

“Hey, guys, sorry I won’t be able to stay around after the game to chat,” announced George. “I’ve got a date to go for drinks with a very classy lady I recently met.”

The four guys sitting at the poker table sat in stunned silence. Each of the seventy-plus year-old players took turns hosting the weekly poker game in their home. It was a friendly, though competitive, low stakes game that they took seriously. This week the game was held in a typical New York City apartment, not large, but comfortable with a lived-in feel. The round table with a felt-side up tablepad was set up in a corner of the chachka-filled living room. Each player had his designated seat.

“Whaddaya talkin’ about, a date?” said Max. “You’re married, fer chrissake!”

“Married?” replied George, his eyebrows raised. “Brenda and I’ve been divorced for six months.”

The men stared at him in disbelief.

“This is bullshit, guys!” exclaimed Max, always the most outspoken of the group. “Here we are, five men, playin’ cards together for decades, and we don’t find out about a divorce until six months after it happens! What’s up with that?”

“You’re right, Max,” said Louie, a retired defense attorney, running his hand through his longish graying hair. “And I’d bet there’s a bunch of other stuff we’ve gone through that nobody knows about.”

“Like that I had prostate surgery a couple of months ago?” asked Richie.

“No shit, Richie!” said Louie.

“We all have our share of aches and pains, and we don’t want to be seen as complainers,” replied George. “But not to share that you’ve gone through surgery...”

Dave, the psychologist in the group, thought about it for a while. He reflected on how many years of playing cards together had passed before he had learned that Louie had been a cop or that Max had a twin brother. “Max’s right,” said Dave in his professorial manner. “We should change the way we’ve been doing things. We ought to be more transparent with one another. We’re not getting any younger. And I don’t want to find out that one of you died from some long illness that I didn’t know anything about by reading about it in the obits.”

“Guys aren’t good in the sharing department,” said Louie. “We tend to do things together, you know, play pool, go bowling, shit like that. But we don’t say much. We’re aren’t like the gals who actually talk about themselves with one another.”

The guys chuckled and nodded in agreement.

“I remember as a kid playing games with my best friend,” said George. “We could spend hours together and never say a word.”

“That’s why we like poker,” said Dave. “We tend to keep our emotional cards close to our chest. We’ll talk about events, sports, politics, all kinds of impersonal stuff.”

“We don’t even talk about our families or kids,” added Richie, reaching for a handful of peanuts. “Or when we do, we don’t pay attention, so we don’t remember much. My wife has taught me a lot about listening, especially when she’s talking.” He chuckled as he put some of the nuts in his mouth.

“Yeah, and if one of us should dare talk too long about anything, whether personal or not,” said Louie, “one of us will become impatient and say, ‘are we here to shoot the shit or play cards!’”

“Whadda you suggest we do, Dave? You’re the shrink,” said Max. “I agree with; you. I don’t want to find out one of youse died from long illness by readin’ the paper.”

“First of all,” began Dave, “let me once again clarify that I am not a shrink; I do not practice psychotherapy. I was a university professor and I taught psychological theory, but I am not, nor was I ever a practitioner. Therefore, I’m no better than the rest of you when it comes to transparency. That’s why I teach. And that’s why I play poker. Relationships are messy; cards are simple. That being said, I do think we should take a few minutes before the game starts, and again during our dinner break, to catch each other up on what’s going on in our lives. Maybe after thirty-plus years, we should get to know each other as people not just as poker-buddies?”

“You just proved my point about listening and remembering,” said Richie. “I bet over the years you must have told us about what you do dozens of times. I mean no offense, guys, but really we could do a lot better about paying attention.”

The guys nodded. While they seemed to agree in principle, recognizing both the truth of what Richie said and their impersonal way of relating to one another, their resistance to doing something different was palpable. Some sat with their arms folded across their chests; others had their jaws set. Poker had been a place where they didn’t have to become vulnerable. It was all about the cards.

“What do you think about the idea of us spending a few minutes before we start playing cards each week updating one another about what’s going on in our lives?” suggested Dave.

“You mean kinda like ‘checking in?’” said Louie. “Sounds good to me.”

“With our memories being what they are,” said George with a smirk, “maybe we’ll have to take notes so we don’t forget what people said. We wouldn’t want to offend anyone.”

“You sound ticked, George,” said Richie.

“Maybe a little,” replied George. “I don’t want to feel pressured to talk about myself. Playing poker is a refuge from being pressured to do anything but deal.”

