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Castling

By

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EXT. A PARK: DAY

In a lovely, city park on a lovely day, TYCHO sits playing chess with a HOMELESS DUDE. It's a casual friendly game.

TYCHO

My father got me started playing chess. He would bring me out here sometimes. Usually when he and my mom were fighting. He used to say that when he would find the world in chaos he remembered that the chessboard is in order. That the rank and file is laid out in simple black and white. He would say there's order to that. Each character has his or her own abilities and aptitudes that he or she uses in set patterns and linear paths in order to reach a common goal. Each piece is unique but the cause is universal. Everyone must work in harmony with their compatriots in order to succeed. He would go on and on about how the victories are clean and unambiguous. How there's order in that. There is poetry in that. A game of war played by strict rules where intellect and foresight is key, where money, class and chicanery have no place. He would actually use words like chicanery. To him the chessboard is a world where everyone knows himself. Knows the rules. Knows why they are where they are. In chess everyone understands their place. I wonder if he ever felt like that. I wonder if he ever felt as in control, if he ever understood his role the way he did when behind a chessboard. That kind of thing sticks with you, you know?

(MORE)

TYCHO (cont'd)  
 I'm twenty-four years old and, to this day, I don't know if I play this game because I enjoy it or because it just seems like the thing to do at times. I don't know if I honestly feel like I need to be working toward something, or if it's just a remnant of my father living on through me. I mean, I know we just met and you don't know me at all, but do you understand where I'm coming from? Do you ever feel that way?

HOMELESS GUY  
 Chickens!

TRAVIS looks confused.

TYCO  
 I'm sorry?

HOMELESS GUY  
 Are you my mommy?

TYCO  
 Oh. You're crazy.  
 (beat)  
 Don't chew on that!

HOMELESS GUY has the queen in his mouth and is chewing it like an ear of corn.

TYCO  
 Bad homeless dude! Bad!

HOMELESS GUY smiles innocently at TYCO, drops the queen and takes off running.

TYCO picks up the queen and proceeds to fix the board, putting all the pieces back in order.

Soon GABE, a tall, skinny man in his early twenties walks up to the table.

GABE  
 (taking his seat)  
 Hey, man. Sorry I'm late.

TYCO  
 Not a problem. I appreciate your coming down.

TYCO picks up a black pawn and a white pawn, takes them behind his back and represents his closed fists. GABE taps TYCO'S left hand with his index finger. TYCO opens his left hand to reveal the white pawn. TYCO and GABE trade seats such that GABE is now sitting where he can play the white pieces.

GABE moves a white pawn two spaces toward his opponent.

GABE

Even in chess the black man is repressed.

TYCO

This is what television and comic books keep telling us. That the game is a metaphor for life.

GABE

Yeah. Absolutely. If life consisted of insurmountable hierarchies and pointless wars fought by tiny people where every move is calculated and everyone is hopelessly controlled by an unseen force.

TYCO

I do think there's poetry in the game, though. That there's poetry in the idea of individuals working together for a common cause.

GABE

I think there's poetry just about anywhere you want it to be, if you look hard enough. I'm just not sure we should be looking all that hard at a game where the common cause is the protection of a weak, unelected dictator who's probably overtaxing his people to pay for his vermay or something.

TYCHO

What the hell is vermay?

GABE

It's, you know, it's gilded silver.

TYCHO

We're gilding silver now?

GABE

No, not now, back in the day, Louis the thirteenth would, you know what, read a book.

TYCHO

Okey doke.

GABE

The point is, there's no need to spend a whole lot of time trying to explicate hidden meaning from a game where horses bounce around in "L" shapes for no discernible reason.

TYCO

I'm not saying it mimics reality to the T, I'm just saying it may still work as a metaphor.

GABE

And I'm just saying the metaphor would work better if the game designers had chosen an animal for the knight's position that could conceivably choose to move in such a way.

TYCO

What did you have in mind?

GABE

Like, I don't know, like a retarded rabbit.

TYCO

You want the dignified and noble knight to ride into battle on a retarded rabbit?

GABE

It doesn't have to be a rabbit, anything that hops is fine by me. So long as it's retarded. A kangaroo, perhaps. Or a frog.

TYCO gives GABE a look.

GABE

Okay, fine. If we're not comfortable with the rabbit being retarded, he could just be drunk.

TYCO

An alcoholic rabbit.

GABE

I never said he was an alcoholic, just, maybe the bishop had his bachelor party the night before the big battle and the rabbit tied one on and he's still a little shit faced.

TYCO

To whom is the bishop getting married? The queen is already taken.

GABE

Do not assume that the bishop is heterosexual!

TYCO

He does tend to dress awfully well.

GABE

Indeed. And while we're on the subject of chess oddities, what's with the pawn moving two steps at first and then he's just too pooped. These armies are in some serious need of endurance training. And what the fuck is a rook? Who goes into battle with a mobile tower? Who is running this army?

TYCHO

The king, I'd imagine.

GABE

And what's his deal. He's choosing warriors and he's like, yeah, give me a bunch of those tired small guys, some religious figureheads, I'll take my wife, two retarded rabbits and, what the hell, someone put some roller skates on the castles and lets wheel those bad boys around. And the other king was just like, I'll have what he's having.

