

As John stood up on the stage, behind the podium, squinting past the blinking lights and barely able to hear over the cheering crowd, he had but one question for himself:

Why was he doing this again?

Then Bianca squeezed his hand and smiled. Right. *That* was why. Because even if he thought hypnosis was all complete nonsense and even if he thought "Chance Or Trance" was the stupidest game show in the world, he was a sucker for a pretty face. True, it wasn't the *only* reason he'd married Bianca, but it was definitely a contributing factor for their wedding...and the *only* factor contributing to his presence onstage.

He rolled his eyes and clicked his tongue with a grin as he squeezed Bianca's hand back. Their mics weren't on, so he could at least afford a stage-whisper to his wife as the crowd applauded at the behest of the blinking sign above them. "Just so you know? I'm gonna choose 'Cash' every time."

She giggled and leaned her head on his shoulder. "I thought you didn't *watch* the show."

"I don't," he murmured as the crowd finally began to settle down. "But I sure as hell asked all about what kind of stuff we're gonna be walking away with."

Bianca just sighed and swatted his forearm playfully. There wasn't much to do but banter back and forth under their breath until the hostess arrived, but-

"And now, the hostess of 'Chance Or Trance!' *Vicky Vance!*"

Right on cue, the theme song kicked in again and the audience leapt to their feet once more. The cheering was even louder this time, and it wasn't too hard to see why. Strutting out onto the stage was one of the most *gorgeous* women that John had ever seen in his life. Vicky Vance was all hourglass curves and sharp, striking contrast. Pale skin and jet-black hair, pure white gloves and an impeccably pressed stage magician outfit that hugged her hips, waist, and bust tighter than seemed humanly possible.

"*Thank you, thank you!*" She winked at the crowd and flashed a dazzling smile as she raised one hand into the air with a flourish. "*You're too kind, really!*" She blew a kiss and bowed deeply, to the audience's renewed approval.

Finally, though, she waved a hand to quiet them down, and the crowd obliged. Vicky stepped up to the podium, her heels clicking with every step on the black-and-white checkerboard of the stage. She grinned and cocked her head back to the spectators.

"Seems like they really like me, don't it?"

"Certainly does!" John replied. Bianca nodded.

"Ah, don't let 'em fool you." Vicky leaned her elbow against the podium, casting a glare at the crowd. She paused for a moment, narrowing her eyes at the audience. Then she looked back to John and Bianca. "Sure, they clap real loud when I show up, but they're even *louder* when I *leave* at the end." That got a laugh out of the crowd -- along with a chuckle and a shrug from John.

"But they're not here to see *me!*" Vicky straightened up once more, turning towards the cameras and smiling wide. "No, they're here to watch John and Bianca play..."

She thrust the microphone out towards the audience, and they happily filled in the blanks.

"*Chance! Or! Trance!*"

"You heard 'em, guys!" Vicky looked back to John and Bianca. "And if there's one thing that I try to make sure, it's that people leave happy. That means them. That means *you*. So! To make that happen, we're gonna play a little game today, and *hopefully* send you back home with some cash and prizes. How's that sound, John?"

She tilted the mic over to John. It was just a formality -- he and Bianca already had lavalier microphones on their collars -- but he still leaned in to answer. "Sounds good to me, Vicky."

"And how about you, Bianca? You ready to win big and make all the viewers here and at home real happy?"

Bianca smiled and nodded. "That's what we're here for!"

"Marvelous! So, I don't know if you've ever sat down and watched a game of Chance Or Trance. Either way, never hurts to get a refresher on how the game's played, so before we get into the nitty-gritty, let's go over the rules!" Vicky snapped her fingers, and with a puff of smoke, a large, multicolored lottery wheel appeared beside Bianca and John.

