return to this wonderful, sleepy, dreamy state whenever you see that candle burning?"

"Yes, I will."

"Relax now and listen only to my voice." Moving quietly, Karen blew out the candle and put it back on the bookcase. She slipped into the kitchen momentarily and returned with an 8-ounce juice glass and a shiny quarter, which she placed in the middle of the coffee table. Then she slipped the cassette tape out of her pocket and mounted it in the tape deck, adjusting the volume a little higher than normal and pressing the Play button.

While she waited for the tape to begin, Karen stretched out on the floor by the coffee table and took a deep breath. "Here goes," she said under her breath. There was a subtle hiss as the tape leader passed the read head, then Karen heard a command in her own voice: "Deeply relax."

Savoring the sensation, Karen felt herself sink into the carpet as she drifted off into her own safe, peaceful place.

Karen's eyes popped open at the sound of the tape deck's auto stop. Sitting up slowly, she looked around and saw her friends clearing the sleep from their own faces. Susan had a look of wonder on hers. "Wow!" she exclaimed. "How do you do that?"

"I'll teach you some time," Karen volunteered.

"It's a lot cheaper than drugs," Marco added, "and has no nasty side affects." Rita gestured at him threateningly with her elbow again, causing the man to draw back in mock self-defense.

"It looks like everybody is still dressed," Tony observed. "What's next?"

Karen smiled slyly at all of them. "A little game of Quarters."

That was when they noticed the glass on the table, a shiny new quarter sitting next to it at the ready. "Where's the beer?" Rita asked.

"In the fridge, of course. Tony, go get us a few to start with, would you?"

Tony obliged, bounding up from the couch and striding into the kitchen. The refrigerator was packed tightly with row after row of glass bottles, each bearing a plain white label with the word BEER printed in simple black type.

"What is this, generic beer?"

"Yeah," Karen shouted back. "I got two 24-packs at the warehouse store."

Tony returned carrying four of the bottles. "Nice to see you spared no expense to welcome your new roommate."

"The way you guys drink, who can tell the difference?"

"You've got me there." Tony opened the first bottle and poured about half a glass of beer. "Who goes first?"

"We'll let Susan go first," Karen answered.

"Wait a minute, let's review the rules," Rita said.

"That would help me a lot," Susan added.

Karen agreed. "Okay. The idea of the game is to take the quarter and bounce it off the table so that it lands in the glass. If you miss, you have to drink the beer. If you succeed, you can make someone else drink the beer plus you can either pass or go again. If you succeed 3 times in one turn, you can make up a new rule. The game continues until we all lose interest and/or consciousness, or when the beer runs out."

"I think I can do that," Susan said.

"Play ball!"

Sitting up on the edge of the sofa, Susan took the quarter and held it flat between her thumb and forefinger, tucking the other three fingers into her palm. Holding her hand a few inches in front of the glass, she knocked on the table three times. With the third knock her fingers released the quarter. It bounced once on the tabletop and then neatly vaulted over the lip of the glass, landing in the beer with a solid plop.

All eyes turned to the new girl in surprise. Susan shrugged, grinning wickedly. "We played a variation on this in my sorority a few times," she explained. "Only we used smaller glasses."

"We've got a ringer here," Marco announced. "Watch it, everyone."

"Just for that, Marco, you can take the first drink."

Grumbling about the fix being in, Marco picked up the glass and drained it. Tony refilled the glass and, since he was seated to Susan's right, accepted the coin from Marco to take his turn. Mimicking Susan's technique, he bounced the quarter against the table. The quarter rose up and clinked against the front of the glass, falling back to the table. "Damn," he said, "I used to be good at this." Sliding the coin over to Rita, he emptied the glass into his mouth and refilled it for the next turn. The taste of the beer in his mouth was surprising. "Hey, this beer is really good," he announced. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Any beer is good beer to you guys," Rita declared. "Stand back." Holding the coin several inches above the tabletop, Rita snapped her wrist down and released the quarter. It took a high bounce and clinked into the glass with a splash, raising the head a little. She leaned back with a satisfied smile. "This was your idea, Karen, why don't you take this one?"

