

Twenty-Two Questions to Love

ONE – The Game Begins

The first time I saw her, she wasn't trying to be noticed. She sat alone at a corner table in the campus café, stirring her drink distractedly as she read a book I couldn't quite make out. There was something different about her—like she was existing in a world slightly detached from the one the rest of us were in. And, as cliché as it sounds, I wanted in. So, I walked up to her.

“You know, staring at a book that hard might set it on fire.”

She didn't even look up. “Good thing I like a little chaos.”

I grinned. “I'm Rivers.”

She finally glanced at me, her dark eyes studying me like I was a puzzle she wasn't sure was worth solving—and that only made me want to prove I was.

“Isla.” A simple introduction. A name and nothing more.

I leaned against the edge of her table. “So, Isla, how do you feel about dinner with me?”

She smirked. “You don't waste time, do you?”

“I try not to.”

For a second, she just stared at me, and I got the feeling she wasn't the type of girl who said yes easily. Then she said something I wasn't expecting.

“I'll make you a deal.”

“I like deals.”

“If you can answer twenty-two questions about me correctly, I’ll go on a date with you.”

“Why twenty-two?”

She tilted her head, amusement flickering in her dark eyes. “Because you want a date? You must answer them all and... you’ll figure out exactly why twenty-two at the end.”

“Challenge accepted.”

And just like that, I was in.

TWO – The Questions

I sat across from her, unable to hide my smile as our eyes locked. She started the questions with a smile, as if preparing to challenge me with something difficult. But instead, she asked something unexpectedly simple.

“Am I gold or silver?”

At first, I considered the literal meaning—jewelry, accessories, something straightforward. She wore no jewelry, just one small silver ring on her right hand. It wasn’t decorative or trendy. It looked old, like something passed down through generations.

That had to mean something.

“Silver,” I said confidently.

Isla’s lips curled into the smallest smile. “Correct.”

I met her gaze with a knowing look, silently telling her that I was ready for this challenge.

“Why silver?” I asked.

“Because silver isn’t loud. It’s not about standing out. It’s about depth.”

Her answer was short, yet deep and honest. I liked that.

“Question two: Mountains or ocean?”

Did she prefer the steady solitude of mountains or the endless possibilities of the ocean?

This one was trickier. “I prefer the ocean, but for you, I would say...”

I scanned for clues. Her keychain had a small wave charm. That was enough.

I smiled. “Ocean.”

She turned to me, her expression unreadable. Then, finally, she nodded. “Ocean. But why do you like the ocean?”

“It’s free. It never stays in one place.”

Her lips twitched, like she hadn’t expected that answer.

“Daytime or nighttime?”

I didn’t hesitate. “Night.”

Isla raised an eyebrow. “Confident, aren’t you?”

I shrugged. “You don’t belong to the daytime. You come alive when the world quiets down.”

She studied me for a long moment before letting out a soft chuckle. “Okay. You got that one right.”

“Do I prefer coffee or tea?” she asked, taking a sip of her drink.

A simple question. But with Isla, nothing was ever simple.

I leaned in, smirking. “Trick question. The real answer is neither. You’re drinking hot chocolate.”

She blinked, then let out a small laugh. “Okay, now I’m impressed.”

“Does that count as an extra point?”

She rolled her eyes. “No. But you do get credit for paying attention.”

Her eyes flickered with amusement as she glanced at the café menu. “Spicy food or regular food?”

I took my time answering, then grinned. “Spicy. It keeps life interesting.”

Isla narrowed her eyes at me, smiling. “Correct.”

Five down. Seventeen to go.

She shifted in her seat. “I’ll give you a freebie. Books or movies?”

She had a book with her, but I wanted more than just assumptions. Casually, I asked, “What’s your favorite movie?”

She smirked. “Nice try.”

“Had to test it,” I admitted. “Books.”

She nodded. "But horror or romance?"

"Easy. Romance. That book looks pretty lovey-dovey," I laughed.

She shrugged. "I'll give you half a point."

"What? Why? It's obvious."

"Obviously not," she teased. "I like romance books, but I prefer horror. I like things that make me feel alive."

I laughed. "You're full of surprises, Isla."

She grinned. "Well then, Halloween or Christmas?"

"Halloween, Miss Horror," I said sarcastically.

She raised an eyebrow and laughed. "No, Christmas. I like Halloween, but Christmas..."

She hesitated, then said softly, "Gifts. Everyone loves Christmas."

I smiled. "I know exactly what you mean."

Her phone lit up, catching her attention. She turned back to me. "Do I prefer to call or text?"

I had made a lot of progress, but as we approached the final questions, I realized Isla wasn't just letting me breeze through this. She was serious about the challenge.

I paused, considering. "Call," I said.

Then, to my surprise, she handed me her phone. "Here. I'll call later, so we can finish. You're almost done."