"Alright. So, here on Chance or Trance, we want to make sure that you two walk away with as much cash as you can. But!" She tapped the podium and leveled a finger at the two of them. "We're generous, but we're not *that* generous. Only *one* of you is actually going to be spinning the wheel and making that sweet, sweet moolah. It looks like that's going to be you tonight. That correct, John?"

He nodded. "That's the plan."

"Fantastic! So, John, you're going to step right over here-" She guided him beside the wheel itself, standing between him and Bianca. "-and Bianca, you're just gonna hunker down right there at the podium. So, John, before you go ahead and spin that wheel, let me explain just why you're gonna be giving that bad boy a whirl."

"See, over here on the wheel, we've got a whole bunch of little stars." She pointed to the wheel. "Each section has at least one star on it. Some of them have more. Some of them have a *lot* more. You wanna get as many stars as you can, because the more stars you get, the more prizes and the more cash you get. Five stars gets you one prize, ten gets you another, et cetera, et cetera. But!"

"Look right here for me, John." She tapped the wheel, fingertip pointing to a star-shaped outline. "See these guys? These are different. Normally, you'd be after the filled-in stars, but if you end up on a space with one of *these* guys, you have the choice between-" She thrust the microphone towards the crowd once more.

*"Chance! Or! Trance!"*

"-and here's what that means. See, *normally* these wouldn't count. But! If you've got guts, you can choose to Trance Out and have these special stars added to your total count. That means we'd zap you with our Hypnomatic for a quick hypnosis session. Harmless. Only *problem* is that we're going to ramp up its power every time you choose to Trance Out, and after a few rounds, you might end up leaning towards *Bianca's* side when it comes time to choose which prize you're gonna be going home with."

"See, every time you hit a new milestone, we're gonna give you two options: Cash or Carry. Cash is just what you'd expect: more money. *Carry* is one of any number of prizes we had Bianca here write down before the show. They cost a little bit more than the money you'd get choosing Cash, and. Well, it sure is *sweet*, isn't it? Showing your honey-bunny you

wanna spoil her. You might not be able to put it in a bank account, but it's *love* that makes the world go 'round."

Vicky paused a moment, keeping her eyes on John. "Think you got that, John?"

He nodded. "I think so."

"Attaboy! Alright, John!" Vicky stepped to the side and motioned with a flourish. "Give 'er a spin and let's see where you land!"

No need to tell him twice! John grabbed one of the spokes of the wheel, raised it up, and gave it a good, strong spin. The audience applauded once more as the wheel spun around and around, but their enthusiasm turned to dismay as it clacked to a stop on a measly one star.

"Oof!" Vicky winced with a shake of her head. "Looks like my bad luck's contagious. That's gonna get you one star towards your prizes, *but!*" She wagged a finger. "It looks like you'd be getting two more -- for a total of *three* stars -- if you decide you wanna Trance Out." Vicky shrugged. "What's it gonna be, John? You want to hit the ground running or take it slow and steady? The more stars you get, the more cash and prizes you're going home with."

He had to fight the urge to roll his eyes. She was high-energy, but all the enthusiasm in the world wasn't going to convince John that the "Hypnomatic" was going to do a *single thing* to him. If he could get more prizes just by letting her use her little gadget on him, he wasn't about to pass up the chance.

"I think I'm gonna Trance Out, Vicky."

The crowd erupted in cheering, and even Bianca clapped her hands together giddily at his answer. Vicky nodded her approval as she made her way to his side, mic in hand.

"Bold move. You know what, John? I *like* it. So." She removed her top hat with a flourish, tucked her microphone under her armpit, and made a show of reaching into her hat with her free hand. "Swear it's around here somewhere. Here we are!"

She pulled a rather tacky-looking headset from her top hat. An Oculus Rift, this was not. No, this was like a pair of chrome goggles and an oversized set of headphones, each component pocked with blinking lights. For a TV show as popular as Chance or Trance, their prop department seemed to have the budget of a high school drama club. Hypnosis might not have been a risk, but looking like an ass sure was. John couldn't help but look up at Bianca after catching a glimpse of the "Hypnomatic," and he mouthed a silent "Seriously?" to her.