“But this might help us get to know each other,” said Dave. “Tell you what, if anyone doesn’t want to share, no problem. He can just pass. How’s that?”

“That works for me,” replied George, taking a sip of his drink.

“Great,” said Louie. “Let’s start next week, okay? In the meantime, deal.”

They played several more hands before the game broke up around ten-thirty.

The guys left that evening in a pensive mood. That in itself was unique. Most of the time they left just thinking about their winnings or losses. Tonight, they thought about the obits and their aging, their memory, how little they really knew about one another, and what they would share with the group. They thought about their respective lives and their secrets and how much they would want to reveal.



The format for the game was always the same. Each week a different player hosted the game in his home. The host supplied the pre-game snacks, a light dinner, and the drinks. The host’s wife would rarely make an appearance. The wives either went out for the evening doing something on their own, or they retired to another room when the guys started to show up. The guys always arrived at around seven, with the game starting at seven-thirty and usually ending by ten-thirty.

This week, Max hosted the game.

Dave arrived first. “Hey, Max,” said Dave. “How are you doing?”

Max smiled.

“By the way, how long have you lived in this condo?” asked Dave as he looked around the knickknack-covered apartment. “It looks like forever.”

Max laughed. “You may not believe it, but we downsized from our house across the river just before Esther got sick.” He walked over to the large windows of the Riverside Drive condo building overlooking the Hudson River toward New Jersey. “We used to live right over there. You can almost see our house from here. Esther didn’t want to move, but the house was just too big for the two of us. So, if you think this place is cluttered, you should have seen the house. We got rid of a ton of things. This is just a sample. Our kids said our home was like a museum: each piece has a story attached. When Esther died, I didn’t change anything. It all reminds me of her.” His eyes misted.

The doorbell rang, and one by one Louie, Richie, and George arrived.

Max, along with his brother Mort, owned two delis in Manhattan. On the kitchen counter, Max had put out a spread of several appetizers including pickled tomatoes, chopped liver, and mixed olives along with a platter of mixed cold cuts—roast beef, pastrami, corned beef, salami, and three types of cheese—as well as potato salad, coleslaw, pickles, and a stack of rye bread. He also supplied a basket of bakery goods including mini-Danish, rugelach, and coconut macaroons. The apartment smelled like a deli.

“I love it when you host,” said Richie. “Not for the view—though it is beautiful—but for the food. No one leaves your house hungry. Quite the contrary, I leave stuffed, belching, and smelling like garlic and pickles.” He smiled, reaching for a pickle tomato.

The guys helped themselves to the appetizers, poured themselves something to drink and milled about before the poker game started at about seven-thirty. They would break for supper around nine and then resume the game until ten-thirty.

“I was thinking about what Dave said last week about being transparent,” said Louie as he sampled some of the chopped liver on mini rye. “What does it mean to be transparent? Theresa always complains that I don’t tell her anything about my childhood or even my work. And I say, what’s the point? My childhood is long gone, and why would I want to talk about my work? I already lived it once, I don’t want to relive it when I’m home.”

“Yeah, Brenda used to ask me a lot of personal questions about my day, what I did, what I thought about,” said George, pressing the tips of his long fingers together. “What’s with women always wanting to pry?”

“I don’t know if it’s prying exactly,” replied Dave, rubbing his chin as he reflected. “I think they want to get emotionally close. And sharing thoughts, history, finding out about experiences and emotions, and sharing those experiences gives them a way to get there. I don’t think they’re nosy, they just want intimacy.”

“Yes, but what about privacy?” insisted George. “Aren’t we entitled to privacy? Can’t we have secrets? Can’t we have a personal life?”

“Ya mean like your keepin’ it a secret from us that your marriage was in trouble?” asked Max, placing a fresh toothpick in his mouth. “Or that it took six months before ya told us ya were divorced?”

George flushed. “Touché! Well, about that, I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t know, it just never crossed my mind that any of you would be interested, since we never talk about anything personal. In my world, no one was ever really interested in me. It’s not something I’m comfortable with.”

“I guess we should have suspected something was going on when you stopped hosting the game, always giving some lame excuse about your apartment being remodeled,” said Louie.

“That’s the point,” said Dave. “The message we’ve all seemed to have agreed to is ‘don’t ask, don’t tell.’”

“That’s fucked,” said Max, munching on a sour pickle.

