

BEYOND FICTION

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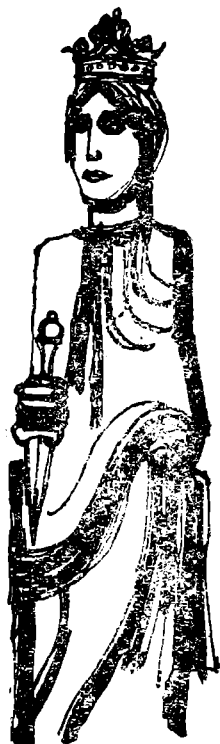
JOSEPH Burnham put down the letter from his wife and gazed out at the Illinois countryside. So Peterson was dead. Dead in an upstate insane asylum. Why did wives have to write such things? Why did they have to have such things to write about? *Why?* Thoroughly depressed, he sat and stared through the window while the Super-Chief sped westward.

"Anything else, sir?" the steward inquired.

Burnham shook his head, ignoring the barely touched mixed grill in front of him. This will never do, he told himself. Have to be in shape for that conference on the Coast. He paid the bill and left.

In the club car, he tried to interest himself in a magazine, but the thought of Peterson was annoyingly present. Only five years ago — brilliant, young, full of promise, and then suddenly . . .

Waste, thought Burnham, what a terrible, terrible waste! He tried to tell himself it hadn't really been his fault. He wished he were back home, so that he could look up Fred Bailey and talk it over with him. Wistfully, he thought ahead to the people he would be seeing in San Francisco. The need to find a friendly, receptive ear was strong, but there would be none until he returned to New York, so he decided to have a drink in-



Queen's Mate

By **JEAN M. JANIS**

**Warning to chess fiends:
Don't make a move—
It means death!**

Illustrated by **ASHMAN**

stead. He put aside his magazine and glanced around. The club car was empty, except for himself, the steward at the far end and a couple across the aisle. He was about to signal the steward when a familiar sound caught his ear and he looked, instead, at the couple. Chess!

The coincidence of his unhappy thoughts about Peterson and the sight of the miniature chess board made him feel less lonely, and he forgot about the drink. The man was arranging the pieces, placing the tiny, pegged figures in their proper squares. It looked like an expensive set, probably made to order, and Burnham turned his attention to the people themselves.

THEY, too, looked expensive. Burnham forgot about both Peterson and chess, gazing at the couple with the honest admiration of a man who is short, balding, fortyish—and thus very susceptible to the charms of people who are none of those.

The woman sat relaxed and graceful, watching her companion, smiling faintly. Her skin was pale and fine as porcelain. Her hair, like the suit she wore, was velvety black. She was tall and slim, her height accentuated by the hair, long and braided, arranged in coronet fashion around her well-shaped head. The man matched her dark, striking coloring. Hand-

some, thought Burnham, handsome! They had stature and—and—he searched for a word to describe the quality which seemed to hover about the couple, came up with elegance, accepted it reluctantly as the best he could manage.

Seeing an escape from his loneliness, he leaned forward. "Excuse me," he said. "That's a handsome set you have there."

The man glanced up. "Why, thank you." His voice carried a faint foreign accent. "Do you play?"

"Well . . ." Burnham shrugged, "a little. Not much." He made a deprecatory gesture. "I'm no Capablanca!" he added.

The woman smiled politely, and the man said, "Neither am I. Would you care for a game?"

Burnham looked at the woman. "Well, I don't want to intrude."

"Oh, not at all," she protested, her tone spiced with the same vaguely pleasing accent as her companion's. "Truly, I did not care to play."

"Well . . ." he repeated, still hesitating courteously. "If you're *sure* . . ."

"Oh, quite," said the woman. She looked from him to her companion. "Carl was hoping to find a game."

The man stood up, holding out his hand. "Czerny is the name," he said. "Carl Czerny. This is my wife."

Burnham shook hands with the couple and introduced himself, crossing over to join them. "Czerny." He frowned. "I used to know someone by that name. Sales manager for a few years in the Detroit office. I'm a district supervisor," he explained. "Supple-Sheen Paints, Inc. Czerny—yes, that was his name. Paul, Emil—something like that. Not related, by any chance?"

"No," said the man, shaking his head. "I think not."

"Well," said Burnham, "it's not a name you run across every day. Polish, isn't it?"

"Czech," replied Mr. Czerny.

"Oh, yes! Yes, Czechoslovakia!" Burnham raised an eyebrow at them. "Say," he went on with heavy jocularly. "I'm not in the company of Red spies, am I?"