She just giggled and shrugged.

"Alright, John. We're just gonna get this bad boy on you -- and keep it on you, just so we don't gotta keep taking it off and putting it right back on -- and fire it up. Just like I said, first time is going to be short, sweet, and to the point. Every time you choose to Trance Out after that? It's gonna get stronger and stronger. I'm sure you got a lot of people rooting for you, so stay focused!" Vicky winked and clenched one hand into a fist. "Do it for them! And for yourself!"

John half-sighed and half-laughed as he slid the contraption onto his head. OK, to be fair, it was a *lot* more comfortable than it looked. Stupidly gaudy or not, the Hypnomatic fit surprisingly well, and soon John gave Vicky a thumbs-up.

She returned it with a wink and raised one hand high into the air. "Alright! Counting down from three! Two! *One!*"

Whatever Vicky did next, John couldn't see. His vision was suddenly obscured by two spinning spirals. Big and monochromatic, they whirled right in front of his eyes. Once the initial surprise wore off, though...

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...John couldn't help but laugh. Seriously? This sort of thing was straight out of old cartoons. If they thought *this* was going to hypnotize him, the producers either had a pretty low estimate of John or a high estimate of their tech. Either way, they only lasted a few seconds before the Hypnomatic shut down and he could see through the lenses again. Vicky grinned over at him, and Bianca could barely contain her laughter.

"So, John." Vicky winked. "Feeling sleepy yet?"

John shook his head with a smirk. "Might be surprising, but I think I'm doing just fine so far."

"Ooh, bad luck, Bianca! Looks like your beau's got an iron will!" Vicky sighed, leaning against the podium Bianca stood at. "I don't think we're gonna be sending you two back with any prizes. Just a boatload of cash. Alright, John!"

She straightened up and stepped back up beside the wheel. With a tap of her gloved finger, the slice he'd landed on turned from one full star and two outlines...to three outlines. "So, to keep things interesting, you can only land on each 'real' star once. After that? You're gonna have to Trance Out if you land on a space you already got. So don't get Duped! Otherwise you're gonna have to get zapped again to get any stars."

"Gotcha, Vicky," John replied, reaching up to grab the wheel's side.

"Glad to hear it!" Vicky presented the wheel once more with a flourish. "Alright, John. Let's give that wheel another spin!"

He obliged her request to the clatter of spokes and audience's raucous applause. Bianca clapped excitedly at the podium, bouncing on her heels as the spinning slowed. Even John was holding his breath by the end, because it looked like he was about to land on a full five stars! Just one...more...space...!

And of course it was one space too far. Instead of five guaranteed stars, he landed on a dud space: two empty stars. The audience groaned, John's shoulder's slumped, and Bianca heaved with a sigh.

"Ooh, so close!" Vicky winced, shaking her head in sympathetic dismay. "Them's the breaks. But, hey! It's not *all* bad!" Vicky gave John a pat on the back. "You took the first dose like a champ! If you want to Trance Out and claim these two empty stars right now, that's gonna bump you up to your first milestone: five stars!"

"So, John. What's it gonna be? Chance or Trance?"

Vicky leaned the microphone towards John, and it wasn't five seconds before he answered with a confident "Trance."

"Ladies and gentlemen, we've got a real daredevil over here!" Vicky smiled, announcing her delight over the similarly enthused audience's cheering. "I tell you, John. Most of the guys that come on here wait a few rounds before they Trance Out, but we are getting our money's worth from you! So." She gave his back another pat and stepped to the side. "You

just let us know if you want to sit down. We've got a chair for you *right here* if you want to take a load off. I don't know how much you watch the show, but *sometimes* our contestants think it's easier to just sit back and have their partner spin the wheel."

