

CALCULATED RISK

A comedy in one act
by
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PREVIEW ONLY!

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SYNOPSIS

An after school game of Risk becomes a battlefield for Newton and his buddies, who are coping with secrets, heartbreak, and change. When the pressure causes one of them to snap, they realize they have to rebuild their friendship, one plastic army at a time.

CHARACTERS

(3M)

FRANK.....Quirky & nostalgic, male, 13.
NEWTON.....Tough & sporty, male, 13.
STANLEY.....Charming & dramatic, male, 13.

SETTING

A cafeteria.

RUNNING TIME

10 minutes.

(AT RISE: STANLEY, NEWTON, and FRANK are seated at a cafeteria table, huddled around the board game Risk. Coloured plastic armies are scattered across the continents. Three distinct backpacks sit on the floor by their feet. STANLEY leans across the table, wide eyed and pleading.)

STANLEY

I promise I won't attack you if you let me hold Australia.

NEWTON

Bro, that's exactly what you said before you tricked me in Madagascar. I don't trust you, Stan. You have that look in your eye.

STANLEY

It's not a look, it's passion! I'm trying to build an empire of peace. Please don't take it personally.

FRANK

You know, Alexander the Great never asked for permission to hold Australia. Mainly because he didn't know it existed, but also because he was a visionary. He just conquered. He conquered everything. And he did it all before he was thirty. In sandals.

NEWTON

Yeah, well, Alexander the Great never had to deal with Stan hoarding armies in Siam.

STANLEY

I'm not hoarding! I'm fortifying. There's a difference. Right, Frank?

FRANK

(Shrugs)

I dunno. The only thing I fortify is my room against Richard.

STANLEY

Oh, the evil stepdad.

FRANK

That's him. Speaking of...

(He reaches down into his backpack. It's a weathered old canvas bag with a rip in it. He pulls out a vintage pocket watch, winds it, and sets it on the table.)

FRANK

(Continued)

...we have exactly forty minutes before he starts wondering why I'm not at home. Move your troops, Newt.

NEWTON

(Scoops up the dice)

Fine. If either of you hit my borders, you're going to bleed troops. I'm declaring war on Siberia.

(He rolls the dice. He stares at the numbers and suddenly goes quiet. His tough guy facade drops for a second and he looks surprisingly vulnerable.)

Crap! You think you have a solid territory, you know? You think your borders are totally secure. And then out of nowhere, you get wiped off the map.

STANLEY

Did you lose your infantry in North Africa again?

NEWTON

(Defensive)

I'm not talking about the game, Stan! I'm talking about life. Strategic retreats. Like you and Ruth.

STANLEY

(Confused)

Me and Ruth?

NEWTON

Yeah. Everyone thought you guys were gonna be married by ninth grade. You were attached at the hip. And then BAM! Total withdrawal. I'm just wondering, how did you handle it? Did she try to negotiate? Or did she just walk away from the table?

STANLEY

(Waves his hand dramatically)

Oh, it was completely mutual. We realized we were much better suited as a creative partnership than a romantic dictatorship.

FRANK

That's very mature. Usually when people break up, it involves a lot more screaming. Or throwing tea into a harbour.

STANLEY

Well, Ruth and I possess a higher emotional intelligence. Plus, she's the ingenue of the school musical this year! I helped her break out of the chorus! She's a star, Newt. A total star! It would be selfish of me to tie down an ingenue.

NEWTON

That's like a fancy word for the pretty girl, right? The one everyone wants.

STANLEY

(Nods enthusiastically)

It's the most fabulous role! She gets the best lighting, the highest notes, and the tragic-yet-beautiful backstory. She's practically royalty. It's cool that you're dating Beatrice, by the way. She has major ingenue energy.

NEWTON

(Quietly)

Yeah. Real cool.

FRANK

Richard says the theatre is a distraction from useful things like studying.

NEWTON

Can we just play? Stan, roll your defence.

(STANLEY rolls the dice with a flourish.)

STANLEY

Ha! Double sixes! My borders remain unblemished!

NEWTON

Man, forget Siberia.

(He slumps back in his plastic chair. He reaches down into his backpack. It's a modern, branded athletic bag. He pulls out a half eaten protein bar and tears the wrapper off with his teeth. He doesn't eat it, he just stares at it.)

So, Stan. Say... hypothetically... an ingenue decided she wanted to, I don't know, "explore other options." Like she just suddenly decides your armies aren't enough for her anymore. How would a guy... hypothetically... win that territory back?

STANLEY

Well, you can't just launch a full scale invasion. Girls aren't like Western Europe. You can't march in with tanks. You have to use diplomacy. Poetry. Maybe a small romantic gesture. Like a flash mob in the courtyard.

FRANK

(Looks up from his cards)

Are you jealous of Beatrice?

NEWTON

Jealous? Me? Of who? I'm the star of the track team. I don't get jealous. I set records. I'm just asking for a friend. Some guy on the football team.

FRANK

Because jealousy is a modern concept. In ancient times, if you wanted someone, you fought a duel. Or wrote a really long epic poem where everyone dies of a plague.

STANLEY

(Gasps)

A plague! That's so dramatic. I love it!

(NEWTON slams his hand on the table. The armies rattle around on the board. As NEWTON speaks, the other boys rearrange the little plastic armies back to where they were.)

NEWTON

Nobody is dying of a plague! I'm just saying, it's a dumb game anyway. You think you're winning, and you think you've got the whole world figured out, and then someone just breaks the pact. Out of nowhere.

STANLEY

Newt...

NEWTON

What?!

STANLEY

Are you okay? You're breathing like you just ran the four hundred meter.

NEWTON

I'm fine. I'm completely fine. It's just the protein bar. It's dry.

