

CHECKMATE

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FADE IN:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

ELODIE BLYTHE (early 20s) stirs the old wooden chair beneath towering shelves. A paper cup of untouched coffee sits next to a stack of borrowed books. She looks down, a visitor badge clings to her shirt.

INSERT - VISITOR BADGE

ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL

Visitor: Elodie Blythe

Room: 23B

Date: 09/15/2025

Check-in Time: 1:31 AM

Checking her watch. 12:15P.M. Her eyes blur with tears. She rubs her face, trying to calm the puffiness that comes with crying for hours. The distant scream of a flatline rings in her ears.

The library hums to life with the faint turning of pages, the shuffling of feet through the aisles, the distant rolling of a cart, and the soft tick of a grandfather clock.

The creak of the old doors catches Elodie's attention. An old man walks into the library, a chess set under his arm. He's searching for a place to sit. Every table has been claimed. The only available seat is across from Elodie. EDMUND VALE walks over to Elodie's table.

EDMUND

Do you mind if I take a seat? It seems the Coffee Shop has filled up.

ELODIE

Hmm... Oh no, not at all.

EDMUND

I'm sorry to disturb your thoughts.

ELODIE

Oh no, please. It's okay.

As Elodie is speaking, she removes her visitors badge and crumples it.

Edmund sits at the table. Removes the set from under his arm and starts setting up the pieces. *

EDMUND

I've always found chess helps
distract me from the pieces of
life. *

Edmund gestures to the now crumpled badge in Elodie's hand. *

EDMUND (CONT'D)

Care for a distraction? *

ELODIE

A distraction would be lovely. *

She gives a slight chuckle. *

EDMUND

Where are my manners, I'm Edmund.
And you are? *

Edmund sticks his hand out. *

ELODIE

Elodie. Nice to meet you Edmund. *

She shakes his hand. *

EDMUND

Have you played chess before?

ELODIE

Yes, I have. I play a lot with my
Aunt. (pain lacing her voice) *

Elodie stops speaking abruptly. *

ELODIE (CONT'D)

(clearing her throat)

Do you play often? *

EDMUND

Oh, I play whenever someone needs
an opponent. *

Elodie's eyebrows raise. Confusion flashing across her face,
but disappearing in a blink. *

The white pawns are splayed in front of her. Edmund gestures
to the board.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

After you.

Elodie's hands hover over each pawn, debating how to open. Her fingers finally find her pawn, she slides it to E4. The chess board lights up. As if to say something bigger is at play. A tear runs down Elodie's cheek. She wipes it quickly. Not knowing why she's crying.

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With her first move she can hear the buzzing of the library start to quiet even more. As if to say, this game is only between Edmund and Elodie.

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Edmund mirrors her move. Black pawn to E5. She advances without much thought to her move, White Knight F3. As she places her knight in its temporary home, laughter echoes in her ears.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Sunlight beams across the table and the chess board set up between Elodie (early teens) and her aunt.

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Laughing, AUNT CARRIE moves her White Knight to F3.

AUNT CARRIE

You're guarding too much El. Trust the board and the game.

ELODIE

But Aunt Carrie, that's leaving my Queen exposed.

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AUNT CARRIE

(teasing)

Mmm, maybe. Or maybe it's bait.

*

*

Elodie studies the board, suspicious, then moves her Black Pawn to D5, attacking from the center.

AUNT CARRIE (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Now you're thinking. But watch this.

Her White Bishop takes Pawn on D5, opening a clear diagonal.

Elodie doesn't see the trap. She advances her Black Knight to C6.

Aunt Carrie's grin widens.

AUNT CARRIE (CONT'D)

When are you going to learn? You must look at *everything* on the board, my sweet.

As Aunt Carrie is speaking she slides her White Queen across to F7, taking Elodie's Black Queen in one clean move.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Murmuring, responding to the memory of her aunt.

 ELODIE
You always do that.

 EDMUND
Pardon?

Elodie looks between the chessboard and the old man sitting across from her.

 ELODIE
Oh, I'm sorry. Where were we?

Edmund moves his black knight to C6. The two exchange a glance, quietly forming a rhythm.

Elodie's next move is the White Bishop to C4. As the Bishop is placed on the checkered block, Elodie looks to her opponent.

He's calm. Collective. Confident.

Moving his Black Pawn to D6 without so much as a glance up to Elodie. He's taking in the game as a whole.

 EDMUND
Impressive opening. The Italian Game. Bold, beautiful, but very fragile.

 ELODIE
Fragile how?

 EDMUND
It's a bold move, but one misstep, and everything it loves is exposed.

Elodie only gives him a crooked look.

 EDMUND (CONT'D)
Your move.

Elodie doesn't look at him and makes her move. White Pawn to D4. Edmund's E5 Pawn captures her at D4.

 EDMUND (CONT'D)
Pawn for a pawn.

ELODIE

You didn't even hesitate.

EDMUND

Why would I? You offered it.

ELODIE

(defensively)

I wasn't thinking.

EDMUND

Grief does that to a person. Makes us hand over what we swore to cherish or protect.

Elodie's hand stills above the board.

ELODIE

How do you know I'm grieving?

Edmund ignores Elodie's question. Her eyebrows pinch together. Eyeing Edmund suspiciously.

He only adjusts one of his pieces.

EDMUND

I've seen a lot of people come here to grieve.

ELODIE

I'm not sure I follow?

EDMUND

They say people find their way here when they need time... To stop and think.