"Hardly." Czerny smiled, showing strong white teeth. "We're not Reds. We're Blacks. That is," he explained, seeing Burnham's puzzlement, "the name Czerny means Black in our language."

"Oh! I see!" Burnham shook his head. "Too bad my name's not White."

"That *would* be fitting, would it not?" Czerny took a pawn of each color and shuffled them behind his back. "Your choice, sir?"

BURNHAM pointed to the left and received White. Pleased, he started to help Czerny arrange

the rest of the pieces. He liked playing White. His defensive game was poor, he knew, and he found himself feeling eager and confident.

"Darling." Mrs. Czerny touched her husband's arm. "Why don't we go to our compartment?" She looked at Burnham. "You could play so much more comfortably there and I would have my knitting while I watch."

Czerny glanced at the other man and Burnham stood up. "Why, sure," he said. "That would be fine!"

"Agreed, then." Mrs. Czerny glowed delightfully and rested her hand briefly on Burnham's sleeve. "So considerate of you."

"Not at all," he beamed. "My pleasure." He followed her slim, willowy figure up the aisle, with Czerny behind him, and they left the club car and moved through the train.

Their compartment was two cars away and, when they reached it, the men seated themselves at the table, while Mrs. Czerny took out a bag of knitting and placed herself where she could watch the game. She made a charming picture sitting there, all black and white, with the bright red of her lips and the red wool in her hands offering a colorful contrast. Burnham decided this was going to be one of his pleasanter trips after all. On the way to the compartment,

he had learned that the Czernys were going all the way through to the Coast.

"Business in New York," Czerny had said. "We're going home after a short visit in San Francisco." Burnham wondered where 'home' was. Europe, perhaps? At any rate, he looked forward to their company. It promised friendship, chess, talk about politics — Peterson came to his mind, and Burnham weighed the thought of confiding in the Czernys, remembering other trips in which brief communions with strangers had often seemed more vital and interesting than old, established friendships.

Czerny had placed the chess set between them and now sat waiting for White's opening. Burnham pursed his lips, whistled a few tuneless notes and tried to recall gambits.

"It's been quite a while since I last played," he apologized.

Work had piled up so steadily during the past four years that he rarely had time for a game. Not like the old days, he thought, back at the Club in New York. The memory of Peterson intruded again and, abruptly, Burnham cut it off by moving his King's Pawn to the fourth rank. Czerny answered by placing his King's Knight at King's Bishop three, and Burnham advanced his Pawn another square, threatening the Knight.

THE next few moments passed with only the soft click of Mrs. Czerny's knitting needles breaking the silence. Czerny's Black Knight galloped across the board, drawing out White Pawns at each position, and Burnham laughed. "If you'll excuse me for saying so," he pointed out, "I don't think much of your defense. Look! You're giving me the center of the board!"

