



**DOUBLE  
TROUBLE**  
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Charlie Quinn sat inside Jackson's Tavern, a neighborhood bar off Federal Highway in Fort Lauderdale. He was downing shots of Dewar's followed by beer chasers. Even Quinn knew this wasn't a good idea. He gazed up from his drink and tried to focus on the damn Christmas lights glittering at the end of the bar. It was another reminder the biggest holiday of the year was less than a week away. And like St. Nick, he too would be busy. Only not wrapping presents. Not this year.

This year, like the past ten on the force, Quinn would be called in to examine another crime scene to figure out whether the deceased died from foul play or a serious case of the holiday blues. The truth: Quinn was tired of turning over dead bodies. Hell, Charlie Quinn was just plain tired.

He hoisted his shot glass and gazed through it.

The bartender, Simms, watched his biggest tipper stare at his drink. "Something wrong with the booze, Charlie?"

Quinn shook his head slowly. "Just wanted to toast another festive season."

Simms, a former bodybuilder who got lazy along the way, stood at six-four. At fifty-four, his soft belly and twenty-inch neck needed tightening. He looked like a bald teddy bear. Until you pissed him off. Then meet Darth Vader. Not too many patrons pissed off Simms and talked about it. He liked Quinn and lifted an imaginary glass in Quinn's direction. "It's just you and me tonight, Charlie. Happy holidays."

"Thanks, Simms," Quinn said, then downed the shot. He sat motionless, eyes closed. He hated this season and thinking about *her* wasn't about to make him feel better. But the same morbid thought penetrated his murky brain: Regina gazing up at her new lover and moaning. What a schmuck for not seeing the freight train barreling in his direction.

Quinn opened his eyes and motioned the bartender, who, on cue, approached with an opened bottle of scotch. "Gotta call it quits after this one, Charlie," he said, pouring the liquid gold into the glass. "It's for your own good."

Quinn flashed a sloppy grin. "Hey, Simms, you ever been in love?"

"Me, lots of times. I'm working on my third wife." He laughed. "What about you, Charlie? You and Regina still an item?"

Quinn let a few awkward moments pass. "We were supposed to get married." Quinn stuck his hand in his pants pocket and clumsily removed a two-carat diamond engagement ring. He waved it at Simms. "She gave it back."

The bartender eyed the ring, then Quinn. "Sorry to hear that, Charlie. Save it for the next one. There's always a next time."

"No fuckin' way!" Quinn shook his head violently almost falling off the stool.

"Easy, Charlie. Don't be too hard on yourself. There are plenty of women around."

Quinn's bloodshot eyes gazed through the ring. "I waited my whole life for Regina," he said almost to himself, then dropped the ring on the bar.

The bartender leaned into Quinn's space. "So what happened?"

"Money."

Simms nodded. "It's always about money."

"She said she wanted more. Needed more." He blinked hard. "It was bullshit."

The bartender lifted his eyes to the wall clock, then returned to Quinn. "You want me to call you a taxi or something?"

Quinn waved him off. "Cash'll be here soon."

"Your partner?"

"He'll take me home, tuck me in." Quinn grinned.

"That's a good idea, Charlie."

Quinn raised his shot glass, found his mouth, and poured down the remaining firewater. He sat, waited for his foggy thoughts of Regina to dissipate. Without luck, he slapped the top of the bar with his hands. "Gotta get some fresh air, Simms. Fresh thoughts." He struggled off the bar stool and glanced in the mirror. He rubbed his eyes and swore. "Now my eyes are deceiving me."

"You say something?" The bartender drifted back to Quinn.

"The fucking mirror ... there's two of me in there."

"More to love, Charlie." The bartender laughed.

"Just what I need, another Charlie Quinn to carry around." He picked up his change from the bar, left a twenty for his shrink, and weaved toward the door.

"I thought you were waiting for your partner," Simms called out with concern.

"I'll wait outside." Quinn continued to the door.

"But the ring ... you forgot your engagement ring."

"You keep it. I don't need it no more."

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