“Sometimes secrets can hurt a relationship,” added Richie with a furrowed brow. “Depending on how big a secret is, it can really take something away from a relationship. I’ve heard about guys who have an entirely secret life that their wives don’t know about. I think most women can sense when their husband is hiding something.”

“Ya mean like married guys who keep a mistress in an apartment?” asked Max. “I can’t understand how they can do that. Seems like a lot of friggin’ work. I found it hard pleasing one woman, but two. Fuhgeddaboutit.”

A couple of guys chuckled, but the rest were quiet.

“You know, going back to something that Louie said,” began Dave. “I don’t think when our wives ask us about our day at work, or anything else for that matter, they really want a blow-by-blow accounting of what we did. I think they’re more interested in how we felt about it or our thoughts about it. They want something personal that they can relate to, not necessarily the details.”

“That’s a good point, Dave,” said Richie.

“Hey, guys, are we gonna play cards or what?” asked Louie. “Enough of the chit-chat. Deal!” He walked over to the card table.

They all took their seats. Max picked up the deck. The host always dealt first. His short, stubby fingers made for clumsy shuffling.

“I fuckin’ hate new cards,” said Max, fumbling with them. “They’re so goddamn stiff and slick.”

Watching Max struggle with the cards was the opposite of watching George’s graceful style. When George shuffled and dealt, the guys marveled; with Max, they chuckled. After a few minutes of card-shuffling, Max finally dealt the first hand. He moved the toothpick that was always stuck in his mouth from side to side as he dealt.

“Hey, did I tell you about the rabbi and the priest who came into my shop last week for lunch?” asked Max. Without waiting for a response, he continued. “The priest says to the rabbi, ‘do you think you will ever break down and have a ham sandwich, Rabbi?’ ‘Sure, Father, says the rabbi, on your wedding day.’”

The guys chuckled, groaned, and snorted. They could always count on Max for a joke or two.

“Are we going to do a round of ‘checking in’ as Richie called it last week?” asked Dave.

The guys went silent.

“Oh, for Pete’s sake,” said Richie, “I’ll start. My prostate is much better since the surgery. I only wake up twice during the night to pee; before it was five or six times. You guys have piss problems?”

The guys laughed. Both Max and Louie nodded.

“My doc has been wanting me to have the procedure where they cut a hole in the middle of your prostate for years, but just the thought of going under the knife is too much for me,” said Max. “I’d rather wake up a half-dozen times during the night.”

“Theresa and I have been thinking about taking a trip to Italy,” said Louie. “We haven’t been there for over twenty years. We figure, if not now, when?”

“I’ve been thinking about retiring,” said George. “I’ve been working part-time just about ten to fifteen hours a week. But now I’m thinking of closing my practice and just doing volunteer dental work at the Free Clinic. It will keep me busy, and I can really make a difference in the lives of folks who could never afford orthodontics.”

“That’s great,” said Louie. “I’m thinking of volunteering my legal services. A lot of homeless people end up in jail and never get legal counsel. The public defenders are overwhelmed.”

“Okay, guys,” said Dave. “That was great. See, it didn’t hurt to share a little. But we don’t want to overdo it, now, do we?”

They all laughed.

For the next hour and a half, they engaged in card-talk. Same as it had always been. Max dealt the cards; it was dealer’s choice. “Draw poker. Ante up,” he said.

Each guy tossed a dollar chip into the pot; they each bought a hundred dollars’ worth of chips at the beginning of the evening and cashed them in at the end. They played a fixed-limit game where players could either bet the minimum of one dollar or two dollars with only two raises equal to the amount of the initial bet. It wasn’t a high stakes game, but they played as if they were high-rollers.

Max put a toothpick in the corner of his mouth and dealt out five cards to each player. Some professional poker players wore dark glasses; Max chewed a toothpick.

Dave picked up his cards one at a time, holding them close to his chest as he peered over the reading glasses that perched at the tip of his nose.

“You call this a hand,” exclaimed Dave. “It looks more like a foot.”

“The way you pick up your cards, you’d think we were playing in a wild west poker game in some saloon,” teased Louie. He picked up his own cards and studied them, twirling the diamond pinky ring on his right hand.

“When are you gonna learn how to deal a decent hand, Max? Jeez!” said Louie.

Richie picked up his cards without saying a word. He studied the men, looking for any signs that would reveal information about their hand. He knew draw poker was a game of wits and luck, since there was no information offered by the cards themselves like there was in stud poker, where cards were face-up on the table.