"I think I'll be fine, Vicky," John answered with a smirk. Wearing a goofy headset was one thing. Sitting back like he was too lazy to even compete on a game show? That wasn't something he could blame on the producers' sense of aesthetics.

"Alright! Just wanted to let you know. Without further ado...!" Vicky winked and snapped her fingers...

...and the goggles over his eyes powered up anew. This time with colors. Rings of technicolor light expanded from the center of his vision, pulsing and shimmering. And this time...there was a sound in his headphones, too. John couldn't tell if it was supposed to be Vicky. The voice was too calm to tell, considering he'd only heard Vicky speak with the energy of a game show hostess. Whoever it was, she had...a very nice voice.

"Relaxed. Getting very sleepy. Relaxed. Getting very sleepy."

Not exactly the most innovative attempt, but at least she wasn't telling him to cluck like a chicken. And with the rings of color drawing his gaze, John had to admit it *was* a little relaxing. If he wasn't on stage in front of a full studio audience -- and being filmed to have millions more watch him -- he could almost see himself enjoying it.

But just like that, the sound cut out, and so did the rings. John blinked, shaking his head for a moment and looking back to Vicky.

"So, John. What's the word. Any more...*relaxed*?" She shot him a wink, and Bianca watched with a quiet smile.

John shrugged with a chuckle and shook his head. "Still got too much stage fright to unwind right now, Vicky. Maybe later, but not right now."

"Ah, that's a shame!" Vicky strutted up to Bianca and leaned an elbow on her podium. "But either way, it's time for you to make a decision! See, you just hit five stars, and that means you get to choose between Cash or Carry!" Vicky gave the side of Bianca's podium a thump, and the previously dark screen on its front lit up.

"So, right now we're talking pretty low stakes. The choice is between two-hundred dollars or -- and this is Bianca's choice from before the show -- a full copper-bottomed kitchen set worth two-hundred-seventy-five! That's pots, pans, and lids! No knives, though. Hoo!" Vicky glanced over to Bianca. "Could you imagine if it came with a knife set, too? That'd be a no-brainer."

"I bet John would still have trouble with it," Bianca said, rolling her eyes. "Let's just say he's in his element right now."

"Oh?" Vicky quirked a brow and glanced towards the audience before turning back to Bianca. "Care to tell us exactly what you mean by that, Bee?"

Bianca's smile turned quietly delighted, and she rested her elbow on the podium. Her eyes sparkled with mischief as she kept her gaze fixed on John. "Johnny hasn't used his brain in *years*."

That got her a whoop of laughter from the audience, and soon John's crooked grin turned to a sardonic smirk. As the amusement died down, he waved Bianca's ribbing aside and rolled his eyes. "Alright, alright, that's enough of that. Vicky, I'm smarter than I look." He winked

and wagged. "And even if I'm not, maybe my *darling* wife and I can use that kitchen set to cook up some *brain food*. I'm going Carry."

"APPLAUSE" flashed in bright lights above the audience, and they did so with gusto. Vicky joined in, smiling toothily, and Bianca just grinned to herself and glanced away. When the sign went dim, Vicky cocked her head towards John and smirked at Bianca. "I dunno, Bee. Seems to me like he's got a good head on his shoulders."

"...He has his moments," Bianca finally admitted, to the audience's delight.

"You're telling me! But you know the golden rule: Show, don't tell. So let's get this show back on the road and give that wheel a spin!" Vicky raised one hand high with a flourish. "It's time to play! *Chance! Or! Trance!*"

With a roll of his eyes and a flick of the wrist, John sent the wheel spinning once more. Vicky could hype up the game all she wanted, but John knew that he was going to be just fine.

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It had been five spins total, and John was forced to admit that things were going a bit rougher than he thought. Sure, nothing happening was really...*bad*. But he was definitely out of it, even after the Hypnomatic shut down. Spirals and pulsing colors had turned to mesmerizing tessellations, and the droning commands of John's first foray into hypnosis were swapped in favor of binaural beats and layered voices. The techniques they used seemed to switch with every Trance he opted for, but there was no denying that they were getting more and more effective with each subsequent submission.