"You're all heart, Rita."

Tony poured the remainder of the first bottle into the glass as Karen slid the quarter across to Marco. "One down, 47 to go."

"Child's play," Marco remarked as he accepted the quarter. Holding it high as Rita had done, Marco slammed his fist downward once as he released the quarter. It hit the table and bounced back toward his hand instead of toward the glass, landing just an inch or two from the edge of the table. "This table is not flat!" he complained jokingly, then drank the beer from the glass.

Steve took his turn next, using the same technique as Susan, and was pleased with the resulting plop as the quarter dropped into the beer. Looking across the table at Susan, he gestured toward the glass. "Be my guest."

"You're too kind."

Karen failed in her first attempt, missing wide right. Putting down the empty beer glass, she licked her lips. "You're right, that really is good beer. I'll have to keep some of this in stock."

The second round began with Susan again successfully hitting the glass. "Payback time, Steve."

Tony also scored on his turn, taking the opportunity to give Rita her first drink. From there a silent contest developed. The more proficient players – Susan, Steve, and Rita – started to pick mostly on each other in an attempt to eliminate the competition through inebriation. The others, who succeeded in a little less than half of their turns, seemed to be trying to get everyone equally drunk. Hearty laughter and frequent bathroom breaks became common as the players began feeling the affects of the beer.

Susan was feeling good. She estimated that Rita had consumed six drinks while she and Steve were even at four. Taking the coin in hand, she neatly bounced it into the glass. "It's yours, Steve."

"Why am I not surprised?" Steve retorted, passing the coin to Tony.

"Wait a minute – I want to go again."

Steve looked at Karen, who nodded. "It's in the rules, if you sink one you can go again if you want. Sink it three times and you can make up a new rule."

"Cool," Susan said, taking her second shot. This one bounced higher than usual, clinking against the back of the glass and falling into the beer. "Rita, why don't you take this one?"

Susan sank the third attempt as well. Beaming, she announced her new rule. "All the men have to drink a full glass each right now," she proclaimed. The men took turns with the glass, each chugging a full glass instead of the customary half.

Rita also sank three coins in a row, splitting the drinks between Steve and Susan. Just as she was about to issue her rule, Marco let loose with a loud, gaseous belch. "*Asqueroso!*," she scolded. "That's it. My rule is that from now on anyone who does that has to take a drink."

Confused, Susan turned to Tony. "What was that word?"

"You know Rita is getting hammered when she reverts to Spanish vulgarities. I think she just called Marco a disgusting person."

"Close enough," Rita snapped.

Karen's laughter was suddenly interrupted by her own oral backfire. "Oh, shit! Gimme that glass." She accepted her punishment like a good sport.

Several rounds later Susan had Rita leading with eleven drinks, Steve next with nine, and herself with seven. *Oops*, she thought, *make that eight* as her next shot bounced too high and clear over the glass. *Great beer*, she thought for the eighth time that evening. She was really enjoying herself.

When Steve's turn came, he tried a Zen approach. Holding the quarter in his fist, he closed his eyes and raised his face skyward. "I am the coin," he chanted. "I am one with the coin." Blowing gently into his fist like a craps player, he bounced the quarter down and landed it neatly in the cup, breaking a three-turn miss streak. "YEAH!" he cried, raising his arms in celebration. His fellow men cheered, especially when he picked Susan to take the drink. Repeating the ritual, he succeeded at his second attempt as well and made Rita take the drink. Everyone fell silent while Steve communed once more with the quarter, blew into his fist, and took one more shot. The quarter bounced down and up, ticked against the rim of the glass and took a lucky bounce, sliding down into the beer.

The men celebrated loudly, gesturing at Steve and repeating "You da MAN!" until Karen called for order. "He's more man than you guys know," she said knowingly. Her speech was just a little slurred, a sign that her coordination was heading downhill. "What is your rule, oh Manly One?"