George sat straight-backed, expressionless, his body still except for the occasional tug on his right ear.

“Crap,” said Max. “You think you’ve got a shitty hand? You should see mine!”

“You always complain about your hand,” said Louie. “You could have a full house and you’d still bitch.”

“Is that why you twirl the ring?” asked Max. “You think it’s Aladdin’s lamp and a genie is gonna give you a royal flush?”

“Nah,” said Dave. “If Max had a full boat with aces over deuces, he’d probably toss in the deuces in the hope of drawing kings.”

Richie chortled along with his customary snort.

“There goes the pig snortin’ for truffles,” said Max.

The kibitzing continued as did the betting.

“I bet two dollars,” said Louie, tossing in a couple of chips and twirling his ring.

“I’ll call your two and raise you a buck,” said Max.

The rest of the guys called the bet.

“Anyone watching *Game of Thrones*?” asked Richie. “It’s a pretty amazing story. I’ll take three cards.”

“I find it hard to follow,” said George. “Just keeping track of all of the different kingdoms is hard, but then there’s the language. Two cards.”

“I’ll take two cards,” said Dave. “We don’t watch much television except for documentaries and old movies. They really knew how to make movies back in the day.”

“Three for me,” said Louie, tossing three cards onto the table. “We watch *Gray’s Anatomy*. I wonder whether the actors had to spend time in a hospital to learn their parts.”

“Dealer takes one card,” said Max.

“Going for an inside straight, Max?” asked Louie, chuckling.

“That’s Max’s style,” said George. “Always betting on the long shot.”

Max looked at the one card he’d drawn and threw up his hands. “Shit! I fold.”

The five men made for a study in contrasting styles. As they dealt the cards and played their hands, the table chatter was incessant. Never deep, just constant, and seldom about themselves. “Who’s gonna win the pennant?” “When are they gonna make the subways run on time?” “Global warming is screwing up the Artic.”

But this night something had changed. A subtle but palpable undercurrent had shifted. The mood was subdued.

“Time to eat,” announced Max at around nine. The men loaded their plates from the platters on the sideboard buffet and moved over to the kitchen table, away from the cards. No food was allowed on the card table, only drinks.

“Okay. Let’s chat some more about secrets,” said Louie. “I’ll bet we all have secrets. More than one, I imagine. Things we’ve never told our wives or even our best friends.”

“I’m sure that’s true for most of us,” said Dave. “As Richie said, the bigger issue is whether holding those secrets creates distance in our closest relationships.” Dave was in his element as though in a classroom encouraging his students to engage.

“Can people be close if they’re not honest with each other?” asked Richie. “My wife and I have had many conversations about the importance of honesty.”

“Honesty. That’s another issue,” replied George, yanking on his ear. “I don’t think having a secret is dishonest. It’s not a lie. If I tell you something, then it can either be truth or a fabrication. But if I don’t tell you something, it’s not a lie. It’s a secret. I didn’t tell you about my divorce. Does that mean I lied to you?” George spoke the same formal way that he dealt cards. He was articulate and precise. He was far more comfortable keeping conversation intellectual or theoretical rather than personal.

“From a legal perspective, that’s true,” said Louie. “It’s not perjury to withhold information.”

“Looking at it that way, I’ve got a boatload of stuff I’ve never told my wife, but I’ve never lied to her,” said Dave, attempting to be more self-disclosing. “Well, at least not very often.” He chomped down on his corned beef sandwich.

Richie snorted. The guys chuckled.

“In the spirit of honesty,” said Dave, grinning, “this corned beef is delicious, Max.”

They all smiled. “So’s the roast beef,” said Richie.

“A legal definition of honesty is different from a relationship’s definition,” said Louie. “It’s a different context. In a courtroom, lying would be considered perjury. In a relationship, we’re trying to create intimacy. Lying precludes intimacy. And maybe keeping secrets does the same.

“So, what was your intent in keeping secrets from Brenda, George? In a courtroom people are trying to achieve a personal end. A defendant usually is trying to protect himself either by lying or withholding information.”

“Did you want an intimate connection with your ex?” asked Richie, speaking in a soft voice.

“Of course, I wanted to be close,” replied George, becoming defensive. His face flushed. “But I still think there should be room in a marriage for privacy. For example, I believe that sometimes we keep secrets in order to protect someone else.” He crossed and uncrossed his legs. He reached for his glass of wine, trying to compose himself.

