

OF CHESS AND CHICKENS

By Joseph Sorrentino

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SYNOPSIS: It's another night at the chess club and Frank and Harry are, as usual, facing each other across a chess board. The tension mounts as the game nears its end with Frank apparently about to trounce Harry. But Harry has at least one more trick up his sleeve.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MALES)

FRANK (m) A well dressed, well-spoken man, in his mid-late 30's, trim. He's an actor and just slightly pompous. (85 lines)

HARRY (m)..... A not so well-dressed man, in his late-50's to early 60's. He looks like a blue collar worker. (86 lines)

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Harry is playing a psychological game with Frank. Although Frank doesn't believe what Harry's telling him at first, Harry slowly draws him in and leaves him confused, anxious and, most importantly, defeated.

SETTING

Evening at a small, local chess club. Frank and Harry are facing each other across a chess board. It's toward the end of their game—one that Frank is clearly going to win. As lights come up, Harry moves a knight and takes a pawn.

PROPS LIST

- Small table with chess board and pieces
- Two chairs
- Unlit cigar for Harry
- Scarf draped around Frank's neck
- Cell phone for Harry

AT RISE:

FRANK: Tsk, tsk, tsk... Oh Harry, Harry... You're slipping my friend. Not that long ago, you never would have fallen for that wildly tainted pawn.

HARRY: That what?

FRANK: Wildly tainted pawn... Wasn't it clear it was corrupted... contaminated ...defiled?

HARRY: I'm not followin' you here.

FRANK: It's a cheapo, Harry...a trap! And now it appears your knight is...if I may be so bold...*en prise*. (*Moves a bishop to capture the knight.*) Ta-dah!

HARRY: You took my horsey...

FRANK: Knight...

HARRY: Well I'll be...son of a gun...What was I thinkin'?

FRANK: Beats me. When you opened with that Alapin Variation in response to my Sicilian Defense...

HARRY: I did what?

FRANK: ...I thought it was an imaginative...bold even...opening repertoire. Personally, I would have gone with the Najdorf Variation but you were clearly marching to your own drummer at that point. Heck Harry, you march to your own band, don't you?

HARRY: I don't have a band.

FRANK: Of course, breaking Botvinnik's Rule like you did left you vulnerable but, I must say, you recovered nicely. For a while, anyway.

HARRY: Thank you.

FRANK: But now...you're playing like a patzer here.

HARRY: A what?

FRANK: A duffer...a regular woodpusher...an amateur, Harry.

HARRY: I'm doin' the best I can.

FRANK: Of course you are... Smell that?

HARRY: (*Sniffs the air.*) Smells like fried dough. I really like fried dough.

FRANK: Victory, Harry. It smells like victory.

HARRY: I still smell fried dough. It's makin' me hungry here.

FRANK: I think you're facing a Zugzwang.

HARRY: A Zug-who?

FRANK: Zugzwang. No matter where you move, you are in trouble.

HARRY: But if I go there... (*HARRY moves a piece.*)

FRANK: Like I said (*FRANK captures the piece.*)trouble with a capital 'T'...and correct me if I'm wrong but I believe that's a Zwischenschach... (*HARRY just stares at him, annoyed.*) That's a Zwischenzug that leads to...in layman's terms...check...you're in check.

HARRY: Well, I'll be...

FRANK: And can 'mate' be far behind?

HARRY: Boy oh boy...I never saw that comin'...Maybe the wife is right...I better get my eyes checked.

FRANK: Not sure that's going to help you old pal.

HARRY: Sheesh.

FRANK: Like I said, that Alapin Variation you threw out there put me on my heels for a bit and no sooner did I recover from that when it looked like you were developing the Queen's Gambit...of course, some prefer to call it an Isolani but, to be honest, I've never been a big fan of Nimzovitch so I always call it by its original name...and then when you made that move with your bishop, I thought, 'No, no... the clever man's going for a fianchetto...' but then your pieces just sort of meandered all across the board there, didn't they? And now...now here you are facing what I must say is a classic Philidor Position and we all know where...

HARRY: Ever bite the head off a chicken, Frank?

FRANK: Excuse me?

HARRY: A chicken...you ever bite the head off a chicken?

FRANK: No...when I eat chicken, the head's already off.

HARRY: This is a live chicken I'm talkin' about here.

FRANK: A live..?

HARRY: Oh, yeah. Live and kickin'. Best kind.

FRANK: I'm not following you here.

HARRY: It's pretty simple, Frank. I'm talkin' about bitin' the head off a chicken...a live chicken.

FRANK: You're not serious.

HARRY: I am.

FRANK: You mean you actually...?

HARRY: Absolutely.

FRANK: You're pulling my leg.

HARRY: No, I'm not.

FRANK: Yes, you are.

HARRY: I'm not.

FRANK: Right.

HARRY: (*Leans in menacingly.*) You callin' me a liar, Frank?

FRANK: No... No... of course not. You're...you're just joshin' me.

HARRY: I am not "joshin'" you...Frank.

FRANK: You're not?

HARRY: No.

FRANK: Ah.

HARRY: (*Back to usual self.*) I ain't sayin' we do it every week but once in awhile a bunch of the guys come over...

FRANK: How come I've never heard anythin' about it?

HARRY: Well...

FRANK: What?

HARRY: It's just... well, some of the guys didn't want to tell you.

FRANK: Why not?

HARRY: They think...well, they think...let's face it Frank, you are a little different.

FRANK: Different how? How different?

HARRY: No contact sports for you...it's like all you ever wanna do is play chess. And that's fine...really.

FRANK: Thank you. And speaking of playing chess, maybe we could move it along here.

HARRY: You betcha. (*Moves a piece.*) And it ain't like there's anythin' wrong with avoiding contact sports and *just* playin' chess...not really...but some of the guys...

FRANK: (*About to move a piece; stops.*) What?

HARRY: Some of the guys...well, like I said, they didn't think you should be told. Let's just leave it at that. My move? (*Moves a piece.*)

FRANK: Wait...why shouldn't I be told?

HARRY: Well...

FRANK: What?

HARRY: Nothin'. Forget it.

FRANK: No, what? Did someone say something?

HARRY: Look, I don't wanna start no trouble here. It's my move, right? I think I'll move my horsey...

FRANK: Knight...

HARRY: ...Right over here.

FRANK: Someone said something.

HARRY: Well...a couple of 'em...not all of 'em...just a few...they said you wouldn't do it...that you couldn't handle it.

FRANK: I can handle it.

HARRY: That you'd be afraid.

FRANK: Afraid? Me? Of some chicken? Don't be ridiculous.

HARRY: Couple of 'em said you wasn't...how did they put it? Oh yeah, they said you wasn't manly enough.

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