



AN O FOR TWO
PREQUEL SHORT STORY

HOLLEY TRENT

FOR YOU

A *Den of Sin* Short Story

By Holley Trent

<http://www.denofsinseries.com>

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Clint Morstad had probably played in Major League baseball games with more fans in attendance than the total population of the little North Carolina town he was currently infiltrating. Maybe that was a good thing. Having fewer witnesses would make what he had to do easier.

He pushed his mirrored sunglasses up his nose and grabbed the card shop's door handle.

If he had the same kind of luck in relationships that he had in baseball, his planned encounter wouldn't go all sideways. There wouldn't be two grown-ass men arguing in the middle of a sweet little store that probably sold as many Bibles as it did greeting cards.

And Ken wouldn't say those words he'd probably been holding in reserve for months since meeting Clint at that bar: *fuck off*.

Clint probably deserved it, though.

He let his nerves out on a long exhale and opened the door.

Bells chimed as he crossed the threshold, and some cheerful Christmas music piped through the speaker in the corner. With the tunes, tinsel, and twinkling lights, he should have felt uplifted. Fucking *merry*, even.

No. He'd been on edge for weeks—ever since he'd come home from a game, and Ken wasn't there to greet him.

Upon feeling the sharp pricks of his nails digging into his palms, he drew in a breath and relaxed his fists one finger at a time while scanning the three-aisle store.

According to the sign dangling from the drop ceiling, the Christmas cards were in the back-left corner. Seemed as good a place to look for Ken as any.

Clint shook his head at the cashier when she asked if she needed any help and headed to the back.

No distractions.

Being here was hard enough as it was. He didn't chase men. Never had to before.

He found his lover squatting in front of a *Cards for Mom* rack. He approached him quietly, watching for a minute or more as Ken lifted cards and assessed the sentiments within each before returning them to the rack.

He probably wanted to pick the exact right one. Typical Ken.

While Ken's rock star-farm boy good looks had attracted Clint to him, it was Ken's consideration—his *intuitiveness*—that

made Clint want to stick. Clint liked talking to him as much as he liked looking at him, and while Clint had a reputation for being charming, that was all a ruse for the press. Concern for his sponsorship prospects and the health of his bank accounts. He was *on* all the time. A charisma machine.

He was tired.

Ken had been the only person in six years Clint had turned the sparkle off for, and Clint worried now that was part of the reason Ken had pulled away.

He had to find out for sure, and that's why he'd come to this place—Ken's hometown.

Just do it.

Clearing his throat, Clint leaned against the rack behind him and stuffed his hands into his coat pockets. "I always get my stepmother the six-dollar one," he said.

Ken's hands stilled, but he didn't turn.

"But, my stepmother is the kind of woman who tends to look at the price on the back before she opens it and shakes out the check inside."

Ken returned the card we was holding to the rack and slowly stood.

Clint swallowed down his nerves. He didn't even feel this much stress pitching against the number one team in the league.

Ken turned, cut his gaze to the front of the store—likely to the cashier—and then settled his focus on Clint. He seemed to be assessing him. Verifying that he was *truly* there.

That was fine, because Clint was doing the same thing.

He'd missed looking at Ken. That midnight hair, shorn short on the sides, and dark eyes made him look dangerous and mysterious. The piercings and tats added to that, along with his imposing height and fit physique, but the truth was he was a sweetheart. Probably too good for Clint, but here Clint was anyway. He had to try. Ken was *The One*.

“What are you doing here?” Ken asked before turning back to the cards.

The elderly clerk tottered past carrying a big box, and disappeared into the storeroom.

“Don't turn your back on me.” Clint looped his arms around Ken's neck and pressed his cheek to his. He inhaled the other man's familiar, musky scent—the one that had long since faded from the hoodie he'd stolen from him back in September—and tightened his hold on Ken.

Ken stiffened, then relaxed in Clint's hold. He let out a ragged breath and let his head hang. “God. Seriously, what are you doing here? I guess I can't really hide from you. Just like you found me that first night.”

Clint chuckled. Ken was never going to let him live that down. They'd met in a bar Clint's team was celebrating at after a game. Clint invited Ken to continue the party at the team's hotel. When he didn't show up, Clint went out to find him. Fortunately, he hadn't left the bar.

"I understand why you'd want to try to hide," Clint murmured, "but you're easy to find. I saw your truck outside. I figured you'd be in one of the shops."

"And if I wasn't? What was your plan?"

"I'd keep calling your phones until you answered. If that didn't work, I'd pick up a phonebook and call everyone in it with the last name *Brook*. Eventually, someone would point me to you."

"Remind me to move out of this town."

"I'll remind you."

The stockroom door clicked, and Clint pulled away. He didn't have to be warned. Professional baseball players didn't make a habit of flaunting their sexualities. While Clint wasn't exactly discreet all the time, he was calculated about his flirting. Ken, on the other hand, wasn't even remotely *out*. He lived somewhere on the sliding scale of sexuality between *straight* and *kinda gay*. Clint had always thought "gay for you" was a ridiculous concept until it'd applied to the man he was courting.

