

Checkmate  
By  
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FADE IN ON:

INT. WILDERNESS LODGE - NIGHT

A picture perfect winter scene. Maple furniture. Oak panels. Wood - everything.

A barrage of snow pelts the windows. A furious storm's raging full blast. The cars outside are buried.

But inside it's toasty warm.

Flame CRACKLES in the fireplace. Two children lounge on the floor - play *Operation* in its flickering light:

DANNY FORDHAM and AMI CALLISTER. They're equally cute. Both six.

Four adults sit at a table. Two couples, in their 30s:

SALLY and GEORGE CALLISTER: Sally's blonde and petite, dressed in designer threads. George is a nerd trying hard to look hipster. Sporting glasses and a beard.

Then there's:

RHONDA and CARL FORDHAM. Rhonda's brunette and busty - her sweater tries (but fails) to hide most things. Flannel conceals Carl's waist. 30, pushing middle age.

TWO CHESS BOARDS and FOUR WINE GLASSES grace the table. Both chess games are in full play.

It's "girl v. girl" and "boy v. boy." A nod to chivalry.

A GRANDFATHER CLOCK TICKS somewhere. George's hand hovers over his pawn. Carl flashes an awkward grin.

CARL

Your move.

GEORGE

Don't rush me.

CARL

We ain't got all night. Don't stall.

Sally shoots a nervous eye at the kids.

Ami and Danny pay zero attention to the adults. Ami's busy removing a femur from her *Operation Patient*. Her hand's hesitating, as well.

SALLY

Every move's important. Let us wait.

RHONDA

Dragging it out makes it worse.

Ami picks out the femur. Success! She GIGGLES, and tosses the plastic "bone" Danny's way.

AMI

(to Danny)

I *told* you I could! Gimme candy. I win!

Sadness floods Danny's face. He fishes in a pocket and extracts a MILKY WAY. He breaks off a corner for Ami.

DANNY

Suck on this. Make it last.

RHONDA

Danny Fordham! Language!

Sally pats her hand.

SALLY

Honey, they're just six years old. I'm sure he didn't mean it. That way...

Rhonda holds onto Sally's fingers, gazes into her eyes.

RHONDA

Not to bring it up, but it's your turn.

The chess tournament recommences. It's Blue Collar versus Preppy - class struggle, redefined.

George has a lead on Carl. Rhonda whooping Sally by a mile.

More moves. Rhonda captures Sally's bishop! Sally snags her wine glass, GULPS the liquid down.

SALLY

Damn, you're good. Better than expected.

RHONDA

You thought you'd automatically win? Because you went to college... and I didn't?

SALLY

I dunno. Maybe.

RHONDA

I stayed at home and hustled tables. What do you think I did in that bar?

SALLY

Play pool?

RHONDA

Nope! I played Darts and Poker.

CARL

(proud)

And Chess. That's my Girl.

George captures one of Carl's pawns. Carl frowns - he's not half as good at this as his wife.

CARL

Dammit!

Sally glares at Rhonda.

SALLY

Fine - you've got more experience. You should've mentioned that before we decided on a game.

RHONDA

And take away the home team advantage? It's not like I *wanted* to play.

SALLY

We had to decide. In some way.

Sally refills her glass. She leans forward to top off Rhonda's. Rhonda waves her hand - pushes her away.

RHONDA

No thanks. I want my wits for this game.

SALLY

I wanna be drunk off my ass.

GEORGE

Honey, take it easy on the wine.

SALLY

At this point, that's all we've got left.

Carl makes a quick move, captures George's Rook.

CARL

Got ya!

GEORGE

Fuck! Bite me!

SALLY

Honey, language! Please. The kids.

The table falls silent. A nasty grin on Carl's face.

CARL

Bite you? Okay.

The games continue, awkward. George loses ground, confidence swayed.

Sally's too soused to care. She toys with her glass. Rhonda contemplates her friend.

RHONDA

I told you. I didn't want to play.