Vicky snapped her fingers in front of John's face, and he jolted to attention. "Bwuh?"

"Ha!" Vicky clapped a hand onto his back with a laugh. "Having a little trouble focusing, John? Hey, I don't blame you! Five rounds with the Hypnomatic is no joke. Bianca!" Vicky called over to John's wife, one hand on John's shoulder, the other on her hip. "What's your take? You think you'd do any better in his shoes? You strike me as the kinda gal who knows how to keep focused."

Bianca giggled and shook her head. "Oh, gosh, no. I'm awful at this kind of thing; I get distracted so easily."

"You don't say!" Vicky turned to John once more. "That true, Johnny?"

John blinked. He opened his mouth to speak...and took a moment or so to collect his thoughts before he answered with a simple "Yes." Then he held up a hand, as if to steady himself, and amended it with an "I think?"

He didn't quite understand *why* the audience thought that was so funny, but Bianca was giggling along with them, so they probably weren't laughing *at* him. At least he hoped they weren't. Vicky gave him another pat on the shoulder and nodded solemnly.

"The world may never know. Anyway! Three stars away from the fifteen star choice! Time to give the wheel another whirl! John, you might want to look away while it's spinning." She shrugged sympathetically. "Wouldn't want anything happening is all."

John looked at her, then at the wheel, then at Bianca. He seemed more than a little confused and definitely a little nervous about the whole thing. Like, was the wheel dangerous? He'd been spinning it before. Should he not have been? What if- Oh, Bianca was kind of gesturing towards it. Yeah, it was probably fine.

Right! He was on a game show. Oh, God, he felt silly now. Hand going up to grab one of the spokes, John smiled and shook his head. "You and me both. Sorry. Kind of zoned out there." He took a deep breath. "This Hypnomatic thing is something else, I gotta tell you. Alright." He raised his hand up. "Here goes nothing!"

And John sent the wheel spinning once more! The spokes clacked, the spiral painted on the center spun wildly. Kind of an inconvenient design, John mused as he watched the stars on the outer rim. After all, if he tried to look at the stars, the design naturally guided his eyes deeper into the spiral itself, and once he let his focus settle on the center of the spiral, he... couldn't stop staring. John blinked once or twice, but only because his eyes seemed to get tired otherwise. It was such a pretty spiral. Nice and simple. Easy to watch. So easy to watch. Pretty. John's eyelids drooped. So easy to watch. So pretty. His shoulders slumped. So easy to watch. So pretty.

The spiral stopped rather abruptly, and John flinched. Right! Game show. Don't focus on the spiral, focus on the stars. He looked to the top of the wheel to see what he'd landed on, and-

"Oh, come on!" One star and two outlines. Vicky stepped up beside him, ready to pose the question, but John's nascent trance had given way to frustration. He answered fast enough to cut Vicky off. "Trance Out! I'm gonna Trance Out."

She stepped back, eyes wide and hands raised. "Hey, whatever you want, buddy. I'm just here to keep things rolling." She tugged at her collar and whispered over to Bianca. "Temper, temper, am I right?"

Bianca was still all smiles, leaning against the podium and steepling her fingers casually. "He's *very* competitive."

"Well, I hope he knows I'm not competing against him! Down, boy!" Vicky pouted, crossing her arms and cocking one hip out. "I need a moment to recoup my cool. In the meantime, John? You can Trance Out."

Vicky snapped her fingers, and the Hypnomatic powered up again.

It seemed like this time the idea was to take him down without any words, because this session eschewed speech in favor of gentle, rhythmic tones. Not quite music, not quite ambient sound, either. Some combination of the two, along with a background that combined pulsing colors and...two interlaced spirals...

