

[A4A] Rabbit Hole

Synopsis: A bartender has taken an interest in your gambling skills. But even outside of the gambling den, keep your cards close to your chest, or you might find yourself laid bare...

Word Count: 2,233

Author's Note: Ya like jazz?

[Casino jazz SFX]

[Heeled footsteps SFX]

Oh, good evening. Is there anything I can get for you tonight?

No alcohol tonight? I see you're taking your bets very seriously, then. Here's our mocktail menu.

[Handing menu SFX]

Yes, I've been watching. Well, everyone's been watching you. You gamble like no one I've seen before. A winning streak like yours is... hard to come by.

How do you do it?

(Laughs) Alright, keep your cards to your chest then.

Do you come here often? I've only just started as a bartender here, see, so I'm yet to familiarise myself with the regulars. I'm sure I would remember a face like yours.

A newbie? You? I suppose that makes sense, since people really underestimated you for the first few games you played. If you frequented this place often, I suppose you would be the player everyone makes sure to stay away from.

Or, the person people want to play to try their luck. Who knows?

Ah, so that's where you get your expertise from. I had my fair share of gambling during my uni days too, but they were more bets on exams, and the punishment was more often than not, doing something stupid in public, rather than losing money.

Oh? You too? What university did you go to?

Wow, you must have been really intelligent. Though that's no surprise, seeing your skills on the floor. What did *you* bet instead of money?

[Clicks tongue] I knew you were the type to get high on adrenaline quickly, even if you're a surprisingly safe gambler. Did you at least win your fights? I can't imagine a pretty face like yours ever getting roughed up.

I'm glad you can hold your own. Just don't beat up our customers, please. Only one of us has medical experience and I'm quite sure she's busy being smooth-talked to by another man upstairs.

Fraternising with customers isn't really supposed to happen, but when you put the high of winning or losing a gamble, well-dressed people, and good wine, it's inevitable.

(Laughs) Yes, our uniforms don't help either. I quite like them, they're very smart. A few years ago, apparently it was straight up bunny outfits, for both male and female staff, but I'm more partial to these suits.

Yes, I'm not joking, bunny outfits. I'm actually quite sure you can see them on the mannequins on the way in. A little too revealing for such a cold place. If they have the money to upgrade to tailored suits, they can afford to splurge on central heating, don't you think?

How lovely of you, sweetheart, but tipping me will not go towards central heating. It'll go to my student loans.

Oh, you're ready to order? What would you like?

Good taste, that's my favourite. Would you like a straw with that?

Alright, one Midnight Tart Cherry mocktail coming right up!

[Mocktail... making... noises? SFX???)

I'm not showing off, this is how I prepare everyone's drinks. You dine at a luxurious casino, you get the best experience we can offer.

Though between you and I, I *am* trying to impress you.

(Closely, saccharine) Is it working?

(Laughs) I'm glad.

[Glass on table SFX]

[Liquid pouring SFX]

[Ice SFX]

[Glass slides across the table SFX]

Here's your Midnight Tart Cherry mocktail.

It's good, right? I told you it was a good choice.

Yes, me too, I don't make it a habit to drink on the job.

You too? Drink on the job?

(A little too sweetly) Sweetheart, you're not working now.

(Suspicious) ...Are you?

(Laughs) No, no, I get it. We get so mixed up in work and our personal lives, we never get to catch a break!

So, tell me a little more about you. The entire bar staff is dying to know who made one of best regulars nearly flip the table in frustration.

No, no, that wasn't your fault. It was bad sportsmanship, obviously. You've made a lot of people rage quit. I hope you find it as amusing as we do, since we're so eagerly watching from the sidelines.

What do I want to know, hmm? I know your name, it was being yelled a lot. It's a pretty one, too.

What do you like to do? Other than, well, gambling.

Oooh, I see. That's quite a nice hobby to have.

No, I haven't tried it before, I'm not very good with that sort of thing.

'Everything is easy with the right tutor,' huh... Is that an offer?

I'll take you up on it.

My turn? Gosh... I like making drinks, obviously. I host parties often, you should come to one. I'm all about making connections, and doing silly side quests with people.

It's such a small world, you know. You never know who you'll walk into, and who will recognise you. So it's better to be in everyone's good books by throwing them a nice party, right?

...Alright, alright, that is very typical of a law major. You got me. I got a law degree, and passed the bar. But I just... Got sidetracked by life, you know? Well, maybe you don't know. To me, you seem straight-laced, and determined.

Like a person who has a degree in... mathematics?

Hah! I was right!

You guys work hard and play hard, and apparently, you gamble hard too. Though I suppose you both gamble and use your skills, right?

Oh, I won't kiss and tell. We all use a little bit of logic in gambling sometimes, especially if we're not really doing it for the thrill.

'Why else do we gamble?', indeed...

Money, socialising, peer pressure, *getting information*. All sorts, really. It depends on the person, and you can tell exactly what type of person someone is when they gamble.

Like your first game? You were playing with that gentleman in the red over there, right? He underestimated you big time. He's quite a sensible gambler, but he never looks at the person, only the odds of winning. You didn't know the rules, so he explained them to you, and thought you to be an easy win, only for you to flip the script completely.