Steve pumped up his chest and unfurled an imaginary scroll. "From now on, it is the law of this land that if someone has to take a drink, they may instead choose to remove one article of clothing."

The announcement brought giggles from the women and snickers from the men. "What happens when somebody ends up *desnudo*?" Rita asked. "Not that it's going to happen to me, of course."

"I guess you'll have nothing left to offer. We'll make something up when the time comes."

As the next round began, Susan felt a strong buzz rising like the tide in her head. By her own reckoning she was ahead of Steve by two drinks, but he seemed to be carrying it very well. Rita seemed pretty well smashed, as did Marco. Karen had needed help getting up for her last trip to the bathroom, so she was feeling no pain either. Tony stayed quiet, making it hard to assess his condition. When she landed the quarter on target again, she decided to make Tony take the drink.

Tony obliged, and then tried to do her a further favor by assigning his drink to Steve. Steve responded by invoking his new rule and removing his shoes, tossing them back toward the coat closet near the door. Rita missed and did likewise, removing her shoes and tossing them aside. Marco landed his quarter in the glass and a lecherous grin stole over his face. "Why Karen," he remarked innocently, "You don't seem to be wearing any shoes."

Looking down at her own feet, Karen realized he was right – she had come out from her room barefoot when Marco and Rita rang the bell and never gone back. She looked over at Steve and pointed an accusing finger at him. "Is this what you had in mind, Mr. Strip Quarters?" In one smooth motion she pulled the tank top out of her jeans and over her head, revealing a lace-trimmed demi bra with front closure.

"It'll do for a start," he replied with a lecherous grin.

Three more rounds went by and even Susan started to lose track of the drinks. Belatedly she realized that Steve had a higher alcohol tolerance than she did, so despite having drunk more beer he seemed to be gaining an edge in coordination (or at least not losing the edge as fast as she). She avoided two drinks by removing her own shoes and then her socks, and was able to deprive Steve of his shirt in the process. Still, by the time her turn came around again the dizziness hadn't completely passed. The simple trick of bouncing a quarter into a glass required extreme concentration.

Success again, she noted with satisfaction. She assigned the drink to Steve and was mildly disappointed when he accepted it and drank. Karen, who was down to just bra and panties, didn't seem to mind either way.

Marco surprised everyone by nailing two consecutive shots despite his deteriorating condition. On the first one he eyed Karen hungrily, but Rita elbowed him again. "Don't you even think about it," she warned him.

"Okay, then you drink it."

"I will," she affirmed, then almost fell forward leaning to get the glass. "Somebody tell the house to stand still," she pleaded after draining the glass.

Marco wasted no time after landing his second shot. He turned directly to Rita and dared her to take off her dress. It was a nice casual dress, wraparound style in simple cotton tied at the front. Standing up slowly and carefully, Rita tugged the knot open and slipped the dress off her shoulders. Underneath she was wearing a satiny burgundy lace bra and matching Rio-style panty. Her thigh-high hose and sandals had already been sacrificed to the cause. Foggy as she was, Rita was pleased to have captured the attention of all three men. She tried to sit back down slowly and deliberately, but lost her balance partway and fell back into the waiting sofa, completing the indignity with a short string of Spanish expletives.

"You are so adorable when you're wasted," Marco told her. He missed on his turn and it was the women's time to stare as Marco removed his shirt, leaving himself naked from the waist up. *He looks nice*, Susan thought, *but I'll bet Tony looks better*.

A couple more rounds went by and Susan started to feel as if she had regained the advantage. True, she was down to her underwear, but so were Marco and Steve. Karen and Rita had taken several drinks apiece before deciding to remove their bras and were down to panties only. Tony was the most dressed, having held on to his jeans and his whites, but his fine motor skills were slipping. When Susan picked him for her next drink, he peeled off the clingy athletic undershirt and she cooed in admiration, even running her fingers along his firm, tight upper body. Her inner voice scolded her. *You're way too drunk to even think about that*, it warned, but Susan decided that her inner voice needed a drink. When Tony offered her his after sinking his shot she drained the glass, catching the quarter in her teeth.

