

"Knowing Your Opponent"

by

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FADE IN:

INT. CHICAGO HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

FRANCES (14), student, sits silently on a living room couch. She reads a book, completely absorbed.

A commotion comes from the other room.

JOEL (O.S.)

(Yelling)

Come on baby It's really not even that big of a deal.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Joel stop. Will you please just not? God, I cant believe you.

JOEL (O.S.)

Listen. It's the 60's. Your dad needs to stop being such an oppressive jackass and realize that his daughter is no longer 12 years old. And maybe get over the fact that a man MIGHT be sleeping in her bed with her.

Frances makes a disgusted face.

REBECCA (O.S.)

(Agitated)

Joel, I won't discuss this with you. You know how he gets and I don't feel like arguing this point with him and have it be awkward for the entire next two weeks that we're going to be here. NO.

JOEL (O.S.)

Tell you what... we're having the game tonight right?

REBECCA (O.S.)

(Hesitantly)

Yeah?

JOEL (O.S.)

Ok... This year. If I beat you. You let me stay in the bed with you. So I don't have yet ANOTHER sleepless night on that goddamn couch, Your father be damned. BUT. If I lose...

(MORE)

JOEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
I will spend the rest of our two  
week stay here, HAPPILY on the  
couch. Not another peep out of me.

REBECCA (O.S.)  
God, you are impossible... But you  
do realize? I don't lose.

JOEL (O.S.)  
Then I guess your sweet ass has  
nothing to worry about.

Frances hears a SMACK.

JOEL (42), Business man, walks out of the other room, he  
smiles very self assuredly.

REBECCA (38), homemaker, walks out of the room shortly after,  
she looks annoyed.

The front door opens abruptly.

CHRIS (64), a grizzled older man walks into the house,  
carrying a bag of groceries.

CHRIS  
Joel. Why don't you make your  
dainty ass useful and pull the  
groceries in from the car?

Joel grumbles, puts his head down and heads outside.

Rebecca walks into the kitchen and begins preparing dinner.

Chris walks over to Frances, who is still on the couch. He  
rubs her head affectionately.

FRANCES  
Hey grampa.

Frances smiles up at her grandfather and his grizzled  
wrinkled face lights up.

CHRIS  
Hey pumpkin, are you excited you  
finally get your chance to play our  
game? I remember when you were  
younger, you used to always be  
begging to get in.

FRANCES  
(unsure)  
Yeah...  
(MORE)

FRANCES (CONT'D)

I guess, its just you guys play for a lot of money and its all of the money that I worked for over the summer.

CHRIS

Don't worry baby, your pop pop will take you out and buy you something nice when he wins.

Frances smiles happily and her grandfather winks at her.

Chris gets up and walks toward a room in the back.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(To Rebecca)

Hey baby, tell your idiot boyfriend to meet me in the den when he finally decides to quit dicking around out there.

REBECCA

(laughing)

Okay. I sure will daddy.

Chris walks into the den, just as Joel walks in carrying a comically high stack of groceries. Rebecca looks at him, stifling laughter.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Hey, Daddy wants to see you in the den tough guy.

Joel slams the groceries down next to Rebecca and groans.

Frances and Rebecca laugh, as Joel walks toward the den.

Once Joel leaves, Rebecca resumes cooking and Frances sinks back into her book.

Frances hears a commotion from the den.

CHRIS (O.S.)

(Distantly)

Disrespectful... dont even deserve... son of a bitch... Try to come at me!... if you can... if you've got the balls...

Frances gets up and walks stealthily to the entrance of the den.

JOEL (O.S.)

You know what old man? WATCH me take you at your own game. And IF I do lose then fine... I will sleep on the couch and I will stop touching your daughter in front of you the whole time we are here. BUT... if I beat you, you have to leave me the hell alone. Let me sleep in the room with your daughter. We've been together for 2 years, is that not enough for your decrepit ass? You will RESPECT me in front of them!

CHRIS (O.S.)

That may be the first thing that I have ever heard you say, that someone might mistake for the words of a man.

Frances smiles and runs over to her mother.

FRANCES

Momma, momma!

REBECCA

What do you want kiddo?

FRANCES

Hey listen, I am really excited about this game. Like SUPER excited. Do you think I could win?

REBECCA

Baby, don't get your hopes up, your momma has been at this game since before you were born. You barely learned how to play a couple months ago. Just try hard not to go out first mmk?

FRANCES

But what if I win? Wouldn't that be cool?

REBECCA

(annoyed)

What are you getting at?

FRANCES

If I win.

(Beat)

Let me have the room all to myself.

REBECCA

Uh huh. And if I win?

