INTRODUCTION

The "goddess of poker," that's what they called me after I won my first poker game and haven't lost since. I just recently started playing poker a game also known as the game of deceit. It is one of the few exciting things college students do to relax and spend their money. I am among the few girls who are actually good at the game. I started playing the game the fall semester of my sophomore year. If poker can be classified as a drug, then I am the drug addict. The game is so addicting; once you start playing you can't stop. It might have been easier for me to stop playing if I lost a game, but so far I've won every single one of them, and I know deep down in my heart that I can't quit.

GAME NIGHT

As Chance Goldlinger, the coordinator of our poker nights, collected five dollars from everyone at the table, he explained the rules of the group to the newbies that showed up for the game and began his ceremonious speech by saying, "Now everyone, gambling is illegal in the state of Virginia; therefore, you are not gambling, you are merely buying an experience with your money."

"Everyone who wants to play poker must pay five dollars, which will buy you twenty dollars worth of chips. White chips are worth twenty-five cents. Red chips are worth fifty cents. Green chips are worth a dollar and black chips are two dollars. In the first two hours of the game, the blind is fifty cents and around eleven thirty, or so, we usually raise blinds to a dollar. On week days, we usually play from nine at night to one in the morning and our buy in time is before ten thirty. If you happen to be eliminated from the game before ten thirty, then you can pay another five dollars to get back into the game. Our poker games on weekdays are usually on Wednesdays, and people usually go a little crazy with their betting." As Chance explained everything in way too much detail to the two new guys, who probably just wanted to play a simple poker game, the rest of us old-timers chatted amongst ourselves.

Chance's talking was cutting into our playing time, which was very precious on weekdays since most of our goals were to win the game before one in the morning and go to sleep. "The winner of the game will receive however much people put in the pot to play. This means that if there are ten people playing, the winner can walk away with fifty bucks in his/her pocket. Tonight's winnings will be forty dollars because we only have eight people playing."

Ryan Smith, a senior art major, who couldn't put on a "poker face" if his life depended on it, finally spoke up, "Hey Chance, I think they got the gist of it."

"Okay, Okay...may the game begin," said Chance with his arms opened wide.

Joe and Ryan passed out chips as Chance took his seat to my left. "So...I don't think you are going to win tonight Zandria," Chance said quietly into my left ear. I turned my head to face him and saw him smile at his own comment. Besides his good looks, Chance has nothing going for him in the girl department. He's cocky, self-absorbed, and way too dramatic at times to even be considered "cool." Ever since I put him out of the game with a royal flush during my very first poker game, he's been out to make me lose, and, so far, he has not succeeded.

After about five minutes, the game finally started. After passing out the chips, Joe took the seat to my right and said that he would start as the dealer, which made Chance the big blind and me the small blind. I was happy when Joe dealt because he would always deal me a pretty decent hand.

Since I was the small blind, I definitely wanted a good hand that would allow me to play the round. As expected, Joe dealt me an ace of clubs and a three of spades. A pocket ace is always good to have, but not with a three. I was disappointed, but I still put in twenty-five more cents to play because I wanted to take chance with the ace.

"Okay Joe, flip the cards," Chance said impatiently with a smirk on his face, which told me that he had two really good cards. Joe burned one card and flipped the next three. I was so disappointed that the three cards he flipped were jack of diamonds, seven of diamonds, and six of clubs. There were no aces or threes or a chance for me to have a flush. I looked over at Chance and saw that his smirk was gone and had been replaced by a tiny hint of disappointment. I looked around the table and saw that everyone except Matt, one of the two new people to the game, was also disappointed to see the three cards on the table. I took another look at the cards and then glanced in Matt's direction wondering if he had a jack, a seven, or a six. It was then that I noticed that his face was expressionless. He didn't look disappointed or happy. He looked relaxed. This is the reason why I don't like it when new people join our games. They often change the dynamics of the game, which makes it that much harder to win.