Steve struck again, commanding Susan to take a drink. Susan was already reeling, trying very hard not to let the spinning of the room disrupt her concentration, and decided she might as well lose the bra in hopes of winning the war.

"You have fine *pechos*, Susan," Rita slurred admiringly.

Karen agreed. "Look at 'em, Stevie, aren't they great?" She fell over reaching out for Steve's shoulder, taking a long time and great effort to sit up again. Steve looked at Susan's chest like a child discovering a brand new toy. Marco also gawked freely, Rita having long since ceased to monitor his eyes. It was hard to tell through his jeans, but Susan suspected Tony of having an erection. Marco and Steve obviously did, and had stopped trying to hide them after losing their pants.

Look what you're doing, Susan's inner voice whimpered. *Gawking at strange men's private parts. Displaying yourself like a cheap slut*. "Shut up and go away," she replied, then realized from everyone's reactions that she had accidentally spoken the thought aloud. "Sorry, guys, it's just my Irish Catholic upbringing trying to spoil the fun."

The next round saw everyone take a drink except Tony, who opted to remove his jeans (confirming Susan's suspicions), and Karen. Declining her drink, she scooted over toward Steve and draped her legs across his lap. "You're gonna hafta help me, loverboy," she mumbled. Steve obliged, hooking his fingers in the waistband of the panties and slowly drawing them down Karen's legs. She took them from his hand and waved them aloft like a white flag. "I surrender, I surrender! Now torture me." Spinning unsteadily on her naked bottom, she lay back on Steve's lap. Her arm snaked up and, after a few missed attempts, hooked on to his neck and pulled his head down to meet hers for a long, languorous kiss. Everyone watched in fascination as Steve's hand started wandering over Karen's lean body.

When they finally came up for air, he reached for the beer glass and swallowed the contents. "You four can fight it out," he announced. "I think I just got a better offer." Knocking aside part of the growing pile of empty beer bottles, he and Karen staggered toward the back bedroom. Moments later the unmistakable sounds of free, uninhibited passion could be heard coming from that room.

Susan was surprised to learn that she was not shocked or embarrassed by the situation. *No duh*, her conscience whined, *you're completely blotto*. She was even more surprised when her quarter landed squarely in the glass.

Each of the four remaining players was down to his or her last garment. Susan thought long and hard about the appealing bulge in Tony's briefs, but on an impulse gave the drink order to Marco instead. Marco started to pick up the glass, but Rita gathered herself together and pushed it away from his reaching fingers. Glaring back at him through heavy lids, she said, "Pass out on

Both women stared at Marco's tool, fascinated. Being a confirmed heterosexual, Tony used their distracted state to help himself to a long, uninterrupted examination of Susan's breasts. He reached a hand out just a little and lightly brushed Susan's swollen nipple. "Oops – sorry," he said casually when she pulled back from him in surprise. A pleasant tingle lingered on her skin where he had touched her.

With that, Rita turned to Marco and pumped his rod with her hand several times, causing the man to stir and moan. Without another word to Susan or Tony, she crept forward and plunged her mouth down over the object of her desire, taking nearly the full length into her mouth. Susan noted the muscle movement in her throat as she sucked and licked. The movement of Rita's shapely ass captured Tony's attention, practically daring him to put a hand on it and squeeze.

"What do you want to do?" he asked in a low voice.

Gallantly but carefully, Tony raised himself up to his feet and offered Susan his hand. Holding on to each other for support, they managed to stagger toward the back of the condo. They paused a moment at Karen's open doorway and peeked in. Steve was on his back, knees bent at the edge of the mattress. Karen was mounted on top, riding up and down on his pole like a bull rider in the rodeo. Her upper body kept falling down and raising back up, as if she were too dizzy to remain upright. She threw her head back and forth, grunting every breath. Steve's face was taut as he held on, working hard to stay inside her. As they watched Karen's grunts turned to shouts of increasing pitch. "Uhhh ... Uhhh ... That's it ... Come on ... YES! ... YES!! ... YESSSSSSSSSSSSsssssssssss ..." Karen was clearly having the orgasm of her life, and Steve looked to be doing likewise.

