

The Gambler: Chapter 1

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“Full house. Queens full of eights.”

A small crowd that had gathered around the poker table ooded as the tension mounted. Not that Blake Bellinger minds much. He relished any opportunity to make himself the center of attention. Seated across the table from him was his opponent, Clara Carter, who was both his best friend and top rival on the poker circuit. He wasn't one to brag, but he just so happened to be the current number one poker player in the world, with Clara coming in a close second. Together, they had seen the best of the best and watched them all fall before them. Tonight's game, however, wasn't for anything more than some pocket change, something far more valuable was on the line. Pride.

Seated at the far end of the Auction House's casino deck, almost everyone who had come to bid on the new crop of baby slaves had their attention sucked in by the increasingly vicious game. The Auction House was the premier showcase of the best baby slaves money could buy. It was decorated like a 1920's speakeasy, with red curtains and elegant period-accurate furniture filling the space. At its forefront was the stage where the Auctioneer would offer up baby slaves for purchase. The Auction House was no place for those light on cash, as auctions would sometimes run up into the hundreds of thousands. Those who wound up with their pockets turned out would definitely be in for a surprise when they found out what was on the other floors in this utterly massive facility.

“Goodness, you two know we're supposed to be having fun, right?” said Martha Merryweather, not enjoying being caught in the crossfire of two professionals. A wealthy and frequent visitor of the Auction House, she spent a good amount of her time in the Auction House, always on the hunt for her next little cutie to bring home with her. Though, tonight, she'd be lucky to afford a cab ride home, “I wouldn't have invited you both if I knew this was gonna turn into a World Series rematch.”

Smirking, Blake responded, turning to his wealthy friend with absolutely no sympathy, “Martha, you've only bought in for three rounds tonight. It's not like you're losing money over there.”

“Yeah, well, I don't think you two realize just how intimidating it is to buy in when you're both staring at me like a pack of wolves!” Martha said, her voice becoming exasperated with rage.

Both Blake and Clara burst into a fit of giggles. When Martha had invited them to play, they jumped at the chance to scoop up some of their good friend's fortune. They'd played with her many times before, and no matter how many times she lost, she always came back for more.

“Screw you both, I’m sitting out the next hand,” said Martha, turning to the stroller next to her, where her darling sissy baby slave, Candy, was nukking away at her pacifier as she watched the poker gameplay out with absolutely no idea how the game even worked. After spending years as Martha’s personal baby slave/surrogate child, she’d been conditioned right here in this facility before finding her Mommy, and always felt a bit uneasy returning.

”Awww, is my baby girl upset that Mommy is losing?” cooed Martha, unaware of why Candy was actually anxious, “Don’t worry, we can go visit your friends in a little bit.” Her words did nothing to calm her baby down.

Sipping at her martini, Clara patted Martha on the back while feigning compassion. “Hey, cheer up. Maybe you can make a comeback.”

“Yeah, unlike you,” said Blake, switching his targets to his more knowledgeable opponent, “Quit stalling and show your cards, Clara.”

Sighing and running her fingers through her hair like she always did when she was frustrated, Clara laid her cards on the table. “Two pairs, ace high,” she said coldly.

Breathing through his teeth triumphantly, Blake reached across the table and slammed his forearm down on the table as he pushed all the chips over to his large collection. Turning to Clara, he tisked and shook his head mockingly. “What is that? Four in a row now? Don’t tell me you’ve gotten rusty,” he said, knowing how badly her blood had to be boiling by now.

Blake had no idea how right he was. Looking back up at his bestie, he shuddered as he caught Clara’s evil glare. She rarely allowed herself to get this visibly mad, having only seen her sinister sneer once before. After playing with Clara for so many years, he could read her like a book, so he knew if he didn’t pony up a small apology for pushing her buttons too far, there’d be hell to pay.

Before Blake could speak up, however, Clara butted in, her withering stare softening into a sly grin, “I think I’m done playing with money tonight. Deal the cards,” she said, placing the neatly stacked deck in front of Blake.

“Okay then,” said Blake, chuckling merrily to himself as he began to pass out cards one at a time, “And what, might I ask, are you playing with? Are you planning to bet your indentured servitude?” His joke riled up his posse that had gathered around.

Clara refused to let this enrage her though, as she leaned forwards and placed her forefinger on the cards in front of her. “Sounds good to me,” she said with enough venom to bring down an elephant. Despite her smiling expression, she was done messing around. This wasn’t just about winning anymore. After trailing behind Blake for two years and watching his ever-growing ego make him cockier and cockier, she wanted something far more valuable than money. She wanted revenge.

All around the table, the uproarious laughter of Blake’s entourage fell silent. An audience filled with people who were all present to watch baby slaves be dominated on display couldn’t help but have their ears perk up at such a promising proposition. Their eyes went hungry as their interest in this duel only grew.

"If I lose, I'll do anything you tell me to do for a month," Clara says, breathing fire from her nostrils.

The daggers in her eyes were enough to convince Blake that she was dead serious. Leaning forward, he rested his elbows on the table, not afraid to meet Clara toe to toe, "And if you win?"

"I get back everything I lost tonight," Clara shouted, "And...you have to be my baby slave for the rest of the night."

Blake's face dropped at Clara's shocking declaration as he froze in place mid-deal. Sure, he'd been raking her over the coals all night, but this sent shivers throughout his spine. Deep down, this was not a bet he wanted to tango with. So much was on the line for just one hand of cards. Still, he had a reputation to uphold. He'd never turned down a bet before. To concede to Clara now would be social suicide for his public image.

Whipping her head back towards the table, Martha's face lit up, excited to have a front-row seat to the show she was so vehemently annoyed by only a minute ago. "Oh, this just got interesting," she said, her words representing the crowd around them.

Clearing his throat, Blake still wasn't sure if Clara was being serious or not. He decided to be more direct with his next question. "And by baby slave, you mean-" was all he was able to say, though, before Clara cut in.

"Diapers. lots of diapers," said Clara with no hesitation, "Oh, and don't forget all the silly, sissy outfits I can squeeze you into. Don't worry, I promise I'll make you look even more adorable than Candy over here."

Martha quickly leaned back in towards the stroller. "Don't listen to the bad woman, Candy. No way anyone could ever be more adorable," she said before proceeding to tickle her Little's undefended tummy.

Watching Martha interact with her baby slave, Blake could feel himself growing nervous, something that didn't happen very often. In the back of his mind, he was hoping that any second, she would say "Sike!" and they would all get to laugh this off as the big joke that it was. However, nothing about her expression, nor her posture told him that she was anywhere close to backing down.

With a devious smile fixed on her face, Clara pushed her chips to the side and held out her hand, ready to meet Blake in the middle. He wasn't the only one to have a strong read on his opposition. She was more than aware that he could never turn down a bet, especially one so public.

Looking toward the crowd, Blake saw no signs of empathy from the onlookers. Martha was no better, giving two thumbs up and nodding her head suggestively at him.

"Well?" said Clara in a cheerfully melodious voice, "Do we have a bet or are you gonna chicken out?"

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