(He tosses the crumpled wrapper onto the game board. FRANK casually picks it up off the board and sets it to the side.)

FRANK

My mom told me that when you move to a new town, you have to expect a few bumps. But she didn't tell me the bumps would be a guy named Richard who wears cargo shorts in the winter and yells at me for leaving my shoes by the door.

STANLEY

Cargo shorts? Ew.

FRANK

He threw away my vintage bowling shirt last night. He said it was smelling up the whole house. It had a patch that said "Bob" on the pocket. I liked Bob. I felt like Bob and I had an understanding.

STANLEY

Tragic! Did your mom make him get it back?

FRANK

She just sighed. That's her new thing. She sighs so hard I think her lungs are going to collapse, and then she tells me to "pick my battles."

NEWTON

(Mutters, staring at the floor)

Your mom's right. You gotta pick 'em. Because if you fight every single one, you just end up looking stupid.

(STANLEY reaches down to his backpack. It's a bright yellow bag, covered in colorful enamel pins and buttons. He digs through it and pulls out an unopened package of gummy bears. He slides them toward FRANK.)

STANLEY

Here, have some gummy bears. For the loss of Bob. They're hibiscus flavoured.

FRANK

That's some sophisticated sugar.

STANLEY

For your sophisticated sadness.

FRANK

Thanks, Stan.

(FRANK takes the gummy bears. He opens the bag and eats one, then he offers the open bag to NEWTON.)

Want one?

(NEWTON shakes his head and speaks quietly, almost to himself.)

NEWTON

Beatrice changed her seat in Social Studies today.

FRANK

She did?

STANLEY

What do you mean? She always sits next to you. You guys draw those little funny faces on each other's binders.

NEWTON

Not anymore. She sat next to Henry. Henry plays varsity. He's fifteen and he already has a moustache. A real one, not like the peach fuzz I got going on.

FRANK

Henry is a sophomore. He shouldn't even be in our Social Studies class. He failed civics twice.

NEWTON

Yeah, well, apparently she likes guys who fail civics. She didn't even look at me. I walked in, wearing my track jacket... the one she usually borrows... and she just looked right through me. Like I wasn't even there.

STANLEY

Oh, Newt. I'm so sorry. That's the worst feeling in the world.

NEWTON

(Voice cracks)

It doesn't make sense. Last week we walked to the corner store after practice. She wanted a watermelon slushie, so I bought her one. And we sat on the curb, and she laughed at my jokes. She told me I was the funniest guy she knew. And then poof. Just like that, I'm invisible.

FRANK

People change their minds like the weather. It's a flaw in human nature.

NEWTON

I kept checking my phone all night. I thought maybe her battery died. Or maybe her mom took it away. But I saw her active status. She was online. She just chose not to text me back. I sat on my bed all night looking at a grey bubble. Do you know what that does to a guy?

STANLEY

Yeah. I do. It makes you feel like you did something wrong, even when you didn't. It makes you want to rewrite history to figure out the exact second everything changed.

NEWTON

Exactly. How did you handle it with Ruth? Didn't it hurt when it ended?

(STANLEY thinks for a moment, cautious to choose his words carefully.)

STANLEY

It hurt, but in a different way. It hurt because I knew I couldn't be the person she wanted me to be. And she couldn't be the person I needed. We were trying to force a puzzle piece into a spot it didn't fit, just because everyone else expected it to. But letting it go actually felt like I could finally breathe. You know?

NEWTON

(Shakes his head)

No. I don't want to breathe. I want things to go back to how they were. I want to be the guy with the pretty girl on his arm again.

FRANK

Maybe Beatrice isn't an ingenue. Maybe she's just a person who's fifteen percent meaner than you thought she was.

(NEWTON'S vulnerability starts to harden. He sits up straight and pushes his shoulders back.)

NEWTON

Shut up, Frank. You don't know anything about her. You don't know anything about girls, period. You carry a dead man's watch.

STANLEY

Hey! Don't be mean to Frank. He's just trying to help.

NEWTON

(Voice rises)

Well, his help sucks! Both of your help sucks! Look at you guys. Stan's talking about ingenues and Frank's eating fancy gummy bears because his stepdad threw away a bowling shirt. You guys are soft. You're weak.

STANLEY

Newt, you're hurting, and you're lashing out --

NEWTON

I'm not hurting! I'm the star of the track team! I don't get hurt by some girl who likes a guy with a moustache! Henry is a moron! He can't even spell "civic"!

FRANK

Fun fact, civic is a palindrome. It's spelled the same way backward and --

(NEWTON stands up, knocking his chair backwards.)

NEWTON

I DON'T CARE, FRANK! I DON'T CARE about palindromes! I DON'T CARE about Alexander the Great! And I DON'T CARE about this stupid, waste of time, baby game!

(With a violent jerk of both hands, he flips the Risk board. The cardboard flies into the air. Dozens of tiny plastic armies rain down onto the floor.)

(Silence.)

(NEWTON stands there, his chest heaving, his fists clenched, staring at the empty table. He looks massive, terrifying, and completely miserable.)

(STANLEY doesn't flinch. FRANK doesn't move. They both just sit there in the quiet, looking up at him. No judgment. No anger. Just waiting.)

(NEWTON looks down at the floor. Then to the plastic armies all around him. The anger and adrenaline suddenly drains out of him, leaving him looking smaller than a thirteen-year-old track star should look. He looks like he might cry, or throw up, or both.)

(Slowly, without saying a word, FRANK slides off his chair. He drops to his knees on the floor. He reaches out and starts collecting armies from under the table. He breaks the silence, speaking softly.)

FRANK

This is exactly why nobody ever finishes a game of Risk.

END OF PREVIEW

For a complete script, or to apply for production rights:
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