“Just as soon as the bed stops moving,” he answered. Then, with a resigned “Oh, hell with it!” he dropped to his knees and pulled off Susan’s panties.

At that point Tony found himself in a most privileged position, his head between Susan's knees. An idea struck him and he scooted forward slowly, lifting Susan's heavy legs and placing them over his shoulders. Starting at about mid thigh, he turned his head just a little and planted a tiny kiss on Susan's inner thigh. Turning the other way, he did the same on the opposite side. He continued to kiss his way up between her legs, alternating left and right as he approached the Great Divide. He could feel Susan's body rise and fall as her breathing became deeper and faster. When he was close enough, Tony buried his nose in the curly hairs of her mound and inhaled deeply, savoring the smell of an extremely aroused woman. He exhaled gently and slowly, letting his warm breath flow smoothly over her lips. Susan lost herself in the sensation, giving off a sustained moan and squeezing her thighs together slightly around his head. The moaning turned louder and longer as Tony slid his tongue up and down the outer lips, then along the edges of the inner lips. Susan's hips started to flex automatically as Tony continued to breathe gently on her private parts and tease them with the tip of his tongue. "Oh, that feels so good," he heard her murmuring. "So good. So nice."

Feeling inspired, Tony reached out a little further with his tongue and just brushed it against her clitoris. Susan sucked in a fast breath and her moans took on a deeper and more sustained quality. "Ohhh ... Ohhh ... Ohhh ..." Tony continued to work the clitoris, driving Susan closer and closer to the breaking point. Soon she was yelling out nearly as loudly as Karen had. With one final squeal, Susan gave in completely to a massive orgasm that rocked her entire body. Her legs squeezed down on Tony's head like a nutcracker and her hips kept thrusting up and down with each gasping breath. Tony just hung on and rode with her until she went still.

Susan lay motionless for long enough that Tony assumed she had passed out. He started to pull his head away, but to his surprise felt Susan's hands grab him by the hair and start to pull him up toward her breasts. "I want you in me," she said with urgency. "I can come again if you put your dick in me. I wanna make you come too." Slipping his briefs off, Tony allowed Susan's hands to pull him upward as far as the breasts, where he stopped long enough to kiss, lick, and caress them. Susan started moaning again and pulled him up to her face. Reaching down between them, she grabbed onto his rock hard cock and guided it into her canal.

Tony felt the smooth, easy motion of his cock sliding into Susan and his heart skipped a beat. Their mouths met in a deep, sustained, erotic kiss as he began working himself in and out, clenching his groin muscles to put extra pressure on the upper side of Susan's vagina, where he knew the G spot should be. He found it quickly, and Susan responded by squealing in mid kiss. He wanted to hit it again and again but with a touch of dismay he realized he was not going to last any longer. On his next stroke he rammed his cock inward as far as he could, brushing the magic button again, and felt the spasms all through his groin as he erupted. As soon as he regained muscle control he picked up the pace, working quickly to keep pressure on the G spot while he still had most of his erection.

It worked. Just a few more strokes later, Susan shrieked again and threw her arms up over head, arching her back and bucking with the power of her second orgasm. Tony rolled off onto his right side and pulled Susan to him, holding her tight while they savored the lingering sensations and then went still. "Do you mind if I just sleep here?" he asked, but Susan's eyes were closed and her breathing had slowed and she showed no sign of having heard him. "I'll take that as a yes," he said, and released himself into the arms of Morpheus.

Susan and Tony woke up in each other's arms the next morning. Squinting at first against the bright sunlight in their eyes, they looked at each other and the memories of the previous night came flooding back. It was an awkward moment for both of them; they jerked apart quickly, groping on the floor for their discarded underwear. Susan gave up on hers and grabbed a satin robe from beside the bed. Then, as she started to put it on, their eyes met and they both felt an

uncontrollable giddiness rising up inside until they were laughing together. Eventually the laughter subsided into contented sighs.