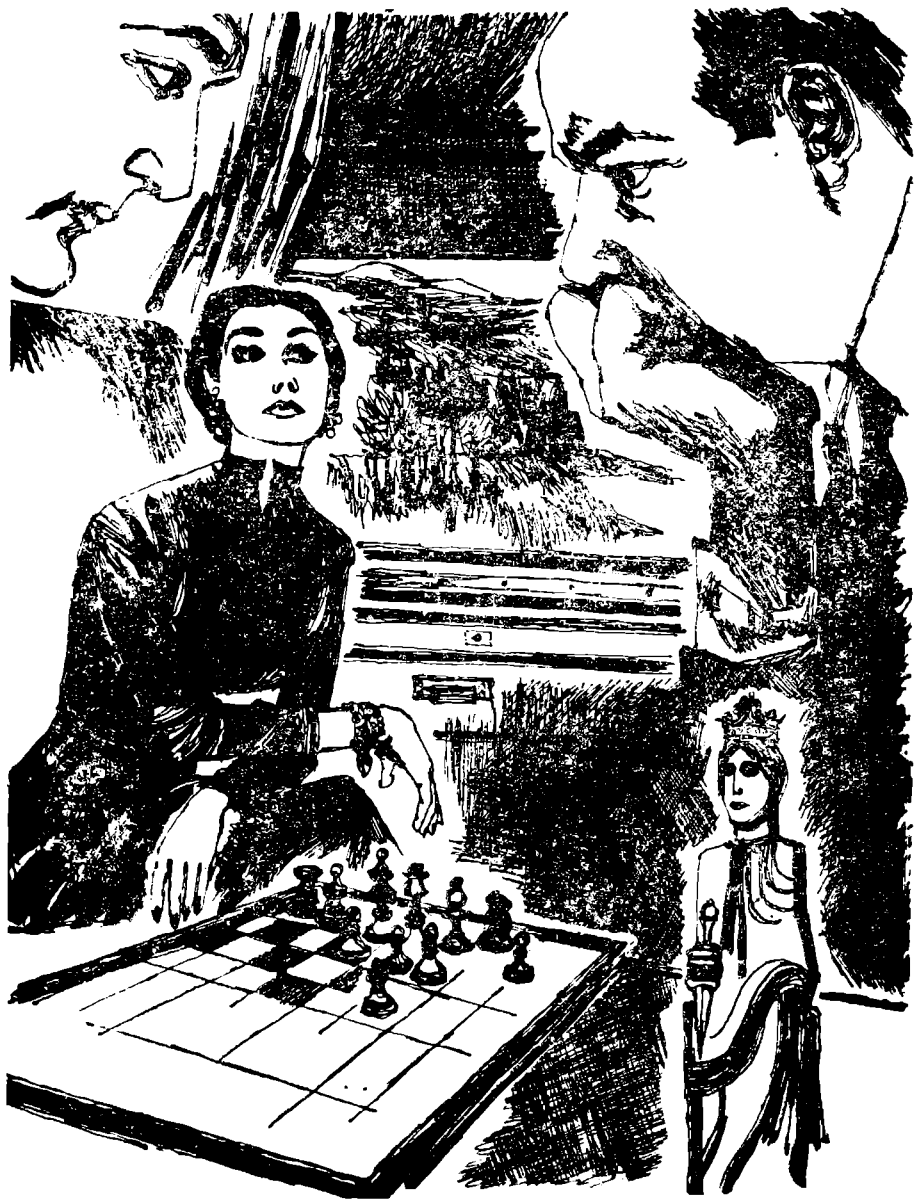
Czerny smiled. "Perhaps." He advanced a Pawn of his own. "When it comes to chess, I fear I am a modernist, wary of wholesale slaughter. I prefer the attack from the wings."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed." Burnham studied the board. "Had a friend like that. Played beautiful chess. Poor guy," he added. "My wife wrote me he died last week."

"How distressing," murmured Mrs. Czerny. "A close friend of yours?"

Her husband looked sympathetic. "Surely he did not die of chess!"

"Oddly enough, he did," said Burnham. "Now that I think of it, that's just what *did* kill him." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You see," he went on to explain, "I used to belong to a chess club back in New York. I was crazy about chess in those days. Used to go there and play three, four nights a week regularly. We had some good players there. A couple of masters and a number of men,



like young Peterson, who were really going places. He was the best, though."

He glanced at the Czernys, trying to determine their degree of interest. His host was sitting with his head cocked attentively, the chiseled perfection of his features seeming to invite confidence. Mrs. Czerny, on the other hand, was bent over her knitting, frowning slightly.

"I'm—I'm not boring you, am I?" he asked.

She looked up swiftly. "No, no," she assured him. "My husband and I are most interested. You were saying?"

"He was saying, my dear," Czerny replied, "that he had a young friend named Peterson who played very good chess." He looked at Burnham. "That was the name, sir? Peterson?"

"Peterson. Yes." Burnham reached out to capture a Black Pawn with his King's Pawn. "I first met him about six years ago, when he was twenty and getting ready to set the chess world on its ear. He played like no one I've seen before or since, and everybody at the Club was sure we had the next World's Champion."

Czerny took the advancing White Pawn with his own King's Pawn, and Burnham paused to survey his position before continuing. The two Kings sat facing each other on a completely open file,

and he moved his King's Knight to King's Bishop three.

CZERNY moved his Bishop in front of his King, and Burnham automatically did the same. Czerny castled. White castled.

"Then," Burnham went on, "five years ago, it happened. Peterson entered the New York State Tournament. He sailed through his preliminary rounds with no losses and only one draw. The Club was so damn proud of him we all could have burst right there on the spot. We gave a dinner for him, the night before the final round, and Peterson showed up late. He apologized, said he'd taken a nap and overslept.

"Well, we thought it was swell of him to come at all. He was under a terrific strain and looked pretty tired. He was nervous at dinner, I remember, but he got through it all right. Afterward, we were in the lounge, talking about this and that, mostly chess." He paused to advance a Pawn.