Edmund waves his hand around, gesturing to the entirety of the library. Elodie scoffs and rolls her eyes.

ELODIE

You shouldn't believe everything you hear...

Her eyes move to the grandfather clock hanging on the wall. 12:15 PM. She checks her watch, 12:15 PM. She picks up her phone for further confirmation, September 15, 2025, 12:15 PM

She looks at Edmund. He only shrugs.

EDMUND

Just a rumor.

He nods towards the board

EDMUND (CONT'D)

Your move.

Elodie reaches for her White Pawn. As her fingers go to grab her piece, she's no longer in the coffee shop.

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Aunt Carrie is hunched over the toilet throwing up the lunch she just ate. Elodie is holding her hair with one hand and in the other she holds a White Pawn. A remnant from the abandoned game.

ELODIE

It's okay. Get it all out.

Aunt Carrie has tears running down her face. She lifts her head and wipes a hand under her chin. As Elodie lets go of Aunt Carrie's hair, a clump of it comes with her. Elodie let's out a sad sigh.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Another tear runs down her face.

Elodie drops her Pawn to C3. It lands with a clank.

EDMUND

I can see how you're hurting. Your grief is tearing you apart.

A beat.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

You're carrying more than you think.

ELODIE

I'm not grieving.

She says firmly. Denial coating her words.

ELODIE (CONT'D)

Your move.

The man in front of her is calm and collected as if he has no idea what is happening. His chess playing mirrors his calm. Black Bishop to A5.

EDMUND

Every game reaches a moment where something has to be risked.

ELODIE
I'm not afraid of risk. I just want
it to be...

 EDMUND
Quiet?

 ELODIE
Maybe.

 EDMUND
Then what if we make this game
become more than just a game?

Edmund leans back in his seat. Studying Elodie's intrigue.

 EDMUND (CONT'D)
We continue to play. Win...and the
board goes quiet. The pain. The
regret. The memory - gone.

 ELODIE
And if I lose?

 EDMUND
Then it remains. It gives the game
meaning, something to play for.

Elodie exhales - steadying herself.

 ELODIE
Then let's play.

Trepidation lacing her voice.

Edmund smiles. Straightens himself.

Her breath hitches as she moves her Pawn to D4.

 ELODIE (CONT'D)
 (decisive)
Your move.

Edmund nods.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

The chess board is set up. Rain pounds on the windows. Elodie
is sitting on the living room floor waiting for her aunt.
Tears in her eyes.

Elodie's focus moves from the chess board to her phone when
she hears it buzz on the table.

She unlocks her phone to see the email notification: *

From: Marisol Dane *

Subject: The New Yorker–Fiction Internship Opportunity *

*Miss. Elodie, I highly recommend you reconsider before
denying my offer.* *

The sound of Aunt Carrie throwing up echoes through the
halls. Then the sound of the toilet flushing. *

Elodie quickly wipes her cheeks, trying to get rid of her
tears before her aunt can see.

Aunt Carrie pauses at the doorway. Leaning against the door
jamb. *

AUNT CARRIE *

That was them again. Wasn't it? *

Elodie only nods. *

ELODIE *

(quietly) *

They want me there next week. *

AUNT CARRIE *

You don't have to stay for me, El. *

ELODIE *

I don't want to go if there's a
chance- *

She stops. Unable to finish her sentence. *

Elodie looks at her aunt. Tears welling in her eyes. *

Aunt Carrie crosses the room slowly and lowers herself onto
the floor across from Elodie. *

Aunt Carrie gestures towards the board and moves her Pawn to
G4, a reckless move. *

Elodie hesitates, then reaches for her Queen. Elodie takes
her Aunts Pawn. *

ELODIE (CONT'D) *

You're just giving it away. *

AUNT CARRIE *

You see that piece as something to
protect. I see it as something that
made you move. *

Elodie looks at the board again. Then at her aunt. *

AUNT CARRIE (CONT'D) *
Life's like that. We don't hold *
onto things because they last... *
(gentle) *
We hold onto them because they *
matter. *

Elodie's eyes fill again. *

ELODIE *
What if it hurts too much to *
remember? *

Aunt Carrie reaches across the board and takes Elodie's hand. *

AUNT CARRIE *
Then it means you loved deeply. *

Elodie nods, barely holding herself together. Aunt Carrie *
gives her hand a squeeze. *

AUNT CARRIE (CONT'D) *
That's why you keep playing – even *
when the board breaks your heart. *

INT. LIBRARY - DAY *

The game between Edmund and Elodie continues. White Pawn to H4. Black Pawn to D6. Pawn to G4. Queen takes Pawn.

EDMUND
Check.

He says it with so much ease. She's trapped. Elodie's breath catches. She stares at the board, then up at her opponent.

EDMUND (CONT'D)
Grief is a painful adversary.

She slides her King to E2, trying to escape his capture.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Elodie is clinging to her aunt. She's gripping her hand as tears run down her face and her head lies on her aunt's stomach. *

AUNT CARRIE
I love you so much my darling.

Aunt Carrie strokes Elodie's hair. Her aunt's hand stills on the top of her head. The beeping of a flatline follows. Elodie grips her aunts hand tighter. Crying.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

EDMUND

We have a choice.

He moves his bishop to G4.

EDMUND (CONT'D)

We can remember only the pain...or
we can remember the love that came
with it.

Elodie stares at the board and then up at her opponent. For a split second the person sitting across from her is not Edmund, but her aunt. Not the healthy aunt from years ago though. The person sitting across from