FRANCES

Then. I will do all of the chores.  
Cooking, cleaning, whatever you  
want. The rest of the time that we  
are here visiting, I'll be on it.

REBECCA

Wow. You are really excited about  
this game huh? Tell you what.  
You're on!

Frances and her mother shake hands.

CUT TO:

INT. CHICAGO HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A beautiful wooden poker case sits on the living room table.  
Joel, Rebecca and Frances sit around the table facing Chris  
intently.

Chris sits at the head of the table. He deals out chips.

CHRIS

So. We are agreed on all of the  
side bets that we have made?

They all look to one another, nodding.

REBECCA/JOEL/FRANCES

(In unison)

Yes.

CHRIS

Ok good, because this is my house,  
and the bets made at this table  
will be enforced. Ok now, Hundred  
buck everyone.

Everyone puts a hundred dollar bill in the middle of the  
table.

Chris stares hatefully at Joel. Joel stares back.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Well. Let the 1963, annual  
Christmas time texas hold em' game  
begin.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE BEGINS:

There is an intense back and forth of chips and stares from player to player.

Joel and Chris are at it the hardest.

Chips are exchanged.

Frances slowly gains chips.

Joel slowly loses them.

The clock shows hours have worn on. Muted arguments rage between Joel, Rebecca and Chris.

Chips are thrown at the winners (except Frances).

Frances wins a fairly large hand. Joel and Rebecca don't notice her large chip stack over their arguing. Chris looks over at his granddaughter with an air of mistrust.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE ENDS.

They all sit silently with their cards in front of their face. 5 cards lay in the middle of the table. They are at an impasse.

FRANCES

Hey Joel. Why do you have so few chips? My mom said that you have been playing this game for a long time?

JOEL

Everybody has their ups and downs Frances. But don't worry, you wonderful people ain't seen nothin yet.

REBECCA

(Irritated)

Oh don't act all high and mighty Joel. Like being low on chips is part of your master plan.

The silent tension makes everyone squirm uncomfortably.

FRANCES

Hey Grandpa. Joel is pretty good at this game! He taught me a lot!

CHRIS

Baby doll, don't pay any attention to what Joel does, unless the object of the game is to lose all your chips first. This game takes balls in order to win. Something your mommas boyfriend here seems to be a little short of.

Frances snickers.

JOEL

You know what old man? I'm all in. Let's see if it's still so easy for you to sit on your high chair when I have all of your chips and all of your money, sleeping in a room with YOUR daughter!

Everybody looks shocked.

REBECCA

(To Joel)

Don't talk to my daddy like that. Its easy to say when you have almost no chips. I'll call you!

There is a palpable amount of tension in the air as eyes shift toward Chris.

CHRIS

(To Joel)

Well... Going all in at a time like this is more manly than I'd been lead to believe you were capable of. However, seeing as how you are full of bullshit most of the time. I will go ahead and...

Chris pushes a large amount of chips into the middle of the table.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Call you out on it.

Rebecca lays down 2 cards.

REBECCA

I have a straight.

Joel jumps out of his seat in a fury and slams down his 2 cards. He has two aces.

JOEL

(Enraged)

Goddamn it. Why the fuck would you call me on that? You caught that straight on the last card, it was dumb luck.

Chris slams his card on the table.

CHRIS

Well the point is moot. FULL HOUSE... And Joel. You best to watch the volume and tone you choose to use toward my daughter, lest this night takes a turn for the worse.

REBECCA

Stay out of this dad!

Everybody (Except Frances) stands up and yells over each other incoherently.

Chris grabs the money from the middle of the table and sits back down at the table next to Frances. Rebecca and Joel continue fighting.

Chris smiles at Frances and hands her a hundred dollar bill.

CHRIS

Merry Christmas baby.

She takes it, smiles at him, and reveals her 2 cards to him.

He gasps. She has won. He looks over to the still fighting couple, then back at Frances. He laughs uproariously and puts his hand lovingly on the side of his granddaughters face.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Baby, we'll make a winner out of you yet.

Frances smiles, takes 200 more dollars from her grandfathers hand, leaving him with one, gets up from the table, leans over and kisses her grandfather.

FRANCES

Merry Christmas Grampa.

Chris stares at her in amazement.

Frances walks over to the couch, picks up her book, and walks to Rebeccas room.

INT. CHICAGO HOME - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances jumps on the bed and kicks off her shoes.

Sounds of fighting echo through the room.

She gets up, shuts the door and the sounds of fighting stop.

She sprawls out on the bed, picks up her book, "Poker: knowing your opponent", smiles and continues reading, feet kicking in the air with delight.

FADE TO BLACK.