Czerny replied with a threat to his Knight and, for a few minutes, Burnham forgot what he was saying and concentrated on the game. He realized, with an agreeable shock, that he was playing much better than he usually did, and he put his thoughts on the board, parrying threats skillfully and answering with advances of his own.

"So," he continued, while

Czerny studied positions, "we were in the lounge, and Fred Bailey and I were talking to Peterson about the International Tournament coming up. He was going to enter and, with the State title practically in his pocket, we were feeling pretty good about his chances in the next one.

"Well, all of a sudden, the kid went to pieces and started to laugh and talk, laugh and talk. Hysterics. Fortunately, Fred and I were right there. Fred's a doctor, that's why I say fortunately. We got Peterson out of the lounge and into one of the private rooms.

"He was in a bad way, all jitters and giggles. Lord, he looked awful! Fred suggested that we get him home, so I called a cab. We managed to get him out of the Club and over to his apartment without too much fuss. Peterson lived alone. His parents had died a couple of years back, leaving him enough of an income that would see him through college with a bit left over. The only thing he really cared about was chess and, what with the money he had and the way he was mastering the game, he could have gone ahead and earned a tidy living." He shook his head, chewing at his lower lip.

"We used to say he was one of the luckiest and nicest guys that ever lived! Not very handsome, but friendly looking. Kind of shy. There was once a girl . . ." He

shrugged, remembering the girl Peterson had brought to the Christmas dance at the Club, wondering what had happened to her.

"How dreadful!" said Mrs. Czerny. Her face was very pale, and her delicately formed hands rested quietly on the red wool. She looked up, fastening her large dark eyes on Burnham. "It was — nerves?" she asked.

"Nerves." He nodded, glancing at his game. "Nerves and chess, that's what Fred said." He answered Czerny's move by taking his Queen's Bishop.

Czerny advanced a Pawn, offering an exchange of Knights which would put Burnham at a disadvantage. Burnham's Knight, however, was trapped in all directions anyway, so he exchanged, albeit unwillingly. Czerny threatened again with his Pawn, and, when the second skirmish was over, Burnham stopped to count pieces and discovered he had lost three Pawns, a Knight, a Bishop and a Rook, while taking only one Pawn, one Bishop and a Knight. He frowned. Czerny's other Knight and Bishop, supported by the Black Queen, were dangerously grouped for a Kingside attack. Talking, he fumed inwardly, that's what I get for talking!

AS though sensing his thoughts, Czerny pushed the board a little to one side. "Do continue,

Mr. Burnham," he said. "We can finish this later."

"Yes, do," urged Mrs. Czerny.

Burnham smiled. "There isn't much more," he apologized. "But you know how it is. Something like that happening to a swell guy like Peterson—it's hard to get it out of your mind, especially when you know you caused part of it." He frowned. "Probably, by tomorrow, I won't even think about it, but just having got my wife's letter this morning, I . . ."

"You want to talk about it," she finished gently. "We understand. But I don't see why it was *your* fault, Mr. Burnham."

"Well," he replied, "it happened this way. When Fred and I got him home from the Club that night, he started crying and shaking all over. Fred went to the drugstore for a sedative, while I stayed with Peterson. All I could think about was the next morning, when the kid surely would have taken the State Championship, only now, how could he? In his present condition, he couldn't have won a game of tiddlywinks from a ten-year-old!

"I helped him to undress and get into bed, and the kid started talking about dreams he'd been having. That's what was upsetting him, he told me. Imagine! Every night for the last week, he said, he'd been dreaming about chess. Only, instead of dreaming about

little pieces on a board, they were big pieces. In fact, he said they were men and women, full grown, moving around on ranks and files the size of Central Park!

"They went through games, Peterson said, real chess games. The Pawns were boys dressed up like pages at court, with little swords strapped to their side. The Knights wore light armor and carried spears. The Bishops had small flasks of poison. The Rooks . . ." Burnham remembered the description, suddenly, vividly, and toned it down so as not to shock Mrs. Czerny. "The Rooks were men maybe seven feet tall. They didn't carry weapons. They—they used their hands. Each King and Queen had a small dagger, a mister—miserery . . ." He frowned. "I forgot what Peterson called it."

"Misericord?" suggested Czerny. "A thin-bladed dagger of the Middle Ages," he explained. "It was generally employed to give the *coup de grâce*." His charming smile flashed briefly. "I am something of a student of medieval times."

