

20. THE GAME

He sizes up the guy that is with her. He's a pushover. And she has a wandering eye. It's going to be a challenge.

She's lost in a pool game with a local. The local doesn't stand a chance.

"I just don't want to deal with that kind of shit now."

"That guy over there is looking at us."

"Can't you see that I need to concentrate on this shot?"

I watch her set it up. I am not really a pool player. But I am fascinated by her strategy.

The stranger approaches the couple. After a while, he raises the inevitable question, "Do you like to get high?"

"Do you have some with you? We could go in the bathroom."

"I didn't really bring it with me. But I have it back at my place."

He looks back at his companion. He doesn't know if he wants to risk it by going back to this stranger's place.

"What do you want to do, honey?"

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

"Do you want to get high?"

"Couldn't you just buy some from him, and be done with it?"

"He doesn't have any with him. No one does. And all the bars are going to close soon. We'll be screwed if we have to go work it on the street."

"I don't really trust him."

"He did look at you a little strange."

"I could tell that he was trying to look up my dress. He wanted to catch a glimpse of my ass."

"Maybe if you show if a little something, he'll get us high for nothing."

"Try showing him your ass. I told you that he gives me the creeps."

"He's all that we've got at this time of night."

"Are you all talking about me?"

"We're mulling over that offer of yours."

"I just took it for granted that you were coming over."

"She's is a little tired."

"You can crash at my place. Or I'll call you a cab."

"How close are you?"

"We can walk from here."

"I don't know if she wants to walk."

"Are you going to take a cab back to your place?"

"We might."

She sinks another ball. She is deep in concentration.

"You remember that one girl that came back with us. She was a real winner. She wanted us to fuck while she watched."

"I don't think that he's the watching type."

"His eyes glow in the dark. I think he's a lizard."

“Or an alien!”

“Same thing. Whatever we do, I don’t want him touching me.”

“You think I want that.”

“You know how you get when you’re high. You’ll just sit there and let him run his hands all over me.”

“I told you that I hate getting into fights.”

“Then we should avoid his type all together.”

“I want to get high.”

“I’ve got some booze at home.”

“It’s not going to cut it tonight.”

“It’s going to have to do.”

The place is air-conditioned, but he feels the heat.

“I need another drink before last call.”

“I need my wits about me. I’ll pass.”

“What about when you get high.”

“I’m not as docile as you are. I can take this guy.”

“You’re a girl.”

“I can do what I have to.

The stranger brings back an extra drink.

“I’ve got one for you. She doesn’t want one.”

“She’s had enough. I can see her falling over if she takes another.”

“She plays a mean game.”

“You can be sure of that.”

I wonder if I am motivating what happens, or are the events already way beyond my influence.

“If we’re going back to his place, we better decide quickly.”

“I think that we need to size him up more.”

“We have been doing that since we met him.”

“But once we leave with him, we may be in a precarious situation. He could have friends ready to jump us. He could have a gun.”

“I can see right now that he has no weapon.”

“He could have one back at his house. He could surprise us when we’re the most vulnerable.”

“Honey, you want to get high just as much as I do.”

“I’m not so desperate that I’m coming out of my pants.”

“I’m not that obvious.”

“I don’t know what would make you more obvious.”

“I’m not sweating, am I?”

“We all are. It’s the weather.”

“So what is my tell?”

“Maybe I know you too well.”

I can’t let them get away. The stranger knows how to probe their history. He recognizes their weaknesses. He senses what they really need.

“It’s almost closing time. Are you coming along?” He realizes not to pressure them. He lets his offer do the work.

“I think that we’re going to get a cab out of here,” she tells him. He sees that they are slipping away.

“Honey, let’s just go for a little while.”

She feels that her good judgement is being overruled. It’s not a good sign of what is to come.

“If this turns out badly, I’m not going to say I told you so. I may not have the chance.”

“Quit being a buzz kill.”

He wants to play one more game of pool. That will be just enough time for him to really size things up. See if the coast really is clear.

The stranger sees things his own way: “I never lose at pool.”

“That’s great. But there is always a first time.”