It also didn't help that he was staring at *you* rather than his cards. I can't really blame him, though, you really dress to impress.

Aww, don't blush like that, you'll make me flustered too.

But you saw how he was, a person like that is a sneaky one. I wouldn't put it past a lawyer to act like that. You've heard who he is, right? He's one every single one of his cases, and he doesn't take cases he can't win. But you pulled the wool over his eyes.

You were playing another table, after, right? The elderly couple are seasoned veterans, but they also knew how sharp you were. They were careful with you, but they ended up losing to the guy my coworker is snuggling up to. He's a smooth-talker, that one. I'm glad you met me before you met him, or else I would have lost you to his spell.

That man, now... He plays for the thrill. He's insanely lucky, but he's also a very strategic person. He's not as skillful at maths as you are, nor is he cautious. But he can read people like a book, and charm them all the same.

He played the lawyer man before you, and he acted like a complete rabbit in front of him. In front of that elderly couple, he became the type of man you would want your grandchild to marry. He's sneaky in his own way, but he doesn't get mad when you win against him.

You're right. He does have a lot of money to throw around.

Do you think he's old money, or new money?

Mm, you have a good eye for brands. He seems to be trying to fit in with them, then. It's working though, from the looks of it. He's talking to the CEO of that one advertising company, Regalia. They did a massive deal with the perfume brand you're wearing, Kore House.

Exactly, he's looking to stick his finger in their pie too.

He's networking and having his fun at the same time. A businessman, from the looks of it, but not a nepo baby. He's an innovator. It's probably his own company.

Who?

Oh, you want to know about that lady playing poker by table three? Wearing sapphire earrings, right?

Well, she was cautious with you. Unlike the guy before, she wasn't reckless. But she's too cautious. You can see that she doesn't take risks at all, and her face tells me that she's only gambling as a social hobby. She's too busy talking to people to really pay attention to the game, her heart's not in it.

Yes, that's why she was talking to you a lot. She wants to know who you are through your mouth, not your cards. A little naive, if you ask me.

Why? Well... Pretty things like you lie so easy... Just a little smile and you think you've wiped the memory of the person you've spoken to.

(laughs) I mean nothing by that, sweetheart. It only means something if you want it to.

And speaking of, I haven't analysed the star of the show: you.

You are a good gambler. You take risks, and you learn from your losses. You learn incredibly quickly, and I know that you can tell when someone's bluffing. That is why you've been playing games that rely on bluffs as compared to games that rely on luck alone.

This isn't your first time gambling. As you've said, you've played in university. But that was a few years ago, so why are you here in a casino so suddenly? Maybe you're looking to relive some memories, but if that were the case... You would be here with your friends.

Why aren't you here with your friends?

...Alright. I'll keep talking then if you won't.

Friends have a massive impact on us, you see. My mother told me that your friends are a snapshot into your future. And that definitely applies to you. You enjoy gambling, but you're distracted tonight. You're not drinking alcohol, you're hyperfocused on both the game and other people. You have an ulterior motive.

And you see, every single person you've spoken to have something in common.

They're all suspects for the Casino murder three months ago. And you know who the victim is, don't you?

[Chair scrapes SFX]

Sit down. You'll look even more suspicious than you already are.

You and the victim went to the same university, have the same hobbies, and I've seen you on her instagram. The Kore House perfume that you wear? She gave that to you on your birthday before she was killed.

Don't cry. People are watching. You know, just...

[Footsteps SFX]

Take my handkerchief.

[Listener wipes their tears SFX]

I want you to look here. Go back home. Do not come back. Stop interfering with my case, or you will blow my cover. I understand that you want to find the killer, but that's *my* job. This is a rabbit hole you do *not* wanna go down.

You are a civilian, and putting yourself in this situation will get you killed. Your friend, she wouldn't like that. And, if someone tries anything here, I'll have to protect you and that would also get my cover blown.

You could get arrested if you continue to interfere with my investigation, and I really don't want that, because you obviously care a lot about her.

I- I do want to know what you've found out. But not here. One second.

Here. I've written my number on this... Ace card? Where did that come from? Anyway, you need to pick a date and time to let me know what you've found, and once you decide, call me and I'll put you through to my boss so that we can book a room to talk in.

It's not an interrogation, you aren't being charged with anything, it's just a conversation in which I ask you about the suspects you've spoken to tonight.

I usually encourage people to write things down as soon as possible, since we are likely to forget things.

No. No more information collecting for you tonight. Or ever. Go home.

We don't need any more casualties. Would you want someone to put their life in danger for you after you get killed in the same way? With every kill, a killer gets more confident. You would be another tally to the list, another person conquered, another lesson learnt on how to evade the law.

We can't let this person get any better.

(Listener asks the Speaker if they'll find her killer.)

[Hand holding SFX]

Sweetheart, I can't promise that I'll find her killer. But I can promise that I'll do my very best.

Now, stay here for another thirty minutes. My shift will be finished by then, and I'll take you home myself. Alright?

Yeah, I want you out of here as soon as possible, but... You shouldn't be going home alone so late at night, regardless of whether a killer is loose or not.

Just wait, okay? I'll give you another drink. On the house. Think of it as a reward for being such a charming and skillful gambler.

[END OF SCRIPT]