“Did your ex-wife buy that bunch of crap, George?” asked Louie, talking with a mouthful of food stuffed in his cheek. “Or is that why you’re divorced? Sounds to me that you’re hiding something.”

George grinned despite his discomfort. “Brenda would say that lies were acts of commission and secrets were lies of omission. She would become angrier about the things not said. She would say she felt betrayed.”

“That’s exactly what my wife, Esther, woulda said,” added Max. A wistful smile crossed his face as he remembered his deceased wife. It had been five years since Esther died. There wasn’t a day that he didn’t miss her.

“I don’t think my wife would accept your distinction between secrets and lies, George,” said Richie, holding his sandwich with both hands. “She would agree with your ex. If it’s a secret, it’s a lie in her book. And lying is a betrayal. And if caught, there would be hell to pay! I think I’d rather just come clean and not have to worry about it.”

“I guess you’ve lived a clean, upstanding life, with no significant secrets, eh, Richie?” said George with a touch of sarcasm.

“Are you suggesting that Richie’s life is boring?” chided Dave, trying to lighten the mood.

“Are you saying that the only way you can have an interesting life, George, is by lying?” asked Richie. “Personal secrets are very close to lies. So why do we keep secrets, especially from our wives? Are we afraid? Maybe all lies are for self-protection.”

“Wait,” said Louie, wiping coleslaw off his shirt. “If secrets are the same as lies, then our government has been lying to us forever. It has many secrets. What role do secrets play in life?”

“I think it depends on the context and the intent,” said Dave, becoming the professor. “I think there’s a difference between secrets we hold that involve other people and secrets that involve only ourselves. If you tell me something to be held in confidence, it’s a secret that I’m bound not to tell others including my wife. And yes, I think we are afraid. We’re afraid of the consequences of being fully transparent. We fear our

wives' anger, we feel uncomfortable seeing someone we love being hurt by something we said, we fear rejection, we fear what others might think of us. Lots of fears."

"I agree," said Richie, swallowing the last bite of his sandwich. "And in my case, I'm more afraid of my wife finding out that I am holding a secret, so I tell her everything. That's how I protect myself."

"I sure can talk a good line," said Dave. "Too bad I can't practice what I preach. But I'm willing to give it a go if you are. I'm no different from the rest of you guys; openness and transparency are great in concept but difficult in practice."

"Maybe there are different levels and types of secrecy," said Richie. "And maybe it depends on the type of relationship."

"What d'ya mean?" asked Max. He shifted his toothpick to the other side of his mouth.

"My relationship with my doctor requires that he tell me the truth and that I tell him the truth about my medical condition, no matter how embarrassing," replied Richie. "But my relationship with my children doesn't always require that I tell them the truth, or at least the full truth. The relationship that the five of us guys established over the years doesn't require full disclosure. Unlike with our wives, that was never part of our contract."

"That's right," said George, feeling somewhat exonerated for not having told the group about his divorce. He felt relieved that they didn't press him further about his secrets. "Our relationship has never been about creating intimacy. It's always been about playing cards. Nothing more." He put some more coleslaw on his plate.

"But with wives," said Richie, "it's all about connection, at least with most wives. When we keep secrets, we are taking something away from the relationship."

"I agree with Richie," said Max. "While we may protect ourselves in the short-run, we may pay a long-term price. I remember my mother always sayin' that if she caught me in a lie the punishment would be far worse than if I told her the truth right away."

"What role do you think trust plays?" asked Louie. "I think the more we trust the person, the more we will be willing to share secrets, right? We trust them not to use the secret against us. We trust them not to judge us. Sometimes sharing secrets changes people's perception of us—positively or negatively. It's risky."

The guys went quiet, deep in thought, as they shoveled food into their mouths. The topic definitely affected them, but not enough to stop them from scarfing down the food.

"Hey, Dave," said Max, breaking the silence, "since you're da one who brung up the idea of transparency, how 'bout telling us about yourself?"

Dave looked up from his sandwich, a piece of corned beef dangling from his mouth. Mustard was smeared on his upper lip.

