

TEXAS HOLDEM

Written by

Larisa Vödisch-Nikitina

Schützenmattstrasse 43, 4051 Basel, Switzerland
Email: larisavoedisch@gmail.com

TEXAS HOLDEM

FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - DAY

The room is large and filled with luxurious objects. The furnishing is in pink ivory, and Cézanne's picture "The Card Players" is on the wall. Six men sit at an elegant Texas Holdem poker table.

The DEALER is a beautiful, young mixed black-Caucasian woman with a sophisticated hairstyle and long manicured nails. She peers attentively into the faces of the players, smiling charmingly but sternly.

To her left sits the OFFICIAL - a small, fat, and bald, middle-aged man, wearing a worn blue shirt and a new green tie. He casts frequent glances at Rolex, clearly proud of it.

Next to him sits the DOCTOR, a tall man of about fifty, with glasses, and a white shirt. His gaze slides over the Dealer as if she were a patient who needs a diagnosis.

There are two players opposite the Dealer - the LAWYER and the POLITICIAN. The Lawyer is about forty years old, clean-shaven, with slicked-back hair. He seems to be thinking about something and doesn't look at anyone.

The Politician is in his 30s. He sits sprawled in his chair, looking at the Dealer with a sly smile as if she were prey.

To the Dealer's right is the BUSINESSMAN - a man in his 70s, gray-haired, in shorts, and a T-shirt. On his head is a black cap with a visor on the back. He casually crosses his legs and stares at the faces in front of him.

Behind him is the BANKER. He is about sixty, with long black curly hair, and a goatee. On his little fingers are rings with enormous emeralds framed in diamonds. At first, he looks intrigued with the Dealer, and then turns his attention to the Official.

BANKER
Hey! "Time is money!"

The Official throws a one-hundred-dollar bill on the table as a small blind. The Doctor winces but puts two Benjamins on the table. Then the Dealer deals two cards to everyone in a circle. Everybody except the Businessman casts a look at them. The Businessman watches their faces.

The Official's face perks up; he has the King and Ace of Spades.

The Doctor looks at his cards - the Seven of Hearts and the Two of Diamonds - for a long time.

The Lawyer scratches the back of his head, looking thoughtfully at his Four of Clubs and Five of Spades.

The Politician glances at his cards; the Ace of Clubs and the Ace of Hearts. He then quickly folds them in his hands and stretches even more on the chair. An insidious smile persists on his face.

The Banker sees the Queen of Clubs and Ten of Diamonds in his hands. He smiles radiantly, as if freshly in love.

After a short beat in thought, the Lawyer tosses four hundred dollars on the table. The Politician, Banker, and Businessman silently throw one after another four hundred dollars on the table behind him.

The Official lowers his gaze, then throws his cards down.

LAWYER

You folding? Already?

The Official lights a cigarette. The Doctor's lips tighten, but he makes his call. A tense silence pervades.

The Dealer collects the money in a pile and lays out three cards on the table - a flop. These are the Three of Diamonds, the Six of Hearts, and the Queen of Spades.

BANKER

(to the Official)

You're giving up way too quickly!

OFFICIAL

You think too bad of me!

DOCTOR

(to the Banker)

He doesn't like to bluff, unlike you.

BANKER

(snickering)

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

OFFICIAL

(snidely)

"Each bird loves to hear himself sing."

BANKER

Well, I'll take that as a compliment.

LAWYER

Please do it. Just don't think that he is unaware of your tricks. You have nothing but bluffs in your cards and your life. And his bluff is by not showing that an ordinary official knows all this.

BUSINESSMAN

I like that kind of bluff; it is not dangerous for us. But I think an ordinary official can't buy a Rolex if he doesn't take bribes. Unless it's just a fake.

The Official quickly hides his watch under his shirtsleeve.

OFFICIAL

Well, this picture you have is also fake...

The Businessman laughs loud.

BUSINESSMAN

Shall we play?

The Doctor knocks on the table; he decides to check. The Lawyer does the same. The Politician puts down four hundred dollars, then winks at the Dealer. She pretends not to notice this. The Banker and then, the Businessman, make their calls.

DOCTOR

I find it very sexy, but...

He folds. The Lawyer looks thoughtfully at the Dealer, then slowly puts the money on the table.

POLITICIAN

Well, the game has finally started.

(to the Doctor)

Do you never bluff, Doctor? We know everything about you! You're trying to hide the fact that you're getting money from the pharmaceutical companies for prescribing expensive drugs to your patients. Isn't it?

DOCTOR

Doesn't compare to your bluff. You are in the pockets of industry, working for business people while selling false dreams to the masses. Oh, you politicians!

POLITICIAN

(dryly)

Well, everyone has to make a living.

LAWYER

That's it. The system obliges.

DOCTOR

(to the Lawyer)

Wait, you'll come to me for treatment!

LAWYER

As a lawyer, I understand everything better than you guys do! You can't even think of surviving without bluffing! Sometimes I've to deal with very naive people. They think about everybody, but everybody thinks for themselves! They're invariably dragged into court for their "kindness of heart," and then I am called upon to save them!

(beat)

Look! If you start treating a patient, as you see fit in contradiction to the Department of Health regulations, his relatives will sooner or later strip you to the bone when he dies. You will lose everything - your license, money, family, and your future. So, think in advance who is closest to you - your patient or your wife and children!

POLITICIAN

Are we going to play or "politicize"?

He makes eyes at the Dealer again. She smiles coldly and lays out the fourth card, the Ten of Spades, on the table.