And he was indeed courting. Like groveling, it was another skill he was unpracticed in. He'd never encountered a keeper before Ken.

Ken grabbed a velvety-looking card and matching envelope, skirted around Clint, and followed the clerk up the aisle.

Clint picked up a six-dollar *From Your Stepson* card and headed toward the front of the store, too.

"Good choice," the clerk said to Ken. "Your mama might be the only one to get that one this year."

"I'm glad to hear it. I accidentally got her one she already had one year, and she gave me the cold shoulder for a week."

"She's sensitive. You should know that by now." She handed Ken his receipt and tucked the card into a little paper sack.

Ken waved goodbye, and gave Clint a speculative look before leaving the store. It was easy enough to read: *catch me if you can*.

He would.

"Do you need stamps?" the clerk asked, pulling Clint's attention back to the transaction.

He grunted. "Actually, yeah, I do. Is there a mailbox nearby?"

"I can mail it for you. Carrier should be here in an hour. How far does it have to go?"

"New England." Grinding his teeth, Clint signed the credit card receipt, scribble his name inside the card, and hastily

addressed the envelope. No check this year. His spoiled brat stepmother would have to get over it. He'd learned not long after signing his Major League contract that money didn't buy love *or* affection, but it did keep the second Mrs. Morstad in Botox and those expensive red-soled shoes. Clint was tired of trying. He *needed* to stop trying, and his father had said as much.

Clint handed the clerk the addressed card, nodded his thanks, and immediately searched the street upon exiting the shop.

There was Ken down the road, turning right at the town courthouse, and driving slower than a moped with one flat tire.

Typical Ken. Clint grinned.

It only took him three minutes to find Ken idling at an abandoned old gas station on the outskirts of town. Clint pulled his rental car up to Ken's driver's side and let down the window.

Ken let his door down, too, and leaned onto the sill. "I'm glad to see you, really, but what are you doing here?"

So he didn't hate him. Why did knowing that seem to complicate things even more?

Clint felt his brow scrunch. "You weren't at my place when I got back from the World Series. You told me you had the time off."

Ken nodded. "I did."

Logic suggested that something had made Ken change his mind. *Maybe what we did that night before I left?*

Shit. Of course.

“Ken, did I...did I hurt you?”

Clint played rough, and Ken was a go-with-the-flow kind of guy. It would have been just like Ken to let Clint have his way even if he wasn't that into the scenes, but Clint wasn't that kind of masochist. He didn't want to play like that if Ken didn't like it.

“Did I go too far, Ken?”

Ken's dark eyebrows inched up and he let his exhale out in a sputter. “In the bedroom? Is that what you think this is about?”

“Is it not?”

Ken scoffed. “No. I told you repeatedly that if you did something I didn't like, I'd tell you. Weren't you listening? I liked seeing you gratified.”

Clint opened his mouth, but before he could get words out, Ken put up a hand.

“It's not about you being a man, either. I don't fight my attraction to you. I don't know how anyone could.”

That should have felt like a relief, but it wasn't. There had to be another shoe waiting to drop. “What is it then?”

Ken shook his head, obviously incredulous.

To what, Clint didn't know.

“All that time, I thought you were a little cold, and I started to take it personally. But that look on your face right now, Clint...*shit*.”

He'd been called worse things than cold, but he hadn't wanted Ken to think that of him. He'd tried to show him warmth, and had felt stupid for it. Like it was unnatural.

“You really don't know, Clint?”

“What am I missing?” *Other than you.*

“I gave you my body, but I was offering you my heart, too. You didn't even acknowledge it.”

Clint's vision fogged and pulse thudded in his ears. “Your heart?”

“Why do you look so confused, Clint? Could it really be that you don't know what that looks like? Someone loving you?”

Clint shook his head.

He *didn't*. How could he?

—

Ken held open the front door of his rental house and waited for Clint to walk past him.

The other man moved to the middle of the living room with his hands stuffed in his coat pockets, looking at this and that in the cluttered space.

Ken didn't have to guess what Clint was thinking. Compared to Clint's palatial digs up in Richmond, Ken's house was a rural shoebox.

The shoebox suited Ken and his mechanic's salary just fine.

He closed the door. "Welcome. Make yourself at home, if you can stand it."

"Funny." Clint shrugged off his coat and laid it across the coffee table.

"Want anything to drink? Eat? I haven't been to the grocery store since last week, but I'm pretty sure I have peanut butter."

"I'll pass. Thanks."

"Suit yourself." Ken tossed his coat over Clint's and loosened the top button of his flannel shirt. The fabric chafed. He'd had a bit of touch-up work done on his chest piece and the scab still hadn't healed.

Clint raised his chin at him. "You got new ink?"

"No, just fixed that mermaid you said looked cross-eyed."

Clint laughed. Such a rare fucking thing, and the sound of it always made Ken feel ten pounds lighter.

"Can I see it?"

"Yeah." Ken finished unbuttoning his shirt and pulled off the tank beneath it.

In seconds, Clint was in his space, his large, rough hand pressing over Ken's sternum.