"Oh." Burnham nodded. "Yes, I think that's what Peterson called it. Anyhow, in these games, when a piece captured another piece, they—they . . ." He stumbled, wanting to tell it the way Peterson had, but not wanting to upset Mrs. Czerny, who sat pale and unmoving, as though carved from some

strange exotic black and white wood, with even the red of her lips faded and wan.

Again, Czerny came to his rescue, nodding and resting one finger on the miniature board between them, saying, "How symbolic. After all, a piece taken is a piece removed is a piece destroyed, is it not?"

"Is a rose is a rose is a rose," Mrs. Czerny chimed in, coming to life and smiling faintly at her husband. "Darling, *do* let us hear the rest of the story. I am certain there is more."

BURNHAM mopped the perspiration on his forehead. Lord! How talking about it brought that night back! "Peterson—he *believed* all this. That was his trouble. I tried to tell him how sometimes, after I'd had a good solid five or six hours of chess, I sometimes dreamed about chessman and games. But he *believed* his dreams. He told me that some place there's a world, or maybe many worlds, where chess is the structure of the society.

"He said in that world men and women move around, living and dying, because we tell them to. He insisted that world had been created by *us*, by people like you and me who play chess. He said that every time a board is taken out, every time a game is started, this other world mirrors the game,

and men and women in it go through the same moves, killing as they capture, or being killed if they're taken."

"Interesting," said Mr. Czerny. He made a tent with his fingers and sat studying them. "Interesting. You know, of course, Mr. Burnham, that chess originated from the sketches made by generals in warfare of days long gone."

"Darling." Mrs. Czerny laid her hand on his fingers. "Not now." She smiled at Burnham. "Please go on," she said.

Burnham saw that Czerny looked a bit perturbed, and decided he'd better finish the story, finish his game and leave. He didn't want to get caught in any family bickering! "Well, Fred came back along about then and made Peterson take more pills. The kid begged us not to leave. He said he was afraid to fall asleep. We agreed to stay with him for the night and promised to wake him if he seemed to be having nightmares.

"So we called our wives to tell them where we were and, almost immediately, Peterson fell asleep. When Fred and I went to the kitchen to make some coffee, I repeated what the kid had told me. We were sitting there, drinking coffee to keep awake and discussing the situation, when the kid screamed.

"We raced into the bedroom. We'd left a small light on, and

we saw him all huddled up in a corner of the bed, shaking and white as a ghost. He held his arms up in front of him, as if he was trying to keep something away and, when he saw us, he just folded over. He was crying over and over, 'Don't let her get me. Don't let her get me!'

"Fred started talking calmly to him while we straightened out the bed. We could see he'd thrashed around quite a lot in his nightmare. Fred just kept talking to him and it was pretty awful. We tried to tell him it was just nerves, that he was under a strain because of the tournament and that he'd be fine once it was over—but he just shook his head, whispering that we didn't believe him. Finally, Fred said it was obvious the kid couldn't play in the morning, and I said I'd call the officials and explain to them.

"WELL, Peterson sort of pulled himself together a little then, and said he didn't want us to do that. He knew how much the Club thought of him, and he was ashamed for breaking down like that. Anyhow, in spite of what he believed about the game, he *wanted* to play in the morning, he *wanted* to win. After all, chess was his whole life. That's where the battle was—inside him. He believed all those crazy things he'd told me and, at the same time, he knew he

could beat any other player in the world, if he'd *stop* believing it was a game of flesh and blood, instead of wood and ivory.

"We sat up the rest of the night with him. We talked about anything we could think of, so long as it wasn't chess. Along about dawn, he fell asleep again, and we stayed close to him this time, smoking and talking softly, so as not to disturb him. He didn't seem to be dreaming, so we just sat and watched.

"We woke him up in time to have a shower and eat some breakfast before going to the tournament. He seemed much better. That little sleep he'd had did him a lot of good. His jitters were gone, and he apologized for all the trouble he'd been, and admitted that we were right and that he'd been wrong.

"Fred and I were still in our dinner jackets from the evening before, and we both needed shaves and some sleep, so Peterson said he'd go on alone. He sounded all right and acted fine, so we wished him luck and he left. I went back to the bedroom for my cigarettes."

Burnham swore and struck his knee with one fist. "It's all my fault!" he cried. "If I hadn't found the damn thing, the kid would have been great! He'd have sailed through that final round like . . ."

"Thing?" Mr. Czerny sat up a little straighter. "You found a—

thing, Mr. Burnham? What sort of thing?"