The man breaks the balls. He sinks a couple of easy shots before he gives way to the stranger. For the stranger, there seems to be more on the line. He sets up a difficult shot and makes it. He needs to move the woman out of the way to make his second shot. Then things get a little tricky for his third shot. Once he makes this one, he seems like he is in command. But he stalls as he can’t get that next ball to go.

After a little give and take, things seem pretty even. The stranger is not digging where things are going. He looks at the woman. He is trying to use her as a good luck charm. She is flirting a little with him. But she still feels pretty comfortable with her man only a few feet away.

The stranger is eyeing a particularly difficult shot. He knows that this could be the game. If he sinks it, it will take the wind out of the sails of his opponent. He spends an inordinate amount of time setting it up. He sips from his drink. He touches the woman.

She looks up, “That was a little close.”

He puts a lot of his body in the shot. The cue ball bounds off the one side and rebounds perfectly. There is a bit of a flaw in the table. Just enough to set the cue ball off by a fraction of an inch. The targeted ball moves towards the hole with authority. But the error is just enough to slow its path. Almost going in, it bounces harmlessly away.

The stranger does not want to show his devastation. Luckily, the man is unable to reply with a success of his own. The stranger recovers to hit in two balls of his own. It seems close to the end. But he doesn’t set up his third shot well enough.

The man has the opportunity to turn the game. The pressure is on him. But he realizes that the stranger’s momentum has slowed. So he uses this to his advantage. He is methodical. He finds success in slowing down the game. He has only one ball to sink. They are now even.

Both men feel that the stakes are higher. The stranger eyes the woman. He feels that she is the prize. She detects his oppressive stare. But she knows that she can use it to her advantage.

“You really think that I’m that easy.”

“I don’t know what to think.”

Maybe she is distracting him from the game. That could be part of the couple’s strategy. And it is working. He has to make the next shot if he is going to show that he stronger. His style is completely the opposite of his opponent. Again he sets up the consummate shot. The game rides on his skill.

Before he shoots, he gazes at her legs. He follows them up to the edge of her skirt. She against catches him.

“I should slap you right here.”

The husband restrains her, “Let him shoot!”

The move is perfect. The stranger misses the shot. The man hits the next two for a clear victory.

“Good game,” the stranger gives him his hand.

The real contest is far from over.

“We better go to my place while we have the chance.”

“One more round. You buy since I won the game.”

“I guess that’s only fair since you bought the last round. I just don’t want you cleaning me out.”

“We’ll have beer all around. Are we going to catch a cab?”

“We can walk. At least, I hope so.”

The woman feels on the verge of throwing up.

“I’ll be back.”

She splashes some water on her face, then she returns.

“I’m OK. Give me my beer.”

“Are you sure?”

“I don’t think that I ate enough.”

“We could stop for a snack.”

The stranger interrupts, “I’ve got some snacks back at my place. Let’s hurry.”

“Drink up. We have time!”

The man is trying to use the same strategy that won the pool game. The stranger doesn’t want to get beaten twice.

“Are we ready to go?” the stranger asks.

“I just want to finish this cigarette.”

She reminds him, “You shouldn’t be smoking in here.”

“Tell the management,” he says wryly.

“We’re never going to leave this place,” she reminds them all.

He is letting this cigarette measure every second of his life. He has slowed time down to a stand still. He imagines the time before he met her. Was he truly happy then? Has she truly improved his lot? She has made him a little more desperate. He is always worried if she is off with someone else. His jealousy only seems to encourage him in his little escapades. He tries to excuse his inconsistency.

“I never done anything.”

He thought that he as spoken under his breath.

She wonders, “Did you say something?”

He just looks guilty. He takes the last puff of the cigarette. There is an ominous quality to that last breath.

“My place is just a little ways from here.”

They let the stranger lead the way.

They walk the tree-lined Chicago streets. It is a damp warm night. There is almost the

feeling that occurs after a summer rain.

After a few blocks, it seems that his place much further than they thought. No one says a thing. They keep walking. The stranger is still ahead of them.

The man believes that the stranger still poses no threat. He is walking in front of them. He's the one who has something to worry about.

The man puts his hands around his lover.

"I wish that I knew that he lived this far away. I might have told him no."

They wonder why they didn't take a cab. They'll have to get one to take them home

"This little walk is taking forever. Are you sure that you're not lost? We did have a lot to drink in there."

