

FAVORITE GAME

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. MILTON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MILTON, 60, well-dressed and cared for, pours cognac into two snifters. He lifts one and smells the fine liqueur.

JEANNIE (O.S.)

Guess who?

In strides JEANNIE, 50 but looks 40, very chic and pretty. She strips off her coat and drops her purse before Milton hands her the snifter.

MILTON

Right on time.

JEANNIE

You should change your garage code.

MILTON

I did, but I changed it back, just for you.

JEANNIE

Spare me. You never did anything just for me.

They clink snifters in a toast.

MILTON

My dear, I did everything for you.

JEANNIE

Like the time you invalidated my credit cards?

MILTON

The way the charges were mounting up, I thought someone had stolen your identity.

JEANNIE

You knew I was in candy land, and you knew it was mall madness. Forgive me, if I don't believe you.

MILTON

Remember who you were with?

JEANNIE

Amon-Re? What do you have against her?

MILTON

How quickly you forget. As I recall, Bradley was there too.

JEANNIE

Was he? I thought he was making a movie.

Milton laughs and moves to the couch.

MILTON

Maui and Honolulu are only minutes apart by air.

(pats couch)

It doesn't take Scotland Yard to read the clues.

She passes a chess table where a half-finished game languishes before she sits on the far end of the couch.

JEANNIE

What difference can it make now?

MILTON

I'm just trying to be accurate. How does a lie serve you?

JEANNIE

I won't flatter your Sherlock Holmes self-image. Enough of this Ruy Lopez opening, why am I here?

MILTON

I thought the female Kreskin would have sussed that out.

JEANNIE

Oh, I know it's about the big payday, when you hand over your check. This is your last chance to change my mind.

MILTON

Exactly. I want you to remember how good it was between us.

JEANNIE

A regular barrel of monkeys--in the beginning.

MILTON

Remember when we were poor? Remember our apartment, the enchanted palace?

JEANNIE
Don't remind me.

MILTON
Those were times to remember. We
were so poor we couldn't go out.
We ate terrible noodles, drank
cheap wine, and played games.

JEANNIE
Chess was your favorite.

MILTON
Perhaps, but we enjoyed scrabble
and twister. Remember what twister
led to?

JEANNIE
I've tried to forget.

MILTON
(pointing)
But our favorite was Jenga. I've
set it up. Want to play?

JEANNIE
You brought me here to play Jenga?

MILTON
No, to win your heart, but Jenga is
the first move.

With a sour smile she rises and heads to the table in the
corner where a Jenga tower waits. Milton joins her.

JEANNIE
Seems like an apt game for us, a
fragile stack of insecurities that
can collapse at any moment.

MILTON
You go first.

She studies the stack a moment before she slowly removes a
piece and adds it to the top.

MILTON
Well done. You haven't lost your
touch.

JEANNIE
Trying to get inside my head?

He looks at the tower a moment before he removes a piece and places it on top.

MILTON

Such a pretty head, but no, I'm not trying to manipulate you.

JEANNIE

That would be a first.

She's quicker with this move, removing a piece and adding it to the top.

MILTON

You always put too much stock in my innocent moves.

JEANNIE

Innocent? From the grandmaster? Please, don't pretend to be humble.

He makes his move, adding the piece to the top.

MILTON

And don't you pretend to be a pawn. You were always a back row power.

They trade moves, making the tower less steady with every play.

JEANNIE

I was an aggravation but hardly a real player.

MILTON

You were everything to me. You held a monopoly on my affections.

JEANNIE

Balderdash. Money was always your guiding light.

She pauses to sip her cognac, the tower in a precarious position.

MILTON

Me? You're the one that ran off with Aladdin's Dragon.

JEANNIE

So, that's what this is all about, Aladdin's Dragon?

MILTON
What happened to it? What?

JEANNIE
You had someone steal it.

MILTON
Sorry, that's bonkers. Why would I
do that?

JEANNIE
For the insurance!

MILTON
That they refuse to pay!

They glare at each other.

JEANNIE
I've had enough.

She sets down her glass and knocks over the tower.

MILTON
Did you have to? Just kerplunk?