Poker is a game that requires strategic planning and observation. To be good at the game of deceit, one must follow three important steps. First, be observant of everyone's bidding technique. The way someone bids can tell you a lot about how they are thinking and what kind of cards they have. Second, put on a natural poker face to prevent people from reading your expression. Third, never bet too much at the beginning until you've gain a good understanding on other people's strategy. For this game, I knew I had to invoke the three steps of poker to win.

"Check," I said to Joe.

"Chance, it's to you," Joe said in frustration because Chance was taking a really long sip from his coke bottle, which I am sure was filled with more than just coke. Chance knocked on the table to check.

Ryan, who was sitting to the left of Chance, also checked. Robert, who was playing with his red chips and looking like he's trying to decide how much to bet, said, "you just couldn't put out the right cards, could you?"

"Sorry man," Joe said with a shrug.

"Well, I guess I will check," Robert said.

Then it was to Landon, the other new person in the game. Before he checked, he looked at his cards and then the cards on the table. His internal struggle over whether to not to bet was written all over his face. Matt, who was sitting to the left of Landon, did not bet either. Cristy, who is currently dating Joe and only played because he did, decided to check as well.

"What is this? No one is betting?" Joe said pretending that he was disappointed. He moved his hands over his red chips, picked two up, and tossed them into the middle of the table.

"Come one Joe," Chance said, irritated that Joe didn't check like everyone else.

"I fold," I said, handing Joe my cards. Joe was either bluffing or he had something, and I didn't want to take a chance with that.

"I call," Chance said, pushing two of his red chips toward the center of the table.

- "You know what I'm going to play slow tonight," Ryan said and threw his cards at the discard pile.
- "I fold too," Robert said.
- "It's to you Landon," Joe said.
- "Hm...I can't decide if I should go for it or not," Landon said, staring at his cards.
- "Well...don't take forever," Chance commented.
- "Don't be rude," I said, giving Chance a punch to the arm. What I really wanted to punch was Chance's face. He's a jerk when he's sober, but he's a bigger jerk when he's tipsy.
- "I'll call," Landon said.
- "Well...I guess I'll call too," Matt said.
- "Joe, you better win this round," Cristy warned Joe playfully and folded her cards.

Joe burned one card and flips the next one, which was a seven of clubs.

- "Well, there is a chance for a full house or trips," Ryan said, looking at the cards on the table.
- "Sure, I have the full house," Chance said jokingly and knocks on the table. A series of checks went around the table before Joe flipped the next card, which was a three of clubs.
- "Now, there is a possibility for a flush," Ryan chimed in.
- "Two dollars," Chance said, throwing two green chips into the middle of the table.
- "I fold," Landon said.
- "I call," Matt said with a smile on his face, which made me wonder what he had in his hands that could beat the cards that were in Chance's hands. Matt was either bluffing or he had something really good. I am usually pretty good at knowing what everyone has in their hands by reading their facial expressions, but I couldn't determine what kind of cards Matt had by reading his expressions. The look on his face was hard to interpret because he seemed way too relaxed and carefree for me to tell what was actually going on in his brain. I did not realize that I was staring at him until he looked straight at me with a questioning stare. I looked away immediately and tried to hide my embarrassment by taking a drink from my water bottle.

His eyes were soft and they seemed to be able to look right through mine into the deepest part of my soul. I'd never had this feeling before and it scared me.

- "Hm...what do both of you have?" Joe asked out loud, staring at the cards on the table, "I fold."
- "Okay, let's see your cards, Chance," Robert said.
- "Flush," Chance said, revealing his two cards, which were a king and a queen of clubs.
- "I have a full house," Matt said, holding out a seven of hearts and six of spades.
- "Matt wins the pot," Robert said, holding his hand up for Matt to high five.