All John could really do was stare at it. There were no one to listen to. Nothing to respond to, mentally or otherwise. Just. Sound. And sight.

He felt himself relaxing. That wasn't the difficult part to notice. The harder part to keep in mind was that it was becoming harder and harder to...think, almost. He didn't have to. So it was almost as if he didn't want to. Didn't have to. Didn't want to. The spirals twisted endlessly in front of him, and the soothing tones in his ears seemed just loud enough to drown out any attempts at thought. Just soft enough to ensure the tranquility settling over his mind wasn't disturbed.

The pleasant monotony stretched on for what felt like hours. Time seemed to lose meaning without anything to hold reference against, and the sensations John was subjected to were so mesmerizing that he was content to passively observe them. His breathing slowed, as did his heart, and soon enough unseen hands guided him to sit. Yes, this was much nicer.

No need to worry about standing up straight. No need to do anything but lay back and stare up at the spirals. No need to do anything but sit back and listen to the soothing sounds.

And as John drifted somewhere between awake and asleep, he heard a gentle whisper, one that seemed to be coming from inside his own head. Told him to relax. To enjoy this. That it felt good to drift along and fall into trance. All he had to do was relax. All he had to do was sleep. So calm. So peaceful. So easy to sleep. So easy to relax.

His eyes sank shut. He drifted away to sleep. He let the words drift in one ear and out the other, taking with them all his silly little hang-ups about the show.

A few minutes later, John woke up smiling. After all, it was all just a game. And when the time came to make a choice, he made the right one. The one that made Bianca happy.

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Seven spins later, John was a bit out of it. OK, maybe he was more than a bit out of it. Head lolling on his shoulders, John was completely fractionated, even if he was completely unable to explain what that meant. The rapidfire sessions of sights and sounds, each "dose" amping up in intensity, had sent his thoughts scattering further and further...and making it that much harder to pull the threads back together once the Hypnomatic finally powered down.

Staring at the wheel as he tried to focus after the results of his last session Trancing, his shoulders slumped and his posture sagged...in the armchair Vicky had helpfully provided at his request. He heard Vicky say something to the crowd, but he didn't really *listen* to anything she was saying. Had to relax. Had to be a good boy.

He snapped back to half-aware "attention," blinking away the fuzziness in his head. If he had been a bit more coherent, maybe John would have been impressed by the gradual increase in power and variety of inductions. As it stood, however, he was more just trying to stay awake.

Spirals whirled in his mind's eye, the figments of ever-intensifying hypnotic control over him. Except the Hypnomatic had all made it so clear, hadn't it? He wasn't being controlled. He was too smart to be controlled. That's what the soothing, synthesized voice had reiterated time and time again. He wasn't being brainwashed; he was just relaxed. It wasn't mind control; it was all just a fun, silly game. None of it really mattered, and he was doing so well. Doing so well. Imagined spirals spun before his eyes, mixing, blending into each other. He was doing so well. He was just relaxing.

His eyes sank shut once more, and, distantly, he heard a group of people chuckling. The sound made him smile faintly. Fun. Silly. Just a fun, silly game.

And they got stuff for playing! Dimly, John remembered choosing to bring presents home, presents that made Bianca happy. So happy. He made her so happy when he chose to get her presents. Always felt so good to make Bianca happy. It was true, which was why it was so easy to agree with the voice and the spirals when they told John that *he loved to make Bianca happy* and that he would *always choose what made her happy*. John was a good boy. Such a good boy. Such a fun, silly game.

A loud *snap!* brought him out of his daydreaming, and he jerked his head around for the source. Oh. Just Vicky again. "Hi, Vicky," he mumbled, smiling up at her.



"Hey, Johnny." She leaned one elbow against his armchair, giving a sort of half-grin as she spoke into the microphone. "How're you holding up? Doing alright?"

