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The Red Flags

By
CATHERINE CASTELLANI

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(THE RED FLAGS)

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The Red Flags premiered at the Verona Area Community Theater (Verona, Wis.) in February 2024.

CAST:

GABRIELLE Natalie Coombs
RIC.....Scott Wieland
PHILIPSteve Fecteau
CHLOE Marsha Heuer

PRODUCTION:

DirectorAllen Ebert
Producer Sara Ward-Cassady
Stage Manager Paul Stiller
Costume Design..... Claire Johnson
Set Design Joshua Carson
Prop Master Marie Kyle
Light Design..... Steve Nickels
Sound Design Dale Nickels

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“*The Red Flags* was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Verona Area Community Theater in Verona, Wis.”

The Red Flags

CHARACTERS

GABRIELLE: A vibrant, happily single woman, 38.

CHLOE: A happily married woman, late 30s to early 40s.

RIC: A handsome, single, diagnosed psychotic, mid-to-late 30s.

PHILIP: Chloe's husband and Ric's older brother, late 30s to early 40s.

TIME AND PLACE

A city, the present. The action takes place over roughly six weeks in a lively bistro, along a riverfront walk, in a city park and in Philip and Chloe's apartment.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Gabrielle pronounces Philip's last name *airMEHZ*, like the scarf. Everyone else pronounces it *HERmeez*. She knows how he pronounces it—it's an affectation she puts on.

STAGING: This play works well on a unit set or in a fluid space without blackouts between scenes.

The Red Flags

ACT I

SCENE 1: THE SETUP

(A chilly evening in springtime. PHILIP sits alone in a lively brasserie. He is waiting for someone and clearly feels awkward. He has a Manhattan in front of him. He sips it and makes a face. It's not his thing. He ordered it because this feels like the kind of place one orders a classic cocktail, but he'd be much happier with a Guinness.)

Enter GABRIELLE. Her energy and verve is calculated to turn every head in the place. She goes straight to PHILIP, who rises to kiss her hello on the cheek. She throws him off his game by making it a two-cheek affair. He plops back into his seat while she flamboyantly uncoats and unscarfs herself.)

PHILIP. Drink?

GABRIELLE. I'll have a Lillet blanc.

(It arrives almost instantly, in a white wine glass with a generous slice of orange.)

PHILIP. They know you here.

GABRIELLE. It's my meeting place.

PHILIP. We're not going to run into a lot of ex-boyfriends here, are we?

GABRIELLE. I never meet lovers here.

PHILIP. Oh.

GABRIELLE. Where's Chloe?

PHILIP. Chloe?

GABRIELLE. Your wife, Chloe. That Chloe.

PHILIP. She's not here.

GABRIELLE. Philip Hermes. You surprise me.

PHILIP. You're the only one who says it that way. Air-MEHZ, like the scarf.

GABRIELLE. Your text said “meet us.”

PHILIP. I’d like you to meet my brother.

GABRIELLE. You have a brother?

PHILIP. I think you two might really hit it off.

GABRIELLE. I never knew you had a brother.

PHILIP. He’s a very private person.

GABRIELLE. Oh no.

PHILIP. Private is bad?

GABRIELLE. It’s code for something. Tell me.

PHILIP. No! No no it’s not code! Really! He’s very ...

GABRIELLE. Single.

PHILIP. Yes. He’s very single.

GABRIELLE. Philip—you’re *matchmaking*!?

PHILIP. Well ...

GABRIELLE. This is Chloe’s idea.

PHILIP. I know she wants you to see that professional matchmaker.
But you won’t.

GABRIELLE. Do you have any idea what that costs? A long weekend in Paris, that’s how much.

PHILIP. But a long weekend is just a few days. We’re talking about the rest of your life.

(GABRIELLE drains her drink in one panicked swallow.)

PHILIP *(cont’d)*. That came out wrong! I just mean, finding a partner, finding someone you can rely on, that’s a big deal.

GABRIELLE. Oh, I really don’t know about this.

PHILIP. Please, Gabrielle. He thinks he’s just stopping by to see me. I’ll tell him we just ran into each other. He’s not expecting anything. It’s just hello.

GABRIELLE. Very private, what does that mean? What’s wrong with him?

PHILIP. He’s good looking, he’s well off, he can be charming.

GABRIELLE. What does he do?

PHILIP. He’s in finance.

GABRIELLE. Ew.

PHILIP. I think he’s rich. On his way to rich, anyway.

GABRIELLE. And “he can be charming.”

PHILIP. He’s my brother. I don’t think of him the way women think of him. But he does well for himself. With women, I mean.

GABRIELLE. He doesn’t sound like the marrying type anymore than I am.

PHILIP. Sometimes, two people who aren’t the marrying type, *are* the type, for each other.

GABRIELLE. You’re very sweet, / but—

PHILIP. He’s not like me. He’s, he’s ... debonair.

GABRIELLE. Debonair?

PHILIP. Yes.

GABRIELLE. That is a ridiculous word. I can’t believe you just said “debonair.”

PHILIP. Well, he is!

GABRIELLE. But ... ?

PHILIP. No but.

GABRIELLE. You don’t usually have to matchmake with the handsome, successful ones.

PHILIP. Nor the beauties.

GABRIELLE. Meaning ... ?

PHILIP. It’s just hello. You’ll just happen to meet. Like you happen to meet a lot of people all the time, right? You meet people, you meet the friends of friends ...

GABRIELLE. The brother of the husband of a friend.

PHILIP. Yes!

GABRIELLE. You don’t.

PHILIP. What?

GABRIELLE. Don’t meet the brother of the husband of a friend unless you’re being set up. The brother I never knew existed of the husband of the friend? No.

PHILIP. Well, he doesn’t have to know that.

GABRIELLE. Smart guy?

PHILIP. Very. Brilliant.

GABRIELLE. He’ll know.

PHILIP. Oh.

GABRIELLE. I’ll just tell him.

PHILIP. Don’t!

GABRIELLE. You're not afraid of him, are you?

(Strange pause. PHILIP seems suspicious and upset.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. Did I say something wrong?

PHILIP. Why do you think I might be afraid of my brother?

GABRIELLE. Are you?

PHILIP. Of course not!

GABRIELLE. I didn't think so!

PHILIP. Good.

GABRIELLE *(awkward beat)*. Is he in the middle of a divorce? Is that it?

PHILIP. Never married.

GABRIELLE. Lone wolf?

PHILIP. Just private.

GABRIELLE. He sounds like he could have any woman he wants, from your description. Handsome, successful, intelligent. *Debonair*.

PHILIP. If it's just a matter of picking up a woman, he doesn't need anyone's help.

GABRIELLE. So it's not just a matter of ...

PHILIP. Uh, I'm not a procurer, Gabrielle. I'm hoping there may be a relationship here, you know?

GABRIELLE. I can't remember you ever mentioning your family, not at Thanksgiving, not at / Christmas—

PHILIP. My parents are both dead.

GABRIELLE. Oh. I'm sorry.

(This is awkward. All the fun has fizzled.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. So tell me! How did you and Chloe meet?

PHILIP. She never told you?

GABRIELLE. No, I don't think so!

PHILIP. She tells everyone.

GABRIELLE. You never told me.

PHILIP. It's the same story.

GABRIELLE. Well you didn't get set up, I know that.

PHILIP. We were a lot younger.

GABRIELLE. Oh great. That's great, Philip. Thank you. That is marvelous.

PHILIP. Crap. Sorry.

(Beat.)

GABRIELLE. I can't do this.

PHILIP. You can.

GABRIELLE. It's too close to home. You don't want my mess for your brother, Philip, you don't.

PHILIP. Gabrielle, he'll be here any minute. No commitment at all. You don't have to be afraid.

GABRIELLE. Maybe I'm just not up to debonair tonight.

(GABRIELLE has flung on her coat and grabbed her bag and positively flees—coming face to face with RIC, who's every bit as handsome and debonair as advertised. PHILIP is head down, maybe texting.)

RIC. Hello.

GABRIELLE. Hello.

RIC. I can't let you leave without telling me your name and everything else about you.

GABRIELLE. Wow. That is quite a line!

RIC. That was TERRIBLE! I can do much better. Let me buy you a drink and try that again.

GABRIELLE. Oh, this is a two part pick-up line.

RIC. I should never try that with someone so beautiful. You've heard it all.

GABRIELLE. Three-part now. You are well-practiced.

RIC. Actually, I'm shy. It helps to be prepared.

GABRIELLE. FOUR!

RIC. Have a drink with me.

GABRIELLE. One. And not here.

(RIC turns and gallantly offers his arm to GABRIELLE who playfully takes it. RIC exits with GABRIELLE. PHILIP, oblivious, slams the remains of his Manhattan. The brasserie sounds fade.)

SCENE 2: THE RIVERFRONT WALK

(RIC and GABRIELLE walking. Their rhythm is slow and luxurious, two people who are walking for the sake of being together, not in order to get somewhere. Moonlight, streetlight—bright enough but romantically soft, too.)

GABRIELLE. And that's all you need to know about me!

RIC. Mysterious.

GABRIELLE. You've told me less.

RIC. I've told you as much!

GABRIELLE. But most of it was lies.

(RIC freezes. GABRIELLE spins away, laughing.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. Ah ha! It *was* mostly lies! It's OK. I've been thoroughly entertained. I'm having a much better evening than I expected to have.

RIC. Oh that's not nice. But you make up for it.

GABRIELLE. I do want to know if you're married. And I want to see some ID and verify that you've told me your real name. Other than that I'm not going to press you, really. Those are the rules with me. No married men, no aliases. Other than that, have your stories.

(RIC gets out his wallet and hands over his driver's license.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. Frederic Hebert, never look at me like this. You look positively homicidal in this picture.

(She returns it.)

RIC. The DMV makes me feel that way. Can I see yours?

GABRIELLE. No.

RIC. Fair is fair.

GABRIELLE. My birthday is on my driver's license.

(An unseen taxi pulls up. GABRIELLE waves it off.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. No taxi!

RIC. Let me see your hands.

(She extends them. Perhaps he drags her under a streetlight to look more closely. He runs his fingers across the backs. Then he turns over one palm and kisses it.)

GABRIELLE. Mmm. You are playing the Latin lover to perfection.

RIC. Thirty-eight.

GABRIELLE. Bastard.

(She hands over her driver's license.)

RIC. Ha! Thirty-eight!

GABRIELLE. I wouldn't have shown you if you were wrong.

RIC. So now we know the essential things.

GABRIELLE. Wait! Are you married?

RIC. Not now, not ever. I mean, not so far.

GABRIELLE. No, you mean not ever.

(Another taxi. RIC waves it away.)

RIC. You?

GABRIELLE. Not married. Not ever.

(Another unseen taxi. GABRIELLE waves it off, annoyed.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. Why are we being hunted by taxis?

RIC. It's your shoes. They're very alluring. And not for walking.

GABRIELLE. I say they are.

(RIC offers his arm again, and GABRIELLE takes it. They walk, relaxed.)

GABRIELLE *(cont'd)*. Are you trying to seduce me by acting the perfectly unattached gentleman? It will work.

RIC. I am not trying to seduce you. I am succeeding.

GABRIELLE. Confident. Too confident. That's a little off.

(RIC pulls GABRIELLE around to face him and plants the most romantic and yet sexual kiss on her ever planted on a woman by a man. The kiss breaks. GABRIELLE is dazzled. A moment.)

GABRIELLE (*cont'd*). Yes.

RIC. That's all today. I want to see you again.

GABRIELLE. No. Now or never.

RIC. Really?

GABRIELLE. I don't trust you.

RIC. What? Why?

GABRIELLE. There's something wrong about you.

RIC. Get to know me better.

GABRIELLE. I'll find out what that something is. And then we'll be done. But we'll have spent days or weeks or months together, and it will hurt to let go. I'm not going to see you again. So make up your mind. Your place, now? Or nothing, ever.

RIC. You shouldn't go home with a man you don't trust.

GABRIELLE. I'd never go home with a man if I followed that advice.

(Without taking his eyes off her, RIC hails a taxi.)

SCENE 3: PHILIP & CHLOE AT HOME

(At the kitchen table, CHLOE is perusing several binders and files. PHILIP enters. It looks like she's doing their taxes old-school. She is not; she is looking at adoption forms.)

PHILIP. You started without me.

CHLOE. This feels ... wrong.

PHILIP. I thought you were sure this time.

CHLOE. I don't mean adopting. I mean this agency. These forms. It feels wrong. It feels cold.

PHILIP. We don't have to use them. They come recommended, but we don't have to use them.

CHLOE. I want an infant.

PHILIP. Which means open adoption.

CHLOE. Which I am fine with.

PHILIP. Which scares the hell out of me.

CHLOE. Which I prefer to going to a foreign country and bringing home a toddler. What if the mother didn't really want to give up her child? You read horror stories.

PHILIP. There are always horror stories. Don't read them. Most people have a good experience. If most people had a horror story, no one would do this.

CHLOE. You're home early. I had a plan to read through everything once and sort of absorb how I feel before you got here. Are you OK? How was your day?

PHILIP. Boring.

CHLOE. You seem agitated.

PHILIP. Nope.

(CHLOE's phone makes a blooping text sound. She checks it.)

CHLOE. "Not what P planned sorry." What does that mean?

PHILIP. Who's it from?

CHLOE. Gabrielle. Who's P? *(The text bleeps again.)* "Tell him I'm not the type but thank you." What type?

PHILIP. Actually, I ... I saw Gabrielle this evening.

CHLOE. Not the type for *what*, Philip?

PHILIP. I had this idea ...

CHLOE. If you proposed a three-way to my oldest friend—

PHILIP. No! No, no. I ... tried to set her up with someone. She didn't go for it. She thinks you put me up to it.

CHLOE. You tried to set up Gabrielle? On what? A blind date?

PHILIP. You wanted her to see a matchmaker!

CHLOE. You're not a matchmaker. You're my husband.

PHILIP. Should I even look at these files? If you don't like them—

CHLOE. Who.

PHILIP. Why do I need your permission to introduce someone to Gabrielle? You want her to—

CHLOE. WHO?!

PHILIP. The problem is—the problem is that Gabrielle doesn't like the whole idea of being set up, right? So I texted her to meet "us" and of course *she* thought that meant you and I—

CHLOE. You *texted* her?

PHILIP. So?

CHLOE. You're texting my friends?

PHILIP. She thought she was meeting *us*!

CHLOE. Where?

PHILIP. What?

CHLOE. Where did you meet?

PHILIP. Some huge French place. It was very loud. She picked it.

CHLOE. Marseilles.

PHILIP. That's it.

CHLOE. OK.

(CHLOE relaxes and goes back to looking at the files.)

PHILIP. What?

CHLOE. She never meets men there. It's her place. She doesn't want it cluttered up with ex-lovers and drama.

PHILIP. Oh. Maybe that's why.

(CHLOE gives him a questioning look.)

PHILIP *(cont'd)*. She didn't stay to meet him.

CHLOE. Who?

PHILIP. The guy. My brother.

(A deadly beat.)

CHLOE. Ric!?

PHILIP. I only have one brother living, Chloe, yes, Ric!

CHLOE. Are. You. Crazy??

(Beat. That one's actually a low blow.)

CHLOE *(cont'd)*. I'm sorry, Philip. But this is my friend.

PHILIP. Chloe. You're right. You're right. But—they both need someone. You've said it and said it about Gabrielle. And I've been thinking. Ric would do well—he'd be on solid ground—if he had a wife and some kind of responsibility to somebody else.

CHLOE. He's a *psychopath*.

PHILIP. A highly functional—

CHLOE. You introduced my oldest friend to a diagnosed psychopath!

PHILIP. It's managed!

CHLOE. He's out of his fucking mind!

PHILIP. He's one of the most in-control people I know!

CHLOE. Because if he let himself go everyone would instantly realize that he is insane!

PHILIP. He's not insane. He's in his right mind. He's demonstrated that.

CHLOE. Oh I need a drink.

PHILIP. Chloe—

CHLOE. I can just picture you in Marseille, fiddling with a cocktail—

PHILIP. I tried a Manhattan. I think I like whiskey straight—

CHLOE. Ric and Gabrielle. What did you really think would happen?

PHILIP. It didn't happen. She ran. Well, not immediately. She was polite to me. But nothing happened. Right. You need a drink.

(PHILIP goes to kitchen area to make CHLOE a drink.)

CHLOE. Make me a cocktail. Everyone has had a cocktail but me. I've never told her about Ric and Mikey or any of it. You made me swear never to tell anyone.

PHILIP. There's only beer.

CHLOE. Isn't that a perfect metaphor.

PHILIP. Do we have Worcestershshire?

CHLOE. I think so.

PHILIP. And Clamato?

CHLOE. What the hell are you doing?

PHILIP. Hebert family beer.

CHLOE. I've known you for over twenty years and tonight you pull out a family recipe?

PHILIP. When I changed my name I dropped everything that went with it. But you want a cocktail. And there's nothing but beer. So ...

CHLOE. Is your family stuff going to stop the adoption, Philip?

PHILIP. Not as long as I'm Philip Hermes—no relation to the scarf.

CHLOE. It's going to come out.

PHILIP. It hasn't come out in—it never has.

CHLOE. If we get caught—

PHILIP. We join the family felons. You knew this about me—you're the only one who knows. I never misled you. The day I knew I was serious about you, I told you everything. And you didn't speak to me for a fucking month.

CHLOE. Yeah, but then I proposed.

(PHILIP smiles and brings CHLOE her drink. She sips.)

PHILIP. You like?

CHLOE. I like! What's it called?

PHILIP. It's a beer Caesar. Or in my family, a Mikey Hebert. Because he made them best.

CHLOE. Oh Jesus, Philip.

PHILIP. Drink up! The past is the past, it's springtime and we're going to have a baby.

CHLOE. These files make me sad. What a way to start your life.

PHILIP. Our child's story doesn't start well, but it ends well. You're going to be a great mom.

CHLOE. I know that.

PHILIP. It doesn't matter where the story begins if it ends well. Right?

CHLOE. Is that true?

PHILIP. You think I had a fun childhood, growing up the middle child between two literally psychotic brothers? It killed my parents. What Mikey did. Ric. What he did to Mikey.

CHLOE. That's why we're adopting. And only ONE. No chance of any Cain and Abel dynamic with just one.

PHILIP. My childhood was pretty dark and sad. But things got better. Things got better and better, and they're going to keep getting better. *(He closes the binders that she has open.)* You want an infant? You want an open adoption? Yes. Let's do it.

CHLOE *(raising her glass)*. To living dangerously.

SCENE 4: A NICE HOTEL ROOM

(Post-sex, GABRIELLE is wrapped in a fluffy hotel robe, and RIC is in boxers. There's a bottle of champagne in a bucket of melting ice. Everything has been wonderful.)

RIC. You want room service?

GABRIELLE. Room service?

RIC. Some oysters to go with the champagne?