- "Very well played Matt," Ryan commented.
- "Thanks," Matt said, gathering all the chips he had just won.
- "Hey, who's winning so far?" We all turned to see who had asked the question and found Taylor walking toward us smiling.
- "Why is he here?" I whispered in Joe's ear.
- "I don't know who invited him," he said.
- "Hey, Taylor," Chance said, standing up to greet Taylor with a gangster handshake that I had no idea that they shared. "Is it cool if Taylor joins us tonight?" Chance addressed to the group.
- "Sure, if he has money," Robert said, rubbing his hands together.
- "Uhhh...that asshole, he invited Taylor on purpose," I said through gritted teeth at a volume level that only Joe could hear. Taylor is my ex-boyfriend, who I dated for the majority of my freshmen year before he cheated on me with a girl who lived across the hall from me. I came back from my ballroom dancing class one night and caught them kissing in the corner of the stairwell. They were so occupied by each other that they didn't even notice that I stood there and stared at them for at least five minutes wondering when they were going to notice me. Of course, they didn't notice me, so I went up to my room and broke up with Taylor through a text message. When he confronted me on breaking up with him over text messaging and called me shallow, I cursed at him and told him that I saw him kissing another girl. Then he tried to lie his way out of it by telling me that it wasn't him and he would never cheat on me because he cared so much about me. Long story short, I left a hand print across one side of his cheek and left.
- "Just don't let him get to you," Joe whispered into my ear as he went to pick up one of the cards that he dropped on the floor.
- "Here I got you a seat man," Chance said to Taylor as he pulled up a chair and set it to my left.
- "Thanks man," he said as he took his seat next to me. In the process of sitting down, he purposefully brushed his shoulder against mine, and I scooted my seat toward Joe to avoid future contact during the game.

I dealt the next round and was annoyed to find that I had dealt Taylor pocket aces, which enabled him to win the round against Joe. For the next few rounds I began to gain some grounds as I fell into the routine of the game. I was able to maintain enough chips to keep me in the game until eleven, although most people usually got bumped out of the game by then. Tonight was not a good poker night for me. During most nights I would have already secured my winnings by now, but tonight I was struggling to stay in. I made some bad calls because I wanted to kick Taylor out of the game, but up to now I'd only been contributing to his chip stack.

At 11:30p.m., the only ones still left in the game were Joe, Matt, Taylor, and me. Joe has the lowest stack of chips, while Matt was the chip leader.

"Alright, I am going all in with my small number of chips," Joe said pushing the remaining five dollars of his chips into the center of the table. Joe and Taylor were the only two left in this round, and I hoped with all of my heart that Joe would win. The cards on the table included a five of spades, ace of clubs, seven of spades, seven of clubs, and a queen of hearts. There is a chance

for a full house and that would be the highest combination one could have to win, but they would need a seven and one of the other cards in hand.

"Let's see your cards," Matt said with a cold look in his eyes. I just now noticed how dark and strangely familiar they were. When I looked into them I feel like I was looking into a black hole.

"I have trip aces," Joe said showing everyone his cards, and I could hear the excitement in his voice. In order for Matt to beat Joe he had to get a full house or four of a kind, which is almost impossible in this situation. I wished secretly that Matt was just bluffing when he called Joe's bet.

"Four of a kind," Matt said revealing a seven of diamonds and a seven of hearts. A peal of groans exploded around the table. Talk about being shocked. If Joe's jaw could have reached the floor this would be the right moment. He probably never thought pocket sevens would ever beat pocket aces until now.

"Good game man," Joe said shaking Matt's hand, giving me a sympathetic look. Now that Joe is out of the game, it is between Matt, Taylor, and me.

"I guess it is just between us three," Taylor said shuffling the cards. "Will you cut this for me?" I turned to see who he was talking to and noticed that he was staring straight at me. I debated inside my head before deciding that I am better than him, so instead of throwing the cards in his face I did what he asked. However, I was not rewarded for my politeness. Taylor dealt me an eight of hearts and a nine of spades. Then the first three cards he flipped was a king of spades, a five of hearts, and a six of hearts. I folded after I saw the cards because I knew that I wouldn't have a chance in this round. The fourth card that Taylor revealed was a king of hearts. Matt bet two dollars, and Taylor called it before flipping the last card, which turned out to be a six of spades.