John nodded. Normally he might have been a bit embarrassed about it, but in the state he was in, he couldn't think of a reason to hold back a long, luxurious sigh. Sinking back into his seat, he shut his eyes and smiled, wide and indulgent. "Mhm." He cracked one eye open. "Are we gonna spin the wheel again?"

"Lookit that!" Vicky gave his shoulder a pat and winked. "Most people tend to forget what they're doing after the ninth or tenth. You're exactly right, John; Bianca is going to give the wheel another spin, and then you get to choose if you want to take the stars or go into trance again." She gave his shoulder another, speaking nice and slow for him.

Oh, that was right. He'd gotten too relaxed to actually spin the wheel himself, so Bianca had volunteered to help him take care of things. John looked around the stage for his wife, and-

He nearly whimpered when he saw her. Bianca was standing right there, right next to the big, flashing wheel, and she just looked. *So* beautiful. She was always beautiful, of course, but he wasn't normally this smitten. John swooned as he looked to Bianca.

"Hi-i-i, honey," he murmured dreamily.

Even through the rose-tinted glasses of his lingering trance, John could see the blush on her cheeks when Bianca smiled back. "Hi, baby."

"Love you, honey."

Giggling into the palm of her hand, she turned steadily redder before finally blowing a kiss. "Love you, too, baby." She reached up and grabbed one spoke of the wheel. "I'm going to spin the wheel for you now. OK, baby?"

"Mhmhm."

"Oh!" Vicky chimed in, stepping up beside Bianca and holding one finger up. "Before you do! There's just one *teensy* thing about this next spin. Or should I say 'this *last* spin.'" She shook her head with a sigh and rested a hand on Bianca's shoulder. "Parting is such sweet sorrow, yadda yadda. And while you've been a *terrific* pair of contestants, all good things must come to an end. But!"

She turned to the audience with a wink and another dazzling smile. "Here on Chance or Trance, we like to end things with a bang. So we're going to up the stakes and give you two the chance to go home with an extra-special bonus! Now. You've hit the first four thresholds. You're two stars from the fifth. That means you're going home with the kitchen set, the spa trip for two, the cruise down to the Caribbean, *and* the shopping spree at Rodeo Drive. All that remains to be seen..."

"...is if you're going to be going home with the Cash prize of one million dollars...or the Carry prize of a cozy little villa down in the Florida Keys? John, you probably want to start thinking about that right now, because it's all but *guaranteed* you're gonna get at least *one* of them. But if it's guaranteed, where's the fun?"

Vicky tapped the wheel with one gloved fingertip, and the stars on its surface seemed to multiply. "So here's what we're gonna do. If you can score *seven* stars in *one* spin, we're going to throw in that extra-special bonus I mentioned. Now, this last spin is going to be catch-as-catch-can. What you see is what you get. No Trance, all Chance. Poor John's been

through enough today, and quite frankly I don't think his brain could take another dose of what we've got."

She watched Bianca with a toothy grin and cocked her head towards John. "That being said, he's still the one calling the shots, so if you've got any ideas on Cash versus Carry, you might want to state your case now, Bee. I don't know if lover boy is gonna be able to make a decision on his own, so you may want to let him know which side of the prize you think's best *before* you give the wheel a spin."

Bianca nodded. John just kind of looked between Vicky and Bianca. He'd kind of trailed off in the middle of Vicky's first sentence, and he was just content to listen along without truly understanding what was being- Oh, Bianca was waving at him. He raised an arm sluggishly and waved back. "Hi-i-i, baby."

"Hi, Johnny." Bianca giggled once more, grinning from ear to ear. She shifted almost nervously from side to side before refocusing and looking to John. "Alright. Uh. I don't really know if you're going to remember this, but. I just want you to know that I'll be happy no matter what you choose, OK?" She clasped her hands together, glanced away for a second, and finally looked back to John. "You're the sweetest husband I could ever have, so as far as I'm concerned, I've already won the only prize worth having."

