

THE MOONLIT PAGE

A Better Position



“Your position,” George told Evelyn, “is very difficult.”

“I know. I'm sitting in the sun.”

They had played in the square every Wednesday for nine years. George explained his moves after making them, and sometimes before, which Evelyn considered a useful weakness.

A pigeon stood near the table. George thought it was the same one that had watched them last week. Evelyn thought there were several pigeons and George liked an audience.

She moved her chair sideways. The patch of shade had slipped beyond the table.

“I'm about to do something interesting,” George said.

“Then do it in the shade.”

They lifted the small board together and carried it to the next table, keeping the pieces upright. Evelyn collected the captured men, including the little pawn George had left near his elbow. The pigeon walked a few steps and stopped by the new table.

“Following the game,” George said.

“Following something.”

They sat down.

For a moment neither spoke.

George was now looking at Evelyn's pieces from her side of the board. His own arrangement, which had seemed so promising a minute earlier, faced him across the squares.

"We've changed places," he said.

"So we have."

They began to rise. Then Evelyn settled back.

"Why don't we stay?"

"With each other's pieces?"

"Just this once. It's not a championship."

George considered the board. From here, his brilliant plan looked rather inconsiderate.

"You did say my position was difficult," Evelyn added.

"I may have overstated it."

"You can show me."

He sat down slowly. Evelyn placed the captured pawn beside the board, near the edge closest to the pigeon, and waited.

This time George did not explain what he intended to do. He looked at the pieces, then looked again.

Evelyn leaned back in the shade.

After a while he made a small, careful move.

"Interesting," she said.

"Don't start."

The pigeon walked away before either of them won. Evelyn watched it go, then turned back to the board.

"Your audience."

"Our audience," George said, and drew his chair a little closer to his newly difficult position.

To remember

1. George praises his chess position while Evelyn objects to sitting in the sun; a pigeon lingers near their square table.
2. They carry the intact board to a shaded table but sit on exchanged sides.
3. Evelyn proposes taking over each other's pieces, so George must solve the position he called difficult.
4. He becomes quietly careful; the pigeon leaves before the game's result, and he calls it their audience.