



# *The little chess player*

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Magic

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– Christmas, Christmas, Christmas – Little Harry was repeating happily and was looking at the beautifully wrapped gifts under the Christmas tree.

Edmon was spinning his tail and circling and barked when he saw Harry.

– Come on my little friend, come on let's take a walk in the snow! – the little boy said to the dog.

Edmon lifted his paws, looked at Harry with his warm brown eyes, and barked as a sign of consent.

– Mom, I'm going to walk Edmon out in the snow – Harry said.

– Do not be late, I'm preparing a Christmas dinner, and you know there will be gifts tonight – Harry's mother replied.

Harry smiled, whistled to his loyal friend, and both got outside in seconds. Edmon was running in the snow, and Harry followed him obediently. The forest seemed even more beautiful, the pine trees covered with snow (in white), and the sound of the river's whirlpool around, made it magic.

Harry glanced at Edmon and saw his little friend stop near the river. Harry caught up with him, wondering why Edmon did not move, his fur coat bristled, and the beautiful husky began barking abruptly.

Then Harry noticed a small bridge, followed by many tiny steps, difficult to determine their origin if they were from a small animal. Curiosity prevailed, and Harry continued, wading in the snow, sauntering towards the bridge, and Edmon followed him.

Harry reached the bridge, took a step on the bridge with a slight fright, glanced down, and saw the stream

flowing on trees and other objects on the surface. He took a breath and continued more confidently in the snow.

– Edmon, why are you barking, what are you unhappy about? Do you feel any trouble, my friend? – Asked Harry with worry.

Edmon continued to bark and follow his master. They felt the cold and were close to freezing when they reached the opposite side of the river. Then the husky ran with such speed as if he was chasing a prey.

Harry could hardly catch up with him and saw Edmon suddenly stopped, not making a sound, looking around. Harry approached his pet and felt the silence was pressuring him, felt fear and embraced Edmon.

– Edmon, and now where to? – Harry whispered in his ear. Something very fast, with the speed of light, passed before them and hid. Edmon began to sniff, and the smell led him to a tall fence. Harry followed Edmon, and as he reached the fence, a strong light drew his gaze.

Behind the fence of the pine trees, there was a cottage made of large uneven stones. Edmon broke and tried crawling, squeezing through the dense hedge of pine trees, and managed to make a gap. The husky sneaked, and followed by Harry on his hands and feet, and they both found themselves in front of the cottage, staring in fear.

Harry stood up and approached the door, but it was heavy. Tired he pushed with his whole body and Edmon accelerated and threw himself onto the door.

The door opened. Light and warmth attracted the uninvited guests. There was a fireplace, Harry approached it, and his little face shone.

– Anyone here, we are friends – Harry said with lack of courage. Not long for the answer to appear:

– Yes, I am the master of the cottage, you are welcome, come and warm up – said a small build old man with a vivacious look. A smile adorned the old man's face as Harry, and the wet dog beside him appeared. – Who are you, boy, how did you get through my pine fence? – continued the old man.

– I'm Harry, and this husky is my best friend, Edmon, thanks to him we got in here.

– That's good, well, sit here, by the fireplace, Harry, and warm up, I'll make tea- the old man invited him.

Suddenly Edmon broke loose and ran around to chase someone. Something fell upon Harry's head, who panicked, and Edmon barked even harder. The old man appeared with a teapot in his hand and laughingly said:  
– Gabby, Gabby, come here, behave, these are our guests.

Then Harry saw that the thing that was on his head was a little monkey pet that had graciously moved over the old man's shoulder. They sat down on a small wooden table in squares in gold and black.

The tea smelled of flowers. Edmon had quieted and was mumbling hungry Harry's legs.

– Harry, I'm going to feed your friend Edmon too, and I'm hoping he will behave and not bark at my gentle girl Gabby. I'm very, very old, my name is Leo, and I live here with my only friend Gabby, who always listens to me  
– the old man said calmly.

– Hahaha, Gabby cannot speak, so she makes no remarks -Harry smiled, and said and continued – How old are you, Grandpa Leo?

– I'm 120 years old, and my little friend is 100 – Leo said.

– Oh – Harry shouted -what's the secret to living so long, Grandpa Leo? Tell me – Harry waved his arm with eager.

