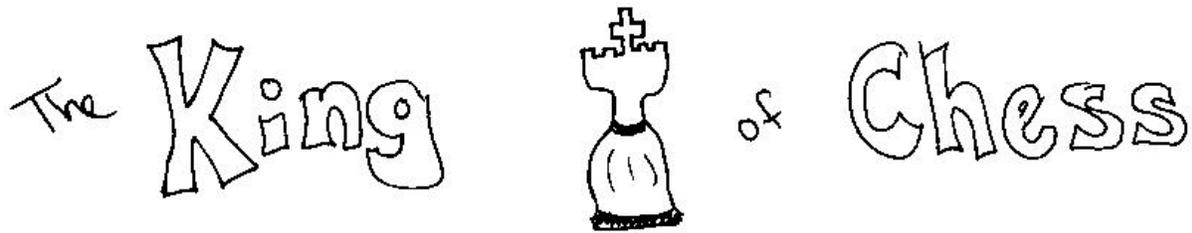


## The King of Chess



By Tamara Kula

Gabe was smart. Everyone knew he was the smartest kid in school. He got perfect grades in math, science, and physics. He wasn't bad in history and English either. And he played the saxophone like no one else. But none of these things made him famous in school. He was famous for something else – chess.

Gabe was not modest. In fact, he bragged about his amazing talent for chess every chance he got: how he had been playing ever since he was three years old, how he had a roomful of trophies in his house, and how, of course, no kid in the entire school had ever beaten him. Not once. His record was a flawless 573 to zero. Every time he played a game of chess after school, he added another point to his record.

So when a new girl showed up in class one day, Gabe wasn't the slightest bit worried.

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"Oh my gosh, did you see how she answered every single question the teacher asked?!"

"She's so smart! I hear she plays the flute too."

"I wonder where she went to school before!"

It was lunchtime, and Gabe found himself surrounded by nonstop chatter about the new girl. As he preferred the topic of everyone's conversation to revolve around himself, he was getting more and more annoyed. He decided that the best way to get back in the spotlight would be to beat this girl at chess. Then things would get back to normal.

He glanced over his shoulder to look for her and realized she was standing right behind him.

"Hi," she said with a friendly smile. "I'm Michelle. I heard you play chess."

"You heard right," Gabe said with a smirk. "Are you any good? Because I've been playing since I was three years old."

The girl's smile hardened slightly. "Oh really?" she said coolly. "My grandfather taught me when I was two."

Gabe narrowed his eyes. "I have 37 trophies at home."

Michelle laughed. "I have so many I can't even count them!"

Trying to look tough, Gabe ignored her little laugh and shot back, "You should know that nobody in this school has ever beaten me. Not once."

"So when can we play?" she asked, determined not to back down.

"How about tomorrow?" Gabe suggested

"Why wait? How about today?" she answered.

And so it was set – that same day after school in the library, Gabe would show everyone that he was still the best chess player in school.

\* \* \*

“Are you worried?” Gabe’s friend Jason asked as a crowd of students followed Gabe down the hall to the library.

“Worried?” Gabe laughed. “Why would I worry?”

“Well, she is pretty smart...”

“Look,” Gabe told Jason impatiently. “I always win. And I’m definitely not going to let a girl beat me!”

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“How could I lose!” wailed Gabe. “In front of everyone!”

He was sitting under a tree outside the school, and Jason was doing his best to console him.

“You almost beat her, Gabe!” Jason said optimistically. “It was a really close game! And 573 to one is still a really good record. Better than anyone’s. Besides, Michelle has been playing since she was two. You didn’t learn until you were three!” Gabe sighed and buried his face in his hands. When he looked up, he saw one of his classmates, Samantha, approaching. Samantha was a good chess player, but not as good as Gabe.

“What do you want?” Gabe demanded grumpily when Samantha reached his tree.

Samantha looked smug. “Oh,” she said casually. “I just wanted to tell you that after lunch today, Michelle asked me to teach her how to play chess. Today was the first time she has ever played.”

“What?!” sputtered Gabe. “She made me look like a fool!”

“It’s your own fault, you know,” Samantha said, sounding like an adult. “She wouldn’t have challenged you to a game if you hadn’t been so conceited. She actually came to talk to you at lunch today to ask if you would teach her how to play!”