"Two more dollars," Matt said.

"Well, it is getting late. I'm going to push my luck tonight and go all in. Are you going to call me buddy?" Taylor asked with a wicked smile across his face challenging Matt to take the bid that he probably shouldn't.

"Sure, I will call. I have enough chips to waste."

"And I assure that you will be sorry for your poor decision."

"How much you want to bet that I won't be?"

"A date with Zandria," Taylor said pointing at me.

"WHAT?" I said loudly thinking that they are crazy for thinking that I'm just going to sit around and let them use me as their bet.

"I like that bet," Matt chimed in totally ignoring my question.

"Are you two crazy? Come up with a different bet because I ain't going on a date with either of you," I said crossing my arms in front of my chest.

"Come on, it is just for fun," Taylor said looking at me with his best puppy dog look, which does not work on me.

"No!" I turned my head away from him.

- "Are you sure that you don't want a date with me Zandria?" Matt said while looking intensely into my eyes, and I felt chills running down my back. He hadn't talked to me all night and this was the first direct comment he's ever made toward me. I was shocked and offended at the same time.
- "What makes you think that Zandria wants to go on a date with you? If she wants to go on a date with anyone it would be me!" Taylor stated confidently. I was suddenly overcome by a strong urge to punch him in the face, but I did my best to with held my emotion this time.
- "No I don't!" I said to Taylor.
- "Zandria, this is just for fun. If you don't want to go on a date after our bet you don't have to," Matt said staring at me with his dark eyes, which still couldn't make out the color of. As I stared harder at his eyes, I began to feel convinced that it was okay for them to use me as the grand prize.
- "Fine!" I declared still unsatisfied with their choice of betting.
- "Show your cards Matt!" Taylor demanded.
- "Are you sure?"
- "Yes, I'm sure!"
- "Okay then. I have a full house," Matt said as he showed us a king of diamonds and a six of diamonds.
- "Shit!" Taylor cursed as he threw down his cards on the table unveiling a four of hearts and a seven of hearts. Matt's full house definitely beats Taylor's flush. Matt had been getting good hands all night, and I really didn't know how I was going to beat him on this next round.
- "So I guess you will be going on a date with me," Matt said smiling.
- "Woah...let's see if you beat me first," I said handing Matt a deck of cards and the buck.
- "Then you'll go on a date with me?"
- "I don't know. It depends."
- "Depends on what?"
- "Depends on if you beat me or not!"
- "So is that a yes to a date if I beat you?"
- "Uhhh...what is up with you boys and dates?" I asked annoyed at all of his questions.
- "Come on Zandria, just one date," he said holding up his index finger.
- "I will think about it after you beat me," I said before looking at the two cards that were dealt to me, an ace of hearts and a king of hearts. These were the best cards I had gotten all night. As I thought to myself that I would surely win this round, I stole a glance at Matt. He was still looking at his cards and seemed to be analyzing them, which made me wonder if he didn't get the cards

he wanted. I reminded myself that Matt had been lucky the majority of the night, so I couldn't let his expression fool me.

"Are you ready?" Matt asked holding his hands over the deck of cards.

"Yes," I said praying that the three cards he was going to flip would allow me to put my cards into good use. The first card Matt flipped was an ace of spades followed by a ten of diamonds and a nine of diamonds. If the next two cards are a jack and a queen, then I would have a straight. If not I still have a good chance of winning with a pair of aces.

"Four dollars," I said adding four green chips to the center of the table. I reminded myself that I must be confident. In order to show that confidence I needed to take the lead in betting. If I throw in chips before Matt, then it will show him that I have something better than him, even if I don't.

"I call," he said and smiled at me. For a moment, I remembered seeing that same exact smile sometime in the past, but I couldn't remember when.

