

Saturday, March 3, 2068, 1:30 a.m., Tracy Island

"I'll see you, and raise you twenty," Virgil said to John as he examined his cards. A chorus of "ooooh" ran around the table. He dropped his chips into the growing pile in the center. "Brains?"

Brains studied his cards. His hand reached for some chips. "I'll see you, Virgil, and raise you another, uh, twenty." This time there were groans around the table.

"I'm out. It's too rich for me," said Alan, who sat next to Brains.

Gordon shook his head and put down his cards. "I fold." Which brought the game back to John.

He gazed across the table at Brains, giving him a speculative eye. The scientist gazed back, his mild expression never wavering. He looked down at his cards. He had four of a kind, all jacks, not a bad hand at all. He again contemplated the man across from him, and then reached for his chips.

"I'll see you." He added the required amount. Then he reached for them again. "And I'll raise you... twenty-five."

There were groans again. Virgil shook his head. "I'm out." He put down his cards. "You two had better have the hands for this."

Brains now contemplated John, who put up an eyebrow in challenge. He glanced at his cards, and then reached for his chips.

"I'll see you," Brains said, "and raise you... fifteen."

Gordon got up and pulled out a beer from the mini-fridge and offered Alan one. Virgil indicated with a motion that he wanted one, too, and then tipped his chair back onto its back legs as he watched the last two players battle it out.

"I'll call," John said quickly, adding his chips. The opponents looked at each other across the table.

"I'll call," Brains said, then lowered his cards. "Straight flush."

"Damn!" John shouted as he put down his cards. "I was sure you were bluffing."

Brains smiled and pulled the chips towards him.

"Well, this is déjà vu all over again," Alan commented. "I seem to remember another poker game when Brains won the pot."

"When was that?" John asked, curious.

"A couple of years ago," Alan said. "You were upstairs. Scott was playing."

"Oh yeah!" Gordon said, a smile lighting up his face. "And Brains took our little side bet, too."

"Side bet? Did I miss something?" John asked.

"Uh, yeah, you did," Virgil admitted. "We were betting on... uh...."

"We were betting on your father and, uh, Dianne's trip to Paris," Brains said as he shuffled the cards.

"Oh?" John exclaimed.

"Yeah, I remember it really well," Alan said as he got up to stretch. "We had started out by playing poker...."

"The game is hold 'em," Scott said as he dealt the cards to the young men at the table. "Starting bet is five, with a limit of thirty."

There was a bit of silence as the men looked at their hands and tried to decide what to do with them.

"So, Brains," Gordon said conversationally. "You ready in case of a medical emergency? With the Doc here, you've had it easy in the sick room."

"I'm ready," Brains said simply.

"What do you all think of this... relationship of Dad's?" Alan asked skeptically.

"Is it a relationship?" Virgil asked. "I mean, all they seem to do is walk on the beach."

It got quiet for a few moments and he looked up to see his brothers gazing at him with amusement. "What? Did I miss something?"

"Lots of things, it seems, Virgil," Scott said amiably.

"Such as?"

"Such as the night they went for a walk on the beach and didn't come back until morning," Gordon said, looking at his cards.

"Or the time they took the cabin cruiser, just the two of them," Alan added.

"Or the times when they've been in the sick room and the doors have been locked, but neither of

them has been, uh, sick," Brains pointed out. This last statement caused all of the brothers to look at him.

"The sick room? They've been making out in the sick room?" Alan asked. Brains nodded.

"Whoa," Gordon said softly, blinking. There was silence after that for a few minutes.

"Now he's taken her to Paris," Scott stated.

"To look at medical equipment," Virgil reminded him.

"Yeah, right." "Sure, Virge, sure." "Do you believe that?"

"Well, why else would they have gone?" he challenged.

"There are a couple of possibilities," Gordon said. "Maybe they're just getting away from us for a bit. Dad might want to show her the sights of romantic Paris. I call and raise you fifteen."

Scott disagreed. "I think there's more to it than that. I think Dad's going to ask her to marry him." He threw some chips into the kitty. "I call, and raise you five."

Alan chuckled. "Wouldn't it be funny if they went to Paris to elope?" The resulting silence made him look up from his cards. "What? Do you think they'd really do that?"

"It is a possibility," Brains admitted, tossing his chips into the pile.

"No. There's no way. Dad would never do that to us," Alan said, shaking his head vehemently. "I call, and raise you ten."

"He's not getting any younger," Virgil said. "He's been through one wedding. He might not want to mess with another one."

"I bet they come back engaged," Scott said.

The five men looked at each other and each began to smile.

"Okay, we'll start a betting pool," Gordon said. "Four possibilities. One, they went to see the medical equipment. Two, they went to spend some romantic time together."

"Three, they come back engaged," Alan added.

"And four, they come back, uh, married," Brains finished.

"Or any combination of the above?" Virgil asked.

"Yes, though the engagement and marriage are exclusive, one or the other," Scott said. He got up and pulled out a score pad. "Betting starts at fifty bucks, winner takes the kitty. We'll ask Kyrano to hold the money and the bets."

"Should we call John about this?" Alan asked.

"Nah. He's at a disadvantage. He hasn't seen a lot of the stuff we have lately," Scott said as he handed out paper and pencils. "Write down what you think is happening, and your bet."

"Okay."

Alan looked around the table and squarely at John. "So we did. And Dad and Mom had a romantic week away from us and came back engaged. They never even looked at the medical equipment. Brains took the pool."

"Wonder if they know you were betting on that," John said wryly, accepting the beer that Gordon handed over.

"Uh, I don't think so. You aren't going to tell them, are you, Johnny?" Gordon asked worriedly.

"If you remember to include me in the next betting pool you have, I'll keep quiet." John stretched and yawned. "I need to get some sleep and so do you, Alan. Got the Thunderbird Five run later today and we've got a passenger that we need to impress."

"Right," Alan got up from his seat and stretched. "Goodnight, guys. See you in the sunshine."

"Goodnight, Alan, John." "See you later." "G'night, guys."

Virgil looked at the other two men. "Pool game, anyone?"

"Sounds good to me," Brains said, getting up.

"Remind me to tell you about a pool game that Mom and I had before she and Dad started seeing each other," Gordon said as he gathered up the cards to put them away.

Post by Tikatu on 23/07/2004