Ken always managed to feel a bit possessed by Clint when he was near, and that had scared him at first—that some tornado with red hair and a killer smile made him want to submit. But, he'd quickly learned that few things made him happier than pleasing Clint, and it was because it seemed very few things could manage it.

Clint traced around the mermaid on her perch and let his fingers linger on Ken's chest. His forehead furrowed.

"Come on," Ken whispered. "Her eyes aren't crossed anymore."

Clint dropped his hand and shook his head. "The tat's fine."

"Yeah? I can put my shirt back on?"

"I wish you would. It's hard looking at you and not being able to play."

"Oh, I see how it is. A guy professes his love for you and looking at him makes you want to stop touching him?"

"I just don't believe you do."

"Why?"

Clint shrugged. "It's complicated."

“And I don’t rate high enough for you to explain it to me?” He didn’t really think that now, but he was curious to hear the rebuttal.

“You say you love me, but I *asked* you to move in with me, remember? But you weren’t there. You just...I—”

“Don’t say I left you.” Ken snapped up his tank top and pulled it over his head. “I wasn’t there, no, but it wasn’t because I didn’t want you. Maybe I thought you were bullshitting me a little. Treating me like a toy. Every time you opened up a little, you’d pull right back in.” Sighing, he rested his hands on Clint’s shoulders and gave the other man a little shake. “The only times you’re vulnerable are when my clothes are off. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“You think you have to get naked for me to tell you I feel something for you, too?”

“Yeah, I do. Because you always have to be the one in control, but that’s okay.”

Clint raised one russet eyebrow.

“Really.” Ken squeezed his shoulders and headed to the kitchen. “You didn’t come all the way down here because you wanted a screw. I know that. I can see that this, *whatever* it is, is tough for you.”

He had the cabinet open and was reaching for the peanut butter when Clint, quiet as a cat burglar, grabbed his wrist. Clint

hooked his chin over Ken's shoulder like he did at the card shop and wrapped his arms around Ken's waist. "Let me buy you dinner. I can get you something better than peanut butter."

"I'm a peanut butter kind of guy."

"I know you are, but I want to take care of you."

"I know that. You've been trying to since the night we met, haven't you? In the only way you knew how?"

Ken hadn't wanted Clint's money. He'd just wanted Clint. They just fit together so well, and not just when their limbs were entwined in bed. There was a give and take between the two of them that really worked when Clint *let it*.

"I thought you weren't willing to take what I was offering you," Ken said.

Clint didn't respond.

They just stood there in front of the open cabinet for a few minutes, quiet.

Clint skimmed his lips across Ken's jaw and straightened up. "I have a gift for you."

"Stop buying me things. I'm not that kind of guy."

"I know you are, but this...this is different. You're right. I like being the one in control, and there's a reason for that. I've always seen things a little differently, you know? From the time I was a kid. My mother loved every one of my quirks, though."

“But she died.” Ken knew that much, if not how his lover had fared with it. It was one of those things he’d always brushed away in conversation, and Ken hadn’t pushed. Maybe that was his mistake—just assuming Clint wouldn’t tell him when what he really needed was for someone to make him talk.

Clint grunted. “The household tolerance for quirk diminished greatly after that. My father had only put up with it because of her.”

“I’m sorry.”

Clint looked at his feet. “You don’t owe me an apology. I owe you hundreds of them, though. Thousands. Some of the things I want to tell you...”

“Hey. Tell me when you’re ready.”

“You’re just going to go with the flow like that, huh?”

“Middle child thing. My mama tells me I’m laid-back to a fault.” He grinned. The truth was that he didn’t see where he had a choice. He’d regretted not being there waiting for Clint, but had chosen to make a stand. Ken had wanted him from the night they met in that bar and Clint had daringly insinuated that Ken’s place was in Clint’s bed. He’d wanted Clint to make love to him, sure, but more than that, he wanted to see that light in his eyes every time Clint turned to him.

Clint could dim most of his unwanted emotions, but he couldn't hide *that*. That he could make Clint happy in such a small way made Ken feel powerful.

"So, what's the gift you have for me?"

"I gotta confess it was a pretty asshole premise. I guess I was in a mood the day I bought them, but I bought tickets. Plane tickets."

"To where?"

"Home."

"You never go home." And Ken understood why now. Why would Clint go to a place where he didn't feel wanted?

Clint nodded. "Like I said, it was an asshole thing. You can trade your ticket for some other place, and I won't be mad. I wanted to fly home and flaunt my boyfriend. Maybe have some wall-pounding sex in the bedroom I got pushed out of at barely eighteen and walk around puffing on cigars I lit with rolled-up C-notes."

Understanding Clint a little better now, Ken thought that doing such a thing might actually go a long way toward fixing what was broken in him. Maybe he could recognize what love felt like if he had a reminder of what it didn't.

"I'll go with you," Ken said.

"You don't mean that."

“Yeah, I do. I want to know what makes you tick. Know how to handle you.”

Clint stared at him for a long while, jaw clenched and lips tight. Finally, he swallowed. “I hope you figure it out. I want you to.”

THE END

See Ken and Clint 11 years later in the MMF erotic romance [O for Two](#), available for purchase now.