LAWYER
 (to the Politician)
 Damn, let's play!

He takes a wallet from his pocket, tossing one-hundred-dollar bills on the table.

POLITICIAN
 How many are there?

DEALER
 Eight hundred.

POLITICIAN
 I don't trust you!

He too, tosses some money on the table.

BUSINESSMAN
 (to the Politician)
 Watch out! You'll lose your shirt!

BANKER
 (smiling but aggressive)
 He must know his place in the hierarchy!

The Banker, and after him the Businessman, throw their money on the table.

LAWYER
 Okay. "Brawns over brains." Or -
 money over brains...

He thinks for a minute, then folds.

BUSINESSMAN
 Look how easily we scared him! You know, we almost always bluff.

LAWYER
 I guess so. I even suppose the Dealer is your "protégé"! That way, you also get to play around with the folk: first, it's your "protégé," and then... "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

POLITICIAN
 (laughing)
 Do you mean: "Every man has his price?"
 (covetously looking at the Dealer)
 (MORE)

POLITICIAN (CONT'D)

Protégé, you say? We'll see it now!

He throws a wad of money on the table, then stares at the Dealer with sly eyes. She only smiles with her lips. The Banker takes out a bundle of bills tied with an elastic band of his pocket.

BANKER

"Money makes money!" There are three thousand and two hundred here.

He confidently throws the bundle on the table.

BUSINESSMAN

But not by themselves! Who do you think works to carry them to your bank?

He picks a hundred dollar bills out of his pocket and quickly counts three thousand and two hundred, before tossing the money onto the table.

BANKER

Oh really? Is it you who work? Who borrows money from me for your business?

POLITICIAN

Screw you, investors!

He folds sharply.

BANKER

(to the Businessman)

Eh, they lack courage and give up far too quickly! Don't you want to look at your cards?

BUSINESSMAN

What to watch? You bluff. I bluff. We've known each other for a long time. But our Lawyer - what is his bluff in life?

POLITICIAN

He's this "piper"! He takes money from everyone but simultaneously plays for you and your opponent, much like our lady, who deals with everyone here.

Everybody laughs cheerfully and winks openly at the Dealer. She smiles, revealing her snow-white teeth.

POLITICIAN (CONT'D)
I wonder what her bluff is.

The Dealer silently places the river card - the Jack of Spades.

OFFICIAL
(screaming)
Wow!

He grabs his cards and looks at them in amazement. His face flushes; it seems like he is about to have a heart attack. He loosens his tie and, breathing heavily, wipes the sweat from his face and bald spot with a paper towel.

BUSINESSMAN
Well, everything is clear! You'll never become wealthy and change your social status because you don't believe in your happiness.

The Official lights a cigarette nervously again. His face twitches.

POLITICIAN
Hey you, Businessman! Your happiness depends on me! If I had not given you this state contract, there would have been nothing to bring to the bank!

BUSINESSMAN
And who is your luck? Maybe not me? Who needs you, if not me!

POLITICIAN
The people! Let people say!

He looks at the Dealer, but she quickly looks away.

BUSINESSMAN
Stop this chatter! The people! We have placed you, which is why you are here today. If we want, you won't be here tomorrow. Let's see what you will say about people then.

The Banker winks at him. They both laugh merrily.

POLITICIAN

(to the Banker, angrily)

Everyone knows about your bluff!
You're playing the stock market
with other people's money.

(to the Businessman)

By the way, with your money too!

LAWYER

Don't worry about him; he has his
bluff! He hides the fact that he
cannot repay his debts because he
borrowed a lot and from different
banks. Now he's only got one last
option - to borrow from the mafia.

The Banker exchanges glances with the Businessman.

BUSINESSMAN

That's not true! I've got enough
cash.

BANKER

Let's see!

He tosses another wad of dollars on the table. The
Businessman puts his wallet there.

BUSINESSMAN

Showdown?

The Banker nods in agreement. The Businessman looks at his
cards and... discards them in frustration: the Seven and Nine
of Hearts.

Next, the Banker shows his cards; he has two pairs. The
Dealer pushes the winnings towards him. The Banker rakes
them in, his rings sparkling.

BANKER

"Money goes to money!"

He looks triumphantly at the Dealer, waiting for her
approval. But she seems completely indifferent.

BANKER (CONT'D)

(to the Businessman)

I'll find out if you have debts in
other banks. I'll call everyone.

BUSINESSMAN

Come on, let's not quarrel! We've both done so much already!

The Officer shows his cards.

DEALER

A royal flush! A rare combination!

Everyone nods in amazement.

BUSINESSMAN

How is our life different from the game? Thank God we're tied with one rope! That way, we need each other, and we can set the "rules of the game" ourselves.

DEALER

I want to remind you, gentlemen, that revolutions can indeed change the rules of the game. People can take revenge on you.

She gets up, straightens her hair, and heads for the exit.

POLITICIAN

(ironically)

Are you our "people"?

BANKER

What a pity you're leaving, madam! I thought...

DEALER

Hold on. I have already thought for you all and made a decision.

She walks briskly to the door, opens it, and stops at the threshold.

DEALER (CONT'D)

Do you want to know what my bluff is? Look under the table...

She leaves, and everyone leans under the table. Her bag is there. The Businessman picks it up and brings it to his knees.

BUSINESSMAN

Why is it so heavy? Oh! Something seems to be ticking here...

Everyone stares at each other in horror. A BOMB EXPLODES.

FADE OUT.

THE END