"Ready for the next card," Matt said, which brought me out of my trance.

"Yes...sure," I said stumbling a little with my response. Matt turned the next card, which was a jack of diamonds. I was happy with the revelation, but at the same time I was worried. Although the jack of diamonds made it possible for me to have a straight, it also gives my opponent the same possibility to have not only just a straight but also something better. If the next card he flips is a queen of diamonds, then a straight flush would be possible.

"Eight dollars," I said with poise. Since I couldn't guess what he had and the queen may not show up, I need to at least scare him away with my confidence.

"I call," he said. "So where do you want to go on our date?"

"Somewhere away from you," I said doing my best to brush off his flirty comment. The last thing I am interested in right now is a guy. I have been single ever since I broke up with Taylor, and I want to keep it that way.

"Aw...that hurts," he said pretending to sound hurt, but I knew he was just teasing me.

"Let's see the next card Matt," I said as I grew impatient of his flirting. All I want to know was if I will be able to keep my "goddess of poker" title after tonight.

"And the river is," he said before he flipped the next card, which turned out to be exactly the card I didn't want to see, the diamond queen of deceit. I wanted a queen, but I was hoping for a queen of spades or hearts or clubs.

"Check," I said hoping that Matt would check as well, but of course he didn't.

"Let's make this the last round, shall we?" He asked as he positioned his hands around his chip stack and pushed it toward the center. "All In!"

Matt had been so confident throughout this entire game. There is no doubt that he won some of the rounds by bluffing since he has the perfect poker face to do it. I could never tell if he's bluffing or if he actually had something. His expression was always so relaxed, which made it hard to read him. Could he be bluffing this time, I wondered. I looked at my cards and then at

him. Poker is not just a game of deceit; it is also a game of risk. In order to be good at the game I must be willing to take the risks. In that moment of realization, I decided to take the risk.

"I call," I said while staring into Matt's dark eyes. I knew I'd seen those eyes before somewhere. I couldn't tear my eyes away from his and before I knew it five minutes have passed. His eyes looked so familiar and they conjured up feelings that I thought I would never feel again. I had an urge of kissing him passionately on the lips and run my fingers through his hair.

"Are you two still playing?" The question took me by surprise and made me jump a little in the chair. I turned to see my roommate, Lily, walking in the front door toward us.

"We are about to end it," I said feeling thankful for her interruption. "Let's see your cards Matt."

"No, I want to see yours first," he said pointing his index finger at me. "By the way, my name is Matt," he said extending his hand for Lily to shake.

"Nice meeting you Matt, I'm Lily a.k.a Zandria's roommate and best friend," she said and winked at me. "I heard that you have to go on a date with him since Taylor lost the game."

"How you know?" I asked shocked at how fast social news travel around the college campus.

"I overheard Taylor talking to Chance in The Hut while I was waiting for my chicken burrito," she said.

"Well, now she won't go on a date with me unless if I beat her," Matt said pretending to look sad.

"Okay, you guys need to reveal your cards. I am excited to see who wins this game," Lily said bouncing on her toes.

Matt and I both flipped our cards at the same time. Matt had a ten and a nine of hearts, which gave him two pairs. Since my ace and king of hearts allowed me to have a straight, it meant that I was right on taking the risk with this round. I couldn't believe that I just won. In the back of my mind I was hoping that Matt would have beaten me, so I could go on a date with him. It is not because I'm interested in him. I just wanted to know why he looked so familiar. Maybe we've met somewhere in the past before, but there was no way that I would forget someone with eyes like his.

"I guess you two won't be going on a date then," Lily said playfully.

"I guess I will just have to get your friend here to go on a date with me by using my charm," Matt said flirtatiously.

"How are you going to do that?" Lily asked.

"You'll see," Matt said with a smile across his face. "I'll see you later," he said to me with a wink before leaving. My heart fluttered in that moment and I feel myself smiling.

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