"This is my neighborhood. I'm not going to get lost in my own neighborhood."

He finds them a little impatient. After all, he is treating them. And they are acting like spoiled children.

"It's that place up ahead."

The couple feel vindicated for all their effort.

"It up a few flights of stairs."

Everyone is on the verge of collapse when they get in the apartment. The man and woman collapse on the couch.

"Do you want some drinks?"

"Let's just rest a few minutes."

There is a fan that cools the place. There is still the humidity of the night.

"Do you want me to turn on the TV.

Both the visitors shake their heads.

He sits down on the white chair. The visitors notice the bare walls. The place barely seems lived in.

"You didn't tell us what you do?"

He is thinking that he probably sells drugs for a living. Maybe he shouldn't have asked.

"I work with my brother. We do construction. I also work on computers. A little bit of everything. I get by."

"You don't have a car."

"I do. I've got a truck. But I mostly use it for work. I keep it at my brother's. I either walk or ride my bike. In the winter, I'll take the train. I've got relatives in the suburbs."

"Nice place."

"I pay seven hundred a month."

"That's a deal. We're paying a thousand."

"Where do you live. Lincoln Park?"

"No. But close."

Is the stranger still trying to psych them out?

"I guess that we'll have that drink."

She hasn't said much in a while. "I'll pass."

"Just get me a beer."

She wants to get high. She feels that it might settle her down. She just doesn't want to fall asleep on the couch.

“Are you still going to get us high?”

“Be patient, honey. He’s getting us beers.”

“I’m not drinking any more.”

The man doesn’t press his host. He takes his time with the beer. If the stranger wants to get them high, then that is cool.

No one says anything for a few minutes.

She breaks the silence, “Do you have some music? I love music. I want to dance.”

She jumps up and starts to move around the room as if she hears music. She circle the stranger seductively. He reaches out for her, but she has already moved away.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

By mistake, he first turns the music on too loud. Then he pulls the volume to a barely audible level.

“The neighbors.”

She stays standing up and now has a beat on which to groove. She is like a young child. Full of energy. Then she just peters out. She collapses where the host has been sitting. He takes her place on the couch.

She stares at him. Then she laughs.

The stranger becomes a little daring, “I bet that I can make your lover come without even touching her.”

“That’s more than he’s been able to do in the last few weeks.”

He sneers at her

“What do I get if I win?”

“You get to leave here in the knowledge that you have a faithful lover.”

“Small consolation. That is what I had before I came in here.”

“You assume that!”

She sneers back at him.

He looks at his lover while he seals the deal, “So you get to sleep with her if you win.”

“And if you win, you can smoke my dope for free.”

“That makes you an inhospitable host.”

The challenge seems just enough to make her cooperate with the stranger. But what will her lover really gain in the contest.

The answer is forthcoming, “I’ll give you my stash for the road.”

She fears that she is being sold for a bag of weed. What is the idea?

The stranger seems to delight in his own charm. That alone seems to pique her interest. It is a certain beginning.

The man doesn’t like the leering glances of the stranger. And he doesn’t feel right making the bet. But he feel that there is no way that the stranger can be successful. He believes that his host was over-confident at pool. That he took too much of risk in bringing them back here. And now he believes that he can have that last victory over his opponent. He will leave her a satisfied man.

He feels that his lover is making a spectacle of herself. She is throwing herself at the stranger. This is also the visitor’s chance to get back at his lover.

She resents the fact that her lover has sold her so cheap. He looks at both of them sitting

comfortably on the couch. She is a little anxious. She hasn't got her dope. And now she is being sold for cheap.

She despises the stranger. His rudeness. And her lover is adopting his ways. If the stranger is going to play a game, she will do all in her power to help him succeed. She wants her revenge.

The stranger is on the spot. He already made them walk this far. And now he is promising the world. What trick does he have up his sleeve.

"I don't want you showing me porn films. That isn't going to do the trick. And I'm not going to perform with my lover for you."

The host sips from his beer.

"I'm a man of the world. I have my ways."

"You have to keep your clothes on. And remember no touching."

"I'm not even going to leave my spot on the couch."

The man intercedes, "How are you going to do this?"

"Give him a chance," she asserts.

She is in tight jeans. She sits back in the chair.