"Me? Okay," he said. He wiped his mouth with a napkin. "Let's see. Where shall I begin?" He rubbed his chin as he put his thoughts together. "I was born in Brooklyn—Williamsburg, just across the bridge. I'm an only child. My parents were immigrants from Poland, escaping just before the Nazi invasion. They both worked in the Garment District; my dad was a pattern cutter and my mother was a seamstress. My father died of lung cancer when I was ten. He smoked like a chimney. I was raised by my mother and her spinster sister, who moved in with us when my father died." Dave was uncomfortable; he'd much rather listen to



others than talk about himself. He was leaving a lot out but couldn't help himself. Standing up in front a classroom discussing Freud was far easier for him than engaging in intimate dialogue.

He pushed on. "I went to Brooklyn Public Schools, graduated from Brooklyn College and then went to Boston University on a scholarship for my doctorate in psychology. I got a job teaching in the psych department at NYU, where I stayed for forty years before retiring. Charlotte, my first wife, and I were married for ten years, and we had one kid together. I've been married to Susan for twenty-five years; we have no children together, though she has children from a previous marriage. And that, my friends, is the story. Pretty boring." He took another bite of his sandwich.

"Yeah, the way you tell it, it sounds pretty boring," said George, pressing his fingertips together. "You recited your bio like reading a script. But I sense there's something more that you're not telling us, my friend. I'm not going to judge this book by its cover." He looked at Dave with one eyebrow raised. "Maybe you don't trust us enough to tell more."

"And you didn't say squat about what it was like to lose your dad at ten or being raised by two women," added Louie. "Or why you got divorced. I am sure what you left out would be more interesting than what you shared."

"It's interesting that you were the guy who said we should share more and learn more about each other as people," said George. "And yet, when you share it's anything but personal."

"Those that can, do," said Dave. "Those that can't, teach."

"Secrets and lies," snorted Richie. "Acts of commission and acts of omission."

Dave smiled and went back to chomping on his sandwich.

"Okay, time to play cards," announced Max. "We'll shoot the shit more next week. We don't want to overdo this sharing shit."

The guys cleared the kitchen table, placed their plates on the counter next to the sink, and returned to their seats at the card table. The game continued as usual.

George dealt. Polished and smooth. Most of the them waited until he dealt the entire hand before picking them up. But Dave, as always, picked his cards up one at a time, holding them close to his chest, peering at the corners as he fanned them.

Though they continued to kibitz, snort, tease, and chuckle, talking about nothing in particular, the banter was subdued, muted. On most nights they thought only about the game; on this night they were thinking about the dinner conversation.

At the end of the evening, as the men were getting ready to leave, Richie said, "You know, we've been playing poker together for over thirty years, yet, as we said, we know very little about each other's history and personal struggles. We may know one another's occupation, we know that some of us are now retired, but we don't know much else. We've accumulated bits of information over time. But if any of you are like me, like I said before, you've probably forgotten most of the details.

"When Dave said that he didn't want to learn about one of us dying by reading the obituaries, it struck a chord in me. We are all getting older. We have friends who are dying, moving away, or have become physically incapacitated. Dave shared a little, very little, about his background tonight." The men chuckled. "As Louie suggested, there is much that we don't know about him. If we share only once a week, it's going take months for us to really get to know each other. Think about this. What could we say at the funeral if

any of us died tomorrow? What would you say about me? Here lies Richie, a guy with whom I played poker for thirty years?"

The guys looked at each other, waiting.

"Yeah. So, do you have something in mind, Richie?" asked Dave.

"As a matter of fact, I do. I think we need to hang out together more. Something to jump start our connection. How about we go away together as a group? Danielle and I have a cabin up in the Catskills that we could use. We could go up there for a few days, play some cards, do some fishing, take a hike, and maybe get to know each other in a shorter period of time. What do you think?"

"It could be fun," said George. "And maybe it would help build trust."

"I dunno," said Max. "The idea of getting out of the city sounds fine, but going with youse guys, I dunno if I could handle it. Too much testosterone." He smirked.

Louie ran his fingers through his hair. "Yeah, I'm not so sure about that," he said. "I mean no disrespect but being together three hours a week for poker is one thing. Going away for a weekend, that's a whole other ballgame."

"Look, guys," said Dave. "I'm just as nervous about spending a weekend together for the purpose of getting to know one another as the rest of you. You saw how robot-like I was when I shared. But it might be good for us." He paused. "I tell you what, why don't we think about it for a week. We can take a vote next Thursday. What do you say?"

The guys nodded, picked up their jackets, said their goodbyes to Max, and left. They barely talked during the ride down the elevator as they left Max's condo.