

Check
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Straight

Michelle stared at the board, viewing the situation at hand. After evaluating her opponent's options and probable next few moves, she moved her queen's bishop. By the way Jerry's mouth dropped, it was obviously not an expected move.

"Check," Michelle said.

"What—"

"Check," Michelle repeated with a smug grin on her face.

"I see that," Jerry said as he narrowed his eyes and looked the board over intently.

"Careful, you'll burn holes in the board, and then we won't be able to play any more," Michelle quipped. But Jerry ignored her, and Michelle could tell by the way his eyes were hopping all over the place that he was playing about five moves ahead. Suddenly, his worried expression was replaced by one of confidence, and he moved his knight to protect.

Michelle pursed her lips. She hadn't seen that defense. She couldn't just move in with her bishop, because a pawn was sitting there ready to snatch it up. A knight for a bishop. She didn't think so. Some experts advocated sacrificing pieces, but Michelle wasn't into sacrificing. She was into hoarding.

She looked her options over and then saw an opening. Her heart quickened. She moved her queen. Two more moves and she could have Jerry in checkmate. She leaned back to relax and looked across at him. She enjoyed watching him squirm.

Only he wasn't squirming. He was trying hard to hold back a smile of satisfaction. It took him no time to move his next piece.

"Check," he said. Michelle stared at her vulnerable king and realized what she had done. When she had moved her queen, she had left her king unprotected. Now she was on the defense. She studied the board for what seemed like hours, looking for possibilities. But there was only one—pull back. She did, and Jerry, without a second thought, moved his own queen into position.

"Check!" he said again, with too much enthusiasm for Michelle's liking.

Again, there was only one place to move and that was back.

"Check!" Jerry yelled. "And mate!"

Michelle stared at the pathetic scene before her. It was true. She was dead. She turned her king over in submission and heaved a heavy sigh. What did she expect? It had been a bad day all around. Make that a bad week.

"Want to play again?" Jerry asked enthusiastically as he started re-setting the board.

"You've got to be kidding," Michelle said. "By the way, when did you suddenly get so good?"

Jerry grinned. "I've been reading up on strategies."

"Sounds exciting," she mumbled. "No life, huh?"

Jerry winced. Michelle knew it was a low blow, and she was sorry she said it. But she didn't feel like apologizing.

"I've got a life," Jerry said.

"Sorry," Michelle answered. It was easier to apologize than hear Jerry correct her on the status of his existence. Besides, he was a useful neighbor to have around. Two years her younger, he still had a crush on her. But it wasn't as bad as it once was, and if she kept berating him, he would be cured of it all together.

"Besides, if I want to get better," he continued, "I have to know some strategies so I can tell what other people are trying on me."

Michelle nodded apathetically. She'd had enough. She needed a breather.

"I didn't mean anything by it," she said. "I've just had a lousy day. I think I'd better get going anyway. Thanks for the game."

"Anytime," Jerry responded as he walked her to the door. She could tell he meant it. She hadn't killed his good nature with her comments after all.

Though October was just around the corner, the air was still summer warm. She headed down the street toward her house, but when she hit the park, she made a left turn. She was depressed and could use a good walk.

Her life had been going great until this year. Then everything went haywire, and she didn't know what to do. What was worse was that she was a Christian but was finding no solace or solutions in her faith. Wasn't this where it was all supposed to pay off? Wasn't this when Jesus and God were supposed to put it into high gear and pull off a few miracles? What was she supposed to do? She tried to remember what she had learned in Sunday school. One verse popped into her mind.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

She thought about it for a moment. The ending was nice—"all these things will be given to you as well." If by "all these things" God meant Todd liking her again and her grades picking up and finding a job, then she was all for it. But the first part stumped her. What did it mean to seek the kingdom of God? What was she supposed to do?

It was probably spelled out in the Bible, but Michelle realized she knew very little about the Bible. Oh, she had read a lot of it, but without paying too much attention. She knew all the major stories and a multitude (well, a mouthful) of verses but never paid attention to what they were actually saying.

She turned and began to walk quickly. She needed to get home. She felt a hunger, a real thirst, for what was in the Bible. Suddenly the verse "as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" made sense. She couldn't get home fast enough.

Michelle let the door slam behind her and then winced, waiting for the reprimand.

"Michelle!"

"Sorry, Mom, I forgot."

She hurried to her room and pulled out her Bible. Where should she start? There was so much. Yesterday, the thought of reading through the entire Bible would have seemed like a monumental task. Today, it seemed just as overwhelming but very exciting. She started looking at all the passages she had highlighted over the years.

"Be still, and know that I am God . . ." That was Psalm 46:10. She read it again, placing her own emphasis.

“Be *still*, and know that I am God” She had a tough time doing nothing. For one, she wanted to run back to Todd and grovel, but she knew she shouldn’t. You couldn’t make someone like you.

“Be still, and know that *I* am God” Now that was appropriate for her. How many times did she think that *she* was God, taking matters into her own hands?

“Be still, and know that I am *God*” Even more appropriate. Why worry? God is infinitely powerful.

She skimmed the pages again. That was only one portion of one verse, and look how much could be drawn from it. She found another.

“Blessed is the one who waits” There was that awful “waiting” again. She was pretty sure that the more she read the more that little theme would materialize.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). Michelle stared at this for awhile in surprise. How many times had she read it without realizing its meaning? The things she wanted, the things she asked for, were pretty petty, and He was able to do “immeasurably more” if she’d only let Him.

She shook her head. Four verses out of an ocean of promises. Why had she stayed away? What blessings had she been missing? What footholds had Satan found?

She needed to read more so she could equip herself against Satan and become better acquainted with the God she claimed to “trust.” She let out a sigh. When had she ever needed to trust? You don’t need to trust when everything is sailing smoothly. But when the rough water comes She picked up her Bible and started gleaning the bits left behind from younger years. Suddenly Jerry’s delving into books to develop his chess strategies didn’t seem so silly. It seemed infinitely wise. It was a good thing God had allowed her to be put in “check.”