



"What about you?"

"I'm going to be a knight," said Ron.

The chessmen seemed to have been listening, because at these words a knight, a bishop, and a castle turned their backs on the white pieces and walked off the board, leaving three empty squares that Harry, Ron, and Hermione took.

"White always plays first in chess," said Ron, peering across the board. "Yes ... look ..."

A white pawn had moved forward two squares.

Ron started to direct the black pieces. They moved silently wherever he sent them. Harry's knees were trembling. What if they lost?

"Harry — move diagonally four squares to the right."

Their first real shock came when their other knight was taken. The white queen smashed him to the floor and dragged him off the board, where he lay quite still, facedown.

"Had to let that happen," said Ron, looking shaken. "Leaves you free to take that bishop, Hermione, go on."

Every time one of their men was lost, the white pieces showed no mercy. Soon there was a huddle of limp black players slumped along the wall. Twice, Ron only just noticed in time that Harry and Hermione were in danger. He himself darted around the board, taking almost as many white pieces as they had lost black ones.

"Were nearly there," he muttered suddenly. "Let me think — let me think ..."

The white queen turned her blank face toward him.

"Yes ..." said Ron softly, "it's the only way ... I've got to be taken."

"NO!" Harry and Hermione shouted.