I grinned. "You're a tricky one, Isla."

Her lips were twitching with mischief. "I never said I'd make this easy."

Something between us shifted. The questions had started as a game, but now, they felt like something more real. She was still holding back, still determined to make me earn my way to the end.

And I was more than ready to rise to the challenge.

THREE – Nine Down, thirteen to go.

Later that night, we ended up on the phone, flirting a little before she started in with her questions again. I shifted in bed, settling in for whatever came next.

"Do I prefer chocolate or vanilla?" she asked.

I thought I had this one in the bag. Everyone has a preference between chocolate and vanilla, right? It seemed like an easy win. I half-expected her to say chocolate, so I went with that.

Of course, I was wrong.

"Vanilla," she said, giggling.

"Really?" I asked, surprised. "Why?"

"Vanilla's simple," she replied. "It's understood. But it's also versatile. You can make it your own."

I smiled at her reasoning.

She moved on to the next question. "Road trip or plane trip?"

It didn't take me long to answer. "Road trip. You seem like the type who enjoys the journey as much as the destination."

She chuckled. "I do. Besides, there's something special about getting lost along the way."

I nodded thoughtfully. "I think I'd like that. A road trip sounds... free."

"Sunsets or sunrises?"

"Sunrises," I said after a long pause.

She hummed in approval. "I like the quietness of them. Sunsets are beautiful, but they disappear too fast."

"Sunrises have a kind of peace to them," I agreed.

"Do I prefer singing or dancing?"

That one stumped me. She wasn't shy, but I'd never seen her do either. I took a shot in the dark.

"Dancing?"

"Nope," she said, grinning.

I sat up slightly. "Wait... you're a singer?"

She laughed softly. "Not exactly. I can't sing at all. But I like the idea of singing—even if it sounds terrible."

I chuckled, picturing her off-key performance. "I'll take your word for it."

She smirked. "No one needs to hear it."

Thirteen down, nine to go.

I had an idea. "Let's switch it up. Instead of you asking questions about yourself, I'll ask the rest."

She laughed. "Sounds good. I just liked making you guess."

"Alright, Missy Isla—do you like cooking or ordering takeout?"

"Cooking," she said, her voice soft but certain. "It's a great way to bond with people. You get to share something you've made with care."

"Guess I need to learn how to cook," I said, already imagining the disaster that would be my first attempt.

Isla was kind. "Don't worry, I'll teach you."

I had to think about this one. Isla never struck me as particularly nostalgic, but she wasn't the type to live too far in the future either. I let the silence stretch for a moment before finally asking,

"Past or future?"

"Future," she said softly. "The past is... heavy. But the future? It's full of possibility."

I nodded, understanding. "Ice skating or roller skating?"

"Ice skating," she replied without hesitation.

I raised a brow. "Really? Why ice?"

"I like the chill," she said with a small smile. "And the glide."

"Pancakes or waffles?"

"Waffles," she answered confidently.

I smirked. "Why waffles?"

"They're crunchy on the outside, soft on the inside," she said. "The perfect combo."

I chuckled, shaking my head. "Camping or staying in a hotel?"

"Camping," she said instantly. "I love being close to nature. Hotels are fine, but nothing beats waking up surrounded by the world itself."

I could see that. "Sounds like you enjoy the simplicity of it all."

She nodded. "Exactly."

"Tacos or sushi?"

"Tacos," she said without a second thought. "You can't go wrong with tacos."

I laughed, nodding. "Tacos are easy. And they're always satisfying."

"I want to get a little more personal with these last few questions," I said. "So, Isla—hugs or kisses?"

She paused for a moment, and the silence stretched between us. I pulled the phone away from my ear just to check if she was still there. She was.

"Um..." I hesitated, suddenly worried I'd cross a line.

"Kisses," she finally said. Then, to my surprise, she added, "What about you?"

I hadn't expected her to turn the question back on me, but I answered without thinking, "Kisses too—but hugs are always great."

She laughed. "Okay, Olaf."

I smiled. Good. I hadn't ruined this.

"Fireworks or bonfire?" I asked.

"Bonfire," she said without missing a beat. "Fireworks are fun, but there's just something about a bonfire. It feels more personal."

"Agreed," I said. "Bonfires have this way of bringing people together."

"And now for the last question," I said, grinning. "Why 22 questions?"

She laughed. "Because I'm 22."

I smiled. That was it. I had officially answered all her questions. "Now I can take you on a date."

"Yes, you can," she said.

"How about a bonfire date? We can roast marshmallows and cook something over the fire."

"Honestly, that sounds wonderful. I'd love that."

"Great. Tomorrow night."

She chuckled. "You don't waste time, do you?"

"I try not to," I said happily. And just like that, I completed the challenge.