"A tiny chess piece, a queen. It was maybe half an inch high, made out of jade. I kicked it with my foot when I went to the bedroom for my cigarettes, and I heard it roll off the carpet onto the wood floor. I picked it up and showed it to Fred. At first, we thought it was part of a miniature set, because of its size. But, instead of being pegged, it had a tiny hole bored through it, like it might have been strung on something and fallen loose.

"Well, we both knew Peterson was superstitious and we figured the jade queen was a good luck charm of his. We got kind of worried. We thought maybe, if he got to the tournament and discovered it was missing, he might blow up again and not be able to play.

"Fred, being a doctor, had to get to his office, so I grabbed a taxi, dinner jacket and all, and hurried over to the tournament. I arrived only a few minutes after Peterson. He was getting ready to sit down and play and I knew that, once the game started, I wouldn't be able to talk to him or disturb him in any way, so I pushed my way through the crowd and handed him the jade queen."

BURNHAM reached for his handkerchief and mopped his forehead again. Mr. Czerny was

watching him intently. Mrs. Czerny had leaned back against the cushioned seat, one hand at her throat, playing with the top button of her suit jacket. "Well, instead of saying thanks, or—or anything, well, he just stood there, staring at the thing.

"I said, 'What's the matter? I found it in your bedroom. It's yours, isn't it?'"

"He shook his head.

"I said, 'Well, gosh, I'm sorry I came busting in. I should have known you wouldn't need any charms to win.' I wished him luck again and reached out to take the thing back.

"Peterson tightened his hand over the little queen and said, 'I happen to know who it does belong to.'

"I said, 'Oh, well, you can return it when you get through here.'

"Peterson said, 'I'm through now,' and looked around the room. He looked at the master he was supposed to play, sitting there, waiting for him to start the game. He looked at the officials, who were getting a little impatient with the delay. He looked at all the people who were waiting to see him win and finally he looked at me.

"His eyes were big and glassy, and he said, 'Remember when you came in last night, you and Fred? I was dreaming about the Black

Queen,' he said. 'She was standing right there in my bedroom. She had a dagger in her hand and she said to me, "You have told our secrets and you are very wicked." She raised the dagger and I screamed. She got scared, I guess, and disappeared. Then you and Fred came in and found me.'

"Peterson held up the little jade queen. 'This is hers,' he said. 'She was wearing a necklace of tiny chessmen. This piece must have dropped off the chain, somehow. That's why you found it where you did, in my bedroom.' He grabbed my arm, and I got a little scared because I hadn't realized how strong he was. 'Last night,' Peterson said, 'you and Fred almost convinced me that my dreams were just nightmares, brought on by nerves. But now I have *this*,' he said, holding up the little queen, 'and I know I was right! *Now* will you believe me? *Now* will you believe the truth about this game?'

"I just stood there, kicking myself all over the place for having brought that thing to him, and Peterson saw I still didn't believe him and he got mad. 'All right,' he shouted. 'I'll tell everybody! *Everybody!* *Someone's* got to believe me!'

"He jumped up on that chair that was waiting for him and kicked the chessboard off the table, scattering the pieces. He stood on

the table and started waving his arms, pointing to that little queen, yelling out the same crazy story he'd told me the night before.

"Everybody backed away from him. The tournament officials were running around helplessly. They didn't know what to do. Nobody did.

"**S**OMEBODY finally grabbed him and pulled him down off the table. He fought. They were going to call the police, but I made them call a doctor instead. That was what he needed, a doctor. I—I never saw Peterson again. The last view I had of him was when they carried him out of there, about an hour later. The doctor had shot him full of some sedative. He was in a strait-jacket, and his head kind of—kind of wobbled." Burnham cleared his throat and wiped his hand across his mouth.

"I don't know how they managed to keep it out of the papers. The reporters were very decent. They called it a 'mental breakdown' and didn't make too much of a story out of it. The people who had come to watch the game had mostly been on Peterson's side in the first place, so *they* never talked about it much. All in all, with the way it was hushed up, I guess maybe Fred and I are the only ones who ever knew the whole story."

"How dreadful!" murmured

Mrs. Czerny. Her eyes were half-closed, and her hand rested quietly at her throat.

"What a terrible experience to happen to anyone," said Mr. Czerny.

"And Peterson?" she asked. "What did he do then?"