She puts on her coat and grabs her purse.

MILTON
If you must go, use the front door.

Milton goes to the front door. She pauses in front of him.

JEANNIE
It always ends this way, doesn't
it? Like a mouse trap.

Milton shrugs and opens the door. She steps past.

CRACK!

The loud report of a rifle.

She staggers back, her blouse blossoming with blood. She
stares at Milton before she collapses. He calmly closes the
door without exposing himself.

He reaches down and grabs her purse. He fishes out her cell
and snaps a photo of her.

MILTON
Sometimes, it ends like a police
chase, Pocahontas.

He sends the photo via the cell.

MILTON
Not with a whimper but with a
knockout.

He drops her phone and goes to the chess table. Takes the
white queen off the board.

MILTON
You never did understand the queen
sacrifice.

From the drawer in the table he pulls out a pistol

MILTON
Don't die just yet. Your brave
buccaneer will be coming in the
door, and I so do want you to have
a last word with him.

Milton moves to a corner where he can cover both doors.

MILTON
But please, don't quote me.

From the kitchen comes BRADLEY, 40, handsome, fit, toting a
scoped rifle.

MILTON
Please drop the rifle.

Bradley turns to Milton.

MILTON
Don't make me shoot you before you
say good bye to her.

Bradley leans the rifle against the couch.

BRADLEY
You son of a bitch.

MILTON
Me? I wasn't the one who shot her.

BRADLEY
It was supposed to be you.

MILTON
You're wasting time. She won't
last long.

Bradley moves to Jeannie and drops to one knee and grabs her hand.

BRADLEY
I'm here, baby, I'm here.

She can't answer, blood leaking out her mouth.

BRADLEY
Don't try to talk. I'm calling
911.

MILTON
I'm afraid not.

He moves behind Bradley.

MILTON
Now, darling, tell us what you did
with Aladdin's Dragon.

JEANNIE
(rasping)
Go to hell.

MILTON
In due time. Say your good bye,
Brad.

Brad leans over and gently kisses her forehead.

BRADLEY
Don't be afraid.

Bradley rises and faces Milton. With a sudden move, he knocks Milton's arm away and dives for the rifle. Even as he reaches for it, a pistol REPORT stops him.

MILTON
Please, don't make this any more
difficult than it has to be.

Milton walks to his drink and takes a sip.

BRADLEY
You won't get away with this.

MILTON
What's not to get away with. You
shot her, and I shot you. Simple.
The police won't have a clue
otherwise.

BRADLEY
You think you're so fucking smart.

MILTON
A pawn is always a pawn.

JEANNIE (O.S.)
Even a pawn can topple a king.

Milton spins to Jeannie who smiles, very much alive.

MILTON
What the--

CRACK

The rifle report fills the room. Milton's chest blossoms with red. He frowns, drops his pistol, and slowly collapses.

JEANNIE
Ah...so sorry, Milt. I just
couldn't stay dead.

MILTON
But...

JEANNIE
He makes movies.
(touches blouse)
You bought it hook, line, and
sinker.

She moves to Milton.

BRADLEY
You had him figured.

JEANNIE
He never could play the queen's
gambit.

She leans closer to Milton.

JEANNIE
I know you never intended to honor
the settlement. You're broke, so
be it. Aladdin's Dragon is still
in its little compartment carved
into my headboard. After you're
gone, I'll sell it. I think I'll
live quite well.

She straightens, looks at Bradley, and frowns.

CRACK

The bullet opens a hole in her chest, and she drops like a stone.

As she does, Milton rises, his chest still red.

MILTON

(to Jeannie)

I think you really are dying this time. As you said, he makes movies. And yes, I played the poisoned pawn.

BRADLEY

Is she right? You're broke?

MILTON

A temporary condition. As soon as--

CRACK

The bullet hits Milton in the middle of his chest. Utter surprise suffuses his face as blood spurts. He falls in a heap next to Jeannie.

Bradley goes to Jeannie's purse and extracts her keys. He stops at the chess table and knocks over the king.

BRADLEY

The backward pawn sometimes wins.

He walks out.

FADE OUT.