(beat)

The metaphor is crap. It's easy and it's obvious and it's tired.

TYCO

Okey doke.

GABE

This conversation does make me think, though. It makes me think this whole deal would work better as a drinking game.

TYCO

You can't drink with chess.

GABE

You can drink with anything. You can drink with babysitting.

GABE castles.

TYCO

What the hell are you doing?

GABE

What do you mean?

TYCO

You're castling? Only cowards castle!

GABE

What are you talking about?

TYCO

It's a bitch ass move! You're hiding your king away behind the rook.

GABE

I'm fortifying.

TYCO

You're holing up.

GABE

Fine, I'll take it back.

TYCO

You can't take it back; you've already taken your finger off.

GABE

I'm getting mixed signals here, man.

TYCO

Do whatever you want. I'm just saying, it's a bitch move. I expected more of you.

GABE

What's on your mind, sunshine?

TYCO

Linear paths laid out twelve moves in advance.

GABE

(mocking TYCO)

Okey doke.

TYCO

My father, was always looking at least twelve moves ahead. Half the time the game was over in fewer than ten moves. Which means he beat me before I moved my first pawn. I've always felt like I was letting him down, not looking ahead. Letting things come as they are.

GABE

Would that particular bit of psychosis fall under nature or nurture?

TYCHO

Why not both?

GABE

Your father is a good guy, Tycho. A damn good guy. Doesn't mean his is the life you should be trying to live. Or that his is the game you should be playing.

TYCHO

Linear paths laid out twelve moves in advance. Rook to queens bishop four. Knight to queens rook three. High school to college to career to marriage to fuck all. Linear paths.

GABE

I see.

TYCO

And even if those ideas are antiquated and chess is no longer relevant, even the idea of forging my own metaphors is tired at this point. It's all been done before. There's no such thing as a Marco-fucking-Polo anymore. I feel like I'm just wandering, like nothing I do is ever going to resemble originality, like nothing is ever going to rival the things our fathers have done. I feel like they created the world and we just live in it. You hear all this talk about the sins of the father. What about the virtues of the father? How do we escape those?

(beat)

I'm just, I don't know, have you ever, do you mind if I get a little, I don't know, ethereal for a second.

GABE

Well, if we're not there yet, let's hop on the cider train and head to boogieville.

TYCO

Have you ever woken up and it's just like, like yesterday the world made sense but now, not so much? You ever just look around and think that you used to know where you were and what you were doing but then someone went and changed the rules without telling you? And maybe if you had a plan things would be better?

GABE

Yes. I know exactly what you're talking about! Like the other day I turned on the television and it turns out that some scientist guys went and created a new ocean.

TYCO

What?

GABE

Yeah, apparently they took part of the Atlantic and part of the Indian and cut em off and, and made what they're calling the "Southern Ocean."

TYCO

What the hell?

GABE

Yeah. And you know what the worst part is?

TYCO

That I'm still trying to get over Pluto not being a planet anymore.

GABE

The worst part is that they did this like four years ago and nobody told me. Did they tell you?

TYCO

No. What, did the scientists just get bored trying to cure cancer?

GABE

I don't know.

TYCO

You don't just go around creating new oceans!

GABE

I hear ya.

TYCO

But that's exactly what I'm talking about. I feel like everywhere I turn someone is creating a new ocean and not telling me about it. I feel like one of these days I'm going to drown and I won't even know in what body of water. And even that will be passé.

GABE

Preach on brother Tyco.

TYCO

I'm done.

GABE

Well. It was a nice sermon.

TYCO

Thank you.

GABE

So we're together on this.

TYCO

Yes.

GABE

I'm very glad.

TYCO

Except--

GABE

No. Just sit there and let's be together on this.

TYCO

We are. Except. Fuck it. So it's a little odd. So it flies in the face of Rand McNally. Why not make a new ocean if we feel like it? Who's to say there have to be only four oceans always and forever? Who's to say that the rook can't move in fucking circles if I want him to? Maybe modification is the same as creation.

GABE

See, I'm over here and you, your somewhere else entirely.

TYCHO

Fuck the linear paths. Fuck black and white. Fuck the metaphor.

(beat)

People are always changing the rules. Like the world is a giant game of Calvin Ball. But maybe it's more fun this way. Isn't that what you were getting at before?

GABE

Before I was just saying that life is more interesting than black and white. I wasn't advocating the arbitrary creation of new oceans.

(MORE)

GABE (cont'd)

(beat)

You are not a chess piece. You are not your father. You are not under anyone's control. No matter what your girlfriend tells you. And I appreciate that you seem to realize that. But there are lines that just shouldn't be crossed.

TYCO

Are there? I don't know. Maybe these imaginary, it's too far lines, the four oceans and seven continents and so on are just another way of hiding ourselves away. Maybe we've all been castling behind ideologies and metaphors for way too long. If all the metaphors are cliché, we just lose them. Modify them. Create our own literary devices.

GABE tips his king on it's side.

GABE

I've got a thing. Sorry I can't stay.

TYCO

It's cool.

GABE

Do you know that you're queen has bite marks in her?

TYCO

In fact I do.

GABE

Maybe the bishop is heterosexual.