"He didn't do anything," Burnham answered. "He was committed to an asylum almost immediately. They let him keep the little jade queen. He insisted he had to return it to someone, and he became violent whenever they tried to take it from him. So they let him keep it but, outside of that trinket, he never touched another chess piece in the past five years. He died last week. Poor devil got hold of a knife somehow and . . ."

"Poor man!" sighed Mrs. Czerny, taking up her knitting again. "So you said. Last Tuesday, wasn't it? How very sad!"

"Tuesday?" Burnham looked puzzled. "Why, I don't—"

"Well, well," said Mr. Czerny, sitting up abruptly and pulling their unfinished game forward. "Your move, I believe."

Dutifully, Burnham bent his head over the board. Tuesday? He couldn't remember. Had his wife written him it was Tuesday? Now that the story had been told, he felt tired. He realized that, while talking about it might have some future benefits, it had certainly de-

pressed him for the time being. He was aware that the Czernys were exchanging a glance, and he felt annoyed with himself for having bothered them with such an unpleasant tale about someone they didn't even know. Tuesday? He wondered again. He must look it up in the letter. Later, he promised himself. You've got a game to win.

CZERNY'S Knight had forked his King's Rook. He could remove the Knight by taking him with—

"You know," Mrs. Czerny's voice broke into his thoughts, "I shouldn't blame myself for what happened, if I were you, Mr. Burnham."

"Hmmm?" He looked up at her. "I beg your pardon?" He could remove the Knight by—

"I mean," she said, knitting rapidly, "suppose the story *were* true. Suppose the Black Queen *had* visited Peterson while he slept, showing him the world he never—" she smiled charmingly—"forgive the phrase—the world he never dreamed existed. That would put quite a different light on the poor man's history, would it not?"

Remove the Knight by taking him with the Pawn in front of the Rook. Burnham held onto the thought while he answered her. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he said politely, wishing she would

let him concentrate on the game.

"Well," she elaborated, "let's say it was true." Her slim white fingers raced with the needles. "Peterson, knowing about the world of the chess people, would represent a threat, would he not? For, if *he* believed, he might persuade others to believe. Think of all the gentle chess players! How would they feel, knowing they were slaughtering living people every time they removed a Pawn or a Knight or a Queen?" She pursed her lips, examining her work critically. "Don't you suppose laws might be passed? Banning chess?"

Burnham sighed and looked longingly at the board. "I'm afraid I don't follow you." Take the Knight with the Pawn. Black's Bishop captures Pawn. Mate! No, no! Advance the White Rook one square! He perked up. Would that let him escape?

"Quite simple," Mrs. Czerny went on. "With chess forbidden, the world of the chess people would cease to exist. *They* would cease to exist. Terrible as their lives might seem to men like Peterson, like yourself, surely *that* would be an even more dreadful destiny. The other way, at least, they have some sort of survival rate and, when one is born to live dangerously, one learns to savor the sensation. But to stop their world completely!" She

shook her head and sucked in her breath. "No," she said. "I feel the Black Queen was wholly justified in trying to silence your poor Mr. Peterson."

Burnham stared at her. "But why?" he demanded. "Why would she tell Peterson in the first place, if it was so dangerous for her?"

Mrs. Czerny shrugged. "Whim," she said shortly. "Anticipation of an interesting situation, perhaps. Mere curiosity, if you like, to see what he would do, how he would feel." She laid her knitting aside, folding her hands. "She might not have realized the possibility of its ending as it did."

BURNHAM snorted. "*Whim!*" He turned back to his game. "On a whim, she makes a poor kid crazy, so that he winds up in an asylum putting a knife in his heart! Some whim!" He could advance the White Rook to King's Knight three. He realized unhappily that would do no good. Black's next move would be to take the Rook. All White could do then would be to move the King and, in the next plays, the Bishop would retreat, the Queen would advance and it would be checkmate. Fretting, he tried to find a way out.

"Let us carry the supposition further," said Czerny. "Let us suppose that the Black Queen *did* do exactly that, for whatever injudicious reason she might have had.

The authorities in her world—let us carry the chess metaphor still further,” he added gently. “Call them the Officials. The Officials, then, would be rather displeased with her actions. For a time, they would be mollified by Peterson’s ‘breakdown,’ feeling a greater security in the knowledge that human beings thought him insane.

“But, alas, some weeks after the unfortunate incident in the bedroom, the loss of the jade piece is discovered. Imagine, if you can, the consternation at this discovery! For—” Mr. Czerny hesitated—“you might as well know that it was not made of jade at all, but a substance not found on earth. You see, with the little queen in his possession, Peterson might at any time suspect the foreign nature of the material, demand an analysis and be able to convince some other human of the truth of his story.”