"Thank you, Tony," Susan said with a sincerity that surprised her.

"Thank you, Susan." He approached her again and she hugged him tightly as he planted a kiss on her forehead.

Just then Karen poked her head into the open doorway, interrupting them. "Hey guys, get a load of this!"

They followed her to the living room, where Marco and Rita were just beginning to wake up. "Holy Jesus," Marco exclaimed. "What a night." Like the others before them, the couple's first thought was to locate some clothing.

Karen was fidgeting anxiously. "Well? ... Doesn't anybody notice anything strange?"

Tony answered for the group. "After all we drank last night, it's strange that we didn't sleep till Sunday."

"Poor baby. Do we have a nasty hangover?"

Tony started to comment, but then stopped. A curious look came over him. "As a matter of fact, I don't. Not even the slightest suggestion of one. And I remember the entire evening clearly, right up to the time we went to sleep."

"Me too," Rita added. "I was so loaded my head should be exploding, but I feel great." A quick poll revealed that they all had the same strange lack of expected symptoms.

Steve turned to Karen, who was beaming at everyone, and asked the question foremost in every mind. "Karen, what did you do to us last night?"

Karen answered, "Look for yourself" and pointed to the coffee table. The floor around it was littered in empty plastic bottles. Tony picked one up and looked at the dark blue label. "Water," he announced. "Bottled water."

Steve yanked open the refrigerator door and looked inside to confirm Tony's finding. "Sure enough, there's about twenty more bottles of it in the fridge."

Marco was still confused. "You mean we got drunk on water?"

"Yes," Karen confirmed. "And we all thought it was the best beer we ever tasted."

The whole group broke into fits of laughter, marveling at the whole experience. Steve pulled Karen close and kissed her. "You are one hell of an actress," he said, applauding. "I thought you were just as wasted as the rest of us, maybe more."

"Oh, but I was."

"How can that be?"

"Simple." Tiptoeing through the discarded bottles, Karen made her way to the stereo and extracted her tape. "I just recorded all the suggestions we would need on this tape. After you guys were all way under, I put the tape in and played it back. I use hypnosis on myself sometimes, and I have a trigger phrase that always sends me off into a nice, deep trance, so I put that phrase at the beginning of the tape. For once, I got to share in the fun."

Rita flipped out. "You had to know it wasn't real beer," she objected. "You planned it, didn't you?"

"I had no idea, really. On the tape, I told myself not to remember anything about the setup until this morning. Last night I was just as convinced as you that we were playing Quarters with real beer I'd bought at the warehouse store."

Susan felt herself turning red as she remembered how the evening had ended. "Um, Karen? Did you tell us to ... I mean ... "

Tony came to her rescue. "I think she's asking you, Karen, if the suggestions on your tape included the post-game activities."

Karen looked shocked. "Good lord, no!" she declared. "All that was on the tape was that we would play Quarters and that the bottled water was actually a very good beer, and that we wouldn't have hangovers in the morning. Everything else we did was on us."

"We do get pretty raunchy when we're drinking," Steve added. "We didn't do anything last night that we haven't done before, except maybe for Susan."

"I was never big on public nudity," Susan acknowledged. "But I'm willing to learn."

When the group's laughter subsided they all looked back to Karen; all they could do was shake their heads in admiration. "Of all the stunts you've pulled," Marco declared, "this one has got to be the best." The group raised imaginary glasses in a toast to Karen's ingenuity.

The whole group pitched in to help clean up while Karen and Steve fixed everyone breakfast. Marco and Rita were the first to leave, hugging and waving their goodbyes as they backed out the door.

"I need to go too," Tony announced. Turning to Susan, he asked, "Can I take you out for a real date tonight?"

"I'd like that," she replied and favored him with a long goodbye kiss.

Shortly after that Steve announced that he needed to put in some Saturday office time, exchanged a quick peck with Karen, and let himself out. Dropping lazily into an overstuffed easy chair, Susan's eyes met Karen's and she sighed happily.

"I think I'm going to like it here."

-wg
7/99