She undoes her zipper. She starts to move her hand towards her panties.

"Honey, that is cheating. You're not supposed to help him."

"I'm not. I'm just getting comfortable."

The man is getting a little worried. They still don't know the stranger. Despite the rules of the bet, he may get aggressive if he doesn't get what he wants. She is only making it too easy for him to mess with them.

She has already got in the mood. Although a little dope would have helped. She has done this before. Complete control. She can feel that energy perk up in her. She doesn't even have to touch herself. She listens to the stranger's voice. He lulls her. She has never felt anything this intense. The sheer force of the moment overcomes her.

She is completely free. She concentrates on her own pleasure. She even sighs as she is led through her passion. The progression is so gradual that nothing seems fake. She is completely hypnotized by the moment.

The man wants to interrupt. He is completely embarrassed. I couldn't have been worse if the stranger had actually assaulted him. Now he is not sure what he wants to do. He has bet all his winnings on this moment. He is not even sure if she will ever be his again. He feels a sinking feeling inside. He wants to kill the stranger in his own place.

After she appears to climax, there is silence throughout the room.

"I don't believe her."

"I wasn't faking it."

He slides his hand beneath her panties. He then licks his fingers.

"You cheated. You helped him out."

"He never touched me."

She gets up and goes to the washroom.

The man grimaces at his host. He really wants to hurt him. He feels useless.

"What is supposed to happen now?" the man asks himself.

The stranger smiles, "Let me get the dope."

“I thought that you won.”

“Let’s get high.”

The man wonders if the stranger is going to claim his prize. She comes out of the washroom.

“I’m going to just go. I’ll catch a cab to a friend’s place.”

She smells the dope.

“You’re not going to stay.”

“I’m a little wiped out.”

The stranger smiles at her. He passes her the dope. She takes a drag and then collapses on the couch in the middle of the two men.

He will never be able to look her in the eyes again. He may not have that chance. He wonders if the stranger deliberately lost at pool to make him over-confident. And the walk back seemed suspiciously long. Long enough to cloud his judgement, to make him too tired. He has drank too much. He is baked. He falls back on the couch. This is his life. Oh well!

Her resolve now seems firm. But she feels so comfortable on the couch. She has no idea what will happen next.

The stranger moves to the chair. He observes his guests. They are coming apart. Now they lie helplessly before him. He seems used to this kind of thing.

He wants to kiss the woman. She has already surrendered herself to him. But he feels that it was all just a game to get back at her lover. He doubts that she will do anything more for him. She has already made her point.

She despises both men. They have made a spectacle out of her. She always felt a little used by her lover. She just seemed like the perfect piece to add to their upscale apartment. Now she felt even more out of place.

She is not sure how to make a graceful exit. In fact, she feels as if she is going to pass out. She feels defenseless as it is. She no longer trusts herself with her lover. She finds the host despicable.

Maybe it is in her interest to let the stranger fuck her. He has taken the first step in the game. This would be the final blow against her lover. They could just do it on the couch.

She gazes into the stranger’s eyes. He is not up to the joke. He is not sure what is her motive. She just wants to hurt someone. She isn’t sure whom.

“Honey, let’s go.”

“I’m not going come back with you. I’m going to get a truck and get my stuff while you’re at work tomorrow.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Why would you even want me to come back with you. I hate you even more because you’re a worm.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“Bull shit! You hung me out like a piece of meat.”

“We’re drunk. It was all in jest.”

“And I’m leaving you in jest. Ha, ha. I should just hit you or something.”

“I can make some coffee,” the stranger interjects. “That should wake you up for the road.”

“I can’t drink coffee at night.”

“Coffee sounds good.”

She stands up and paces for few minutes. Then she falls to the floor. She leans against the couch.

“Do you have some more smoke?”

“The rest isn’t free.”

“I put on a show for you. Give me a break!”

“It’s in my bedroom. Want to come with me and get it.”

mine. He can go give you a blow job.”

The man stands up on cue, “I should leave.”

“What about your coffee?”

“Yeah, honey. What about your coffee?”

She pulls him down by his leg.

“I’ve got to work tomorrow.”

“You’re pretty wasted.”

“I already told you that you could crash here.”