– Many years ago -the old man began – when I was a little boy like you, hordes of neighbouring Kingdom invaded and took our city. Then I fled to the mountain and got to know each altitude, a hill, I even had friends – animals, and I fed them when I could. I was looking for a place to hide from the cold and fall into a habitable cave. There lived an old man who, before closing his eyes, taught me to play in the oldest game.

– Which is the oldest game? – Harry asked.

– How come, no one told you? This is the chess game! – continued Grandpa Leo. – I was playing with the old man every night, and I was getting more and more confident. Before he died, the old man gave me his chess box with the chess figures and the only book he managed to hide from the invaders. The book is called “Persian Tales.” I read them, re-read them, and finally understood their lessons and their wisdom. I decided to go back to town. I was walking for days, hiding from hungry bears, weeping from fear and praying to succeed, to find my parents' home, to find my parents alive – the old man said, and his eyes got almost in tears.

– Keep going – Harry urged him, and Edmon followed his master with a growl.

– I reached the town – said Grandpa Leo in a trembling voice – and felt calm, the devastating storm was over. Life was going on, people were busy, and the market was trading. I looked at the watermelon vendor and shouted with joy, “Dad, Dad!”. We embraced, he wiped my tears, asked me where I was hiding and what was

this box in my hands. We went home; everything was the same, preserved. My mother hugged me with love and joy. I told my parents about the old man, about the Persian Tales I already knew by heart, and showed them the chess box with the figures.

Grandpa Leo took some tea and continued:

– Then my mother opened her arms and exclaimed excitedly” Tomorrow night the new King will open the castle doors for the one who can play the most ancient game. The winner will receive a prize. “The next day I went to the castle, and the guards were laughing at me.” Hey, you little boy, what is in this box?” “Please convey to the King that I am Leo – the little chess player.” The guards laughed. When the King heard about the little chess player, he called me immediately. He stared at me with curiosity and the wooden box that I held in my hands. “Boy, where did you get this chess box from?” “I inherited it from an old man who taught me how to play,” I replied to the King. “Then let us measure our strength,” the King said with a smile on his face. We sat to play chess on my chessboard. The King became very thoughtful and offensive. I could not always guess his moves and gradually began to lose. “Boy,” said the King, “you can move the figures, you know the rules, but you cannot beat me.” “My King,” I replied, “If you allow me to progress and I win, without offending you, I’ll do it right away.” Then the King looked at me and said, “There is wisdom in you. Where did you learn wisdom, boy?” “From the old ‘Persian Tales,’ “I replied. “Why did you ask for permission to win the game?” The King continued. “Because in the game of chess the complete victory is called checkmate.” “And what of that?” The King asked me. “. If I tell you Checkmate – that means insulting you – the meaning of this word is, “Death to the King.” “Oh, oh ...” the King managed to exclaim. What is your wish, I will gladly reward you?” Then I asked the King to grant me (to bestow on me) with longevity. And he generously replied, “You will live long and have this monkey pet Gabby as a royal present for you.”

Harry listened; his eyes sparkled with a challenge – to ask the old man to teach him to play chess. Grandpa Leo showed him the figures, their names and how to move them on the chessboard.

It wasn’t easy for the boy to take all in; he struggled to remember all and to start to place the figures on the chessboard. It was late eve, and it was getting dark. Grandpa Leo urged Harry to leave, so to get home in time for the Christmas Eve.

– Grandpa Leo, I promise to come back with Edmon again and play chess with you – said the kid.

The old man embraced him, patted Edmon on his head and sent them.

Outside, a strong wind blew, and the snow had covered all traces. Edmon led and managed to cross the bridge

again, drowning in the deep snow and guarding the wind. They arrived home, and Harry's mother welcomed them:

- Where are you, Harry, in this wind and snow you could be lost?
- Mom, Mom, we had the most magical walk with Edmon, but I'll tell you after dinner.

The Christmas tree was lit (shone), and it was time for presents. Harry smiled, and his father pointed to the presents:

- Harry, here it is – this box, wrapped in gold paper and a blue ribbon, is your gift.

Harry began to untie the ribbon, to open slowly and gradually faster and clumsily, tore the packaging, and a wooden box of gold and black squares shone in front of his eyes.

- Chess! Chess! Harry shouted victoriously. -This is the clever game, the game of the beautiful mind.

Harry's parents watched with joy, and with surprise, that their son knew about this game. Harry looked at them and thanked them with the words:

- And you know, I do not want ever to become a King so I can play this wise game and freely say CHECKMATE.

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