Burnham kept his eyes on the board, anger rising inside him. It’s a trick, he thought, a trick to keep me from concentrating on the game, like blowing smoke in an opponent’s face, or whistling, or tapping. Jaws clamped tight, he decided he didn’t think much of the Czernys after all.

“The Officials,” continued Mr. Czerny calmly, “would then send the Black Queen to retrieve the missing part of her necklace.” He stroked the side of his aristocratic

nose with one long slim finger. “Of course,” he added, “she would be suitably escorted.”

AH! Burnham forgot his irritation and stopped listening. There was a way out! Instead of taking the Knight, he would put his own Knight at King four, threatening Black’s Queen! Then, when Czerny took the White Queen, the Knight would capture the other one, relieving the pressure on that diagonal and permitting the White King to escape. On the other hand, if Czerny chose to move his Queen, rather than let her be captured, the pressure would *still* be removed. Gloating, he reached for the Knight.

“And,” Czerny went on, watching the move idly, “since the Black Queen and her escort could make their appearance on earth only through the use of a chess player as a sort of medium and, since they did not know the unfortunate young man’s name, their appearance was geographically dislocated, and the subsequent search for him was both bothersome and wearying, isolated as he was in an asylum, and grossly averse to the sight of a chess piece.”

“Not too wearying, darling.” Mrs. Czerny smiled. “They might look upon the trip as a sort of vacation.”

“So they might.” Czerny leaned over to study the positions on the

board. "At any rate," he went on, "you really needn't blame yourself, Mr. Burnham. After having found Peterson and gained access to him—they would have ways, you know. Perhaps Peterson was only too glad to see them and get rid of the little trinket. Perhaps, after having his entire career lost to him, for he was a man of sensitivity and could not consider ever continuing his passion for the game—perhaps, there, at the end, he asked them to kill him.

"They didn't want to. They were rather sorry for him, and they did it—as a favor, as—the *coup de grâce* administered to a sufferer they had inadvertently wounded. After all," Czerny pointed out, "how else would he get hold of a knife in such a place? It would be interesting, Mr. Burnham, if you knew whether or not the little queen was still in his possession when he died last Tuesday."

Burnham looked up from the board. His anger was fading, and he felt a drop of perspiration slide slowly down his back. "What do you mean?"

Czerny was hunched over the table, his face stern and bitter. He pointed to the two menaced Queens. "What do you mean?" he asked. "My Queen? My Queen?" He glared up at Burnham. "You fool! Don't you see the Black Rook? The Queen has

nothing to do with this mate! You—you would slaughter that Queen for no good purpose?"

BURNHAM sat motionless. He glanced at the door. He wished mightily that he had ordered that drink in the club car and never spoken to the Czernys.

Mrs. Czerny leaned forward, her beautifully molded features void of expression as she studied the board. "Poor Queen!" she murmured. "It would be most unchivalrous to take her."

"Resign," said Czerny. "Your position is hopeless. Don't force the sacrifice of two Queens."

Damn them, thought Burnham. It was a trick! Fine people! His King would be perfectly safe after they traded Queens, and Czerny knew it. He was just trying to trick him into losing. He felt vastly relieved that no money had been wagered on the game. That's probably how they make their living, he thought suddenly. Luring strangers into games. What a sucker he was! He saw it all so clearly now. They had taken his story about poor Peterson and twisted it around so that . . . His eyes narrowed. "It's your play," he said coldly.

Czerny, his lips pressed into a thin, tight line, took the White Queen with his Knight. Burnham captured the Black Queen. Czerny advanced his Knight, taking a

Pawn. Burnham removed the Knight with his Rook, and then, too late, he saw the trap. It hadn't been the Queen, after all. It had been the combination of Black Rook and Black Bishop, just as Czerny had said. Unhappily, he watched the White Rook fall. He moved his Knight desperately, but he was out of position. Another Pawn fell, and that was that.

"Well," Burnham sighed, "that's mate, all right. I do like to go down fighting, but you've got me."

"Yes," said Mr. Czerny, taking the thin-bladed dagger from the sheath in his belt. "I have indeed."

"One moment, darling," murmured Mrs. Czerny, unbuttoning the top of her jacket.

The last thing Joseph Burnham saw clearly was the green necklace on her throat, and he did not go down fighting after all.

Jean M. Jarvis