The man goes to the bedroom and comes back with a blanket.

“What about me?”

“You can sleep in my bed.”

“I’m not going to sleep with you.”

“I can fall asleep on the chair. I do it all the time.”

The visitor decides to pass on the coffee. He doesn’t even need the blanket. He just passes out.

“I’m going to go lie down.” She heads to the bedroom. She collapses the moment that she hits the bed.

The host is still restless. He cleans up the living room. He falls back into the chair. It’s not that bad sleeping here. He has had some entertainment.

It is getting light around 5:30. He has only been asleep for about three hours. But he had to take a piss.

When he sits up, he notices that his visitor is gone. The stranger thinks that his stash has been stolen. What else?

He peeks in to the dark bedroom. He can see an outline of the man fucking his lover. He just goes back and sleeps on the couch.

In the morning, not much is said.

“Here’s forty dollars. I’m sorry that we were such terrible guests.”

“You don’t owe me anything?”

“Take it. We embarrassed ourselves. It’s the least that we can do.”

“No one got sick. No harm. No damage.”

She smiles, “We were terrible guests.”

The couple doesn’t say much in the cab ride back.

“Let’s pretend that none of this happened.”

“I feel the same way.”

He can barely make it through his morning. The night plays back in his head. He dodged a close one. He needs to buy his lover flowers.

For her part, she goes over the little game that the stranger played in his apartment. She muses if this is the sort of thing that he tries all the time. Does he ever get the women to actually sleep with him. What other choice does he have at that time of night.

That evening she makes an excuse to get away from her lover. She ends up back at the same bar. She is by herself. She finds a place in the shadows. She can watch everyone else without being seen herself.

She sees a couple get in a fight. They leave together in anger. She studies a man at the pool table. He has none of the grace of the stranger.

After a few drinks, she decides that he is not coming in tonight. She decides to walk the route that they took last night. It seems even longer than it did on the previous night. She is surprised that she even remembers the location. She was already pretty fucked up. But the images seem to have burned in her brain. She would never forget this sort of thing.

She reaches the stranger's building. His light is out. Maybe he isn't even there. She has no intention to ring him up.

She take a cab back to the apartment.

"Where have you been?"

"I was out with the girls. Didn't you have any plans of your own?"

"I was waiting for you to come back."

"Really."

"Look what I've got."

He pulls out a bag of weed."

"Where the hell did you get that?"

"I stole it from that guy last night."

"I thought that you ended up giving him forty dollars."

"It was actually about eight dollars. I folded it up in a wad and left it on the table."

"You're not going to smoke that all yourself, are you?"

"I was thinking about it. Especially when you took so long to get back."

"I never really liked that guy."

"I thought for sure that you were going to sleep with him."

"He's not my type. But he does have good dope."

"It was hilarious how you pretended to go along with that low rent seduction of his. You made him think that he was a regular Casanova."

"I liked you stuck your fingers down my pussy. It seemed a little degrading. But it was a nice touch. You even had me believing that you were mortified."

"I didn't know what to think. I really thought that you were going to leave me."

"I was."

They both break out in laughter.

She adds, "I just wanted to get high."

They are seriously baked as the night wears on.

"Let's order a pizza."

He looks at his watch. "It's a little late now."

“We can go down to La Dolce Vita.”

“When do they close?”

“They’re open all night. But I don’t know if I can move.”

“We have no choice. Unless you want me to go for you.”

“Are you really going to come back?”

Their life seems too comfortable. What’s going to happen to her if she keep this up.
Pizza at 3 in the morning. Getting fucked out of her mind all the time.

“Get me a pack of smokes. Here’s a twenty!”

She heads walks over to the restaurant. There’s a guy in there who looks like the
stranger. It’s someone else.

“How are you doing tonight, lady?”

“I’m doing well.”

He can almost smell the dope on her clothes. “You going to eat all that pizza yourself.”

“You want a slice.”

“Maybe. What else do you have?”

She turns to the clerk, “You don’t have cigarettes.”

“No, we don’t. There’s a convenience store across the street..”

“I’ll be right back.”

“You have a few minutes.”

The pizza does smell great.

She crosses the street. The light is even more intense in the 7 Eleven. She glances at a
gossip magazine. What time is it anyway?