SALLY

We could've at least done something *fun*.

GEORGE

Fun!?! You're kidding me. Like what?

SALLY

*Chutes and Ladders?*

George leans over and kisses Sally's forehead. Tears stream down her face. Everyone's distracted. No-one sees... Carl repositions a piece on his board!

GEORGE

*Chutes and Ladders* isn't productive. It had to be a game of smarts.

SALLY

How about *Trivial Pursuit*?

GEORGE

Answering questions like "What's the Capital of Alaska?" That's not important in real life.

SALLY

It's Anchorage. So there.

RHONDA

No. It's Juneau.

CARL

And not important. No freakin' way.

Sally SLAMS her fist down to the table. Everyone scrambles. Chess pieces wobble, but don't fall.

SALLY  
What about Checkers?

GEORGE  
We lost half of them, years ago.

SALLY  
We could've used quarters.

GEORGE  
Drop it, Honey. Never mind.

Now it's George's turn to move. He hesitates - again.

CARL  
Come on. It's like ripping off a Band-aid. Make the decision and move. Quick.

GEORGE  
Gimme a second.

CARL  
*I voted to play Cards Against Humanity.*  
But noooooo, everyone disagreed.

GEORGE  
That's not a game of smarts.

CARL  
You said "no". Because I'd win.

George's hand drifts towards a piece. Suddenly...

ZAP! The adults jump. They pivot towards the children. Danny's screwed up his *Operation "heart transplant."*

Carl exploits the distraction, and secretly moves a piece *again*. Ami waves at Danny.

AMI  
More candy. You owe me!

DANNY  
Okay. But leave me some. I'm hungry.

He breaks off more Milky Way. Ami kisses Danny's cheek.

SALLY  
Awww. Our children like each other.

RHONDA

That's what's important. Protecting them.  
Whoever wins, *they'll* be ok.

The adults turn darkening thoughts to the boards. George makes his final move.

CARL

Yeah! Checkmate, Baby!

He shoves his King forward, snatches George's Queen. The adults fall silent. George stares at his shoes.

GEORGE

Shit. Game over. I lose.

Sally jumps up, and hugs him. George strokes her hair.

GEORGE

Shhhh, it'll be okay.

RHONDA

No, it won't. Ever again.

Rhonda makes *her* last winning move. Now it's *Sally's* turn to lose. Sally doesn't react: she's too drunk to care.

The final tally: Callisters: Zero. Fordham's: Two.

Unless you count the children. Ami's triumphed over Danny - a minor win on their side.

Sally and George cling to each other. They back away from the table, eyes on Carl and Rhonda (their "friends".)

GEORGE

Stop now. I'll take the hit.

SALLY

Baby, no! I won't let you volunteer. No way!

GEORGE

Ami needs her -

Carl SIGHS, and reaches under the table. He pulls out a MAGIC EIGHT BALL, and hands it to George.

CARL

Use this to decide.

GEORGE

This is no game of skill.

CARL

Nope. It's random. At this stage, that's for the best. Better than flipping some coin.

SALLY

What's the question?

RHONDA

I guess... "Is it Me?"

George shakes the ball. The cube bobs in murky water.

Sally glances at the children. Both are absorbed in fun and games. Pleasantly - blissfully - unaware.

Sally's eyes travel further - to an AX across the room.

SALLY

When it's time; will it be quick?

RHONDA

I promise. It will be.

CARL

And we won't tell the kids what happens?

RHONDA

Ever. In a million years.

George GULPS. The Magic 8 Ball Cube revolves some more.

GEORGE

What's important is that *they* survive. I'm sure they'll find the rest of us...

CARL

In a month. Or two.

RHONDA

Or three.

More snow assaults the window. George turns away from the grim scene. The Magic 8 ball reveals its answer: MAYBE.

SALLY

What the hell does *that* mean?

George SIGHS. Shakes the ball again.

Everyone's stomach RUMBLES in anticipation. Hungry.

FADE OUT: