

Junior Division, Prose

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A Pawn's Shadow (an excerpt)

He looked at the board in front of him, the game in his favour. Across the table sat his thirteen-year-old protegee whom he had been training for three years. She was talented, but impatient at times. He felt the thrill of anticipation as she made her move.

A former chess grandmaster, Sergey now lived a quiet life in a town on Canada's west coast. The girl picked up her chess piece, a Bishop, and hovered over the board, casting a shadow on her pieces. She looked up at Sergey's face; he knew something she didn't.

"Taking your Rook means I'll be winning, right?" she asked.

"It's not that simple," replied Sergey. "Look closer." He watched as she re-analyzed the board. Her hand hovered above the board, casting a shadow across Sergey's Rook.

Instead, she picked up a solitary pawn in the middle of the board and advanced it one square. She had seen the trap. Relieved, she smiled at him.

"Good," Sergey said calmly, nodding approvingly. He moved his Queen, threatening her Knight. Thinking of her next move, she absentmindedly adjusted her pieces, her hand forcing them in a line.

Queen!" the girl said, promoting her Pawn to a Queen. Moments ago, a Pawn only able to move a single square, now a Queen gliding freely across the board. "Checkmate!" the girl exclaimed moments later beaming with accomplishment. It was the first time she had won against him.

Sergey's smile was even wider, and tears ran down his cheek. All at once he thought of the shadows that stalked him his whole life. But today, the vibrant smile of his talented young protegee who, he was now sure, was destined for greatness pierced through the darkness of his past. It reassured him that he had made a difference.