As the audience -- and Vicky -- swooned with delight, Bianca all but collapsed into embarrassed giggling. Vicky strode over and wrapped an arm around her shoulder, grinning just as wide...even if she wasn't blushing beet-red like Bianca was.

"Bee, you know you're on a *game show*, right? You wanna renew your vows, do it on your own time!" She jostled Bianca playfully before letting go and tilting the mic towards Bianca.

"I don't know! He's just being so sweet right now!"

"Mm." Vicky glanced over to John, who was more or less occupying himself blinking and trying to stay awake. "Sweet's one word for it. Alright!" She snapped her fingers once more, and John's head slumped forward. "Uh. Right. Bianca, how about you give that wheel one last spin? I'll go wake Johnny up."

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After waking him up, Vicky mercifully covered John's eyes to keep him from slipping under again. After all, a spare glance at the wheel had nearly sunk him earlier, and in the state he was in then, he wouldn't last long at all watching it. Still, even John perked up at the audience's gasp.

The wheel had landed on a space with exactly seven hollow stars, and...that was important, as far as John could remember. He wasn't exactly sure why. But given that Vicky had just shown Bianca and the crowd something. And given that Bianca was staring right at it, wide-eyed and redder than ever. And kind of *drooling*, even.

He guessed it was a good thing?

"So! Of course there's the choice between Cash and Carry if John opts to Trance Out one last time, but there's the matter of the bonus on top of it!" Vicky leaned against Bianca's shoulder, smirking. "The extra-special bonus with all the aforementioned *late night* applications this version has." She was quiet for a moment, just watching Bianca cover her face with her hands. "Bianca, you're being kind of *quiet*. Everything OK?"

"Shut up," Bianca giggled, shaking her head. "Oh, my God."

"We haven't exactly shown off what it can *do* on the show, but." Vicky leaned in a little closer. "I'm sure you can imagine what sorts of shenanigans a married couple can get into with something like *this* on their hands. Bee, are you doing OK? You need to sit down?"

Bianca shook her head wordlessly.

"Alright, whatever you say! *John!*" Vicky thrust her hand in the air. "The last decision of the night! Are we going Cash for the million dollars...or Carry for the villa?"

John looked at Vicky. Then at Bianca. Then at the wheel. Then...

Then he shut his eyes and thought for a moment.

He didn't quite think about the decision he had to make. He didn't think about Cash. He didn't think about Carry. He thought about Bianca and him on the beach. Smiling as they watched the sunset. The sound of waves crashing in the distance. The sweet taste of fruit on Bianca's lips as they kissed. Days spent in sunlight, nights spent watching the stars blink into sight, one by one.

John's chest rose and fell slowly, and for a moment, he was about to drift off to sleep once more. But just before Vicky stepped over to nudge him awake, his eyes opened, he smiled, and he nodded.

Then he blinked. He couldn't remember the word for it. "Uh." John blinked again, looking at Bianca and Vicky. He pointed weakly towards a picture of the villa...

...and the crowd cheered wildly in response! "APPLAUSE" flashed in bright letters above them, and the audience happily obliged. "Well, that's that, folks! Looks like John and Bianca are going to be spending their next vacation down in the Florida Keys! *But that's not all!* They're going to be spending their next vacation down in the Florida Keys...with their very own *Hypnomatic!*"

Vicky hefted a box into the air with one hand, and even if the picture on the box made it look a great deal more sophisticated, there was no doubt that the helmet depicted was the same kind that John had over his head right now.

"Now, there's a *whole* lot of technical mumbo-jumbo we've got to go over with the missus before we can hand something like this over, but something tells me this is going to see a *lot* of use in the future. Isn't that right, Bianca?"

"I plead the fifth."

"Smart move! Anyway, I hope you folks have enjoyed watching tonight, but remember to tune in next week to see the next episode of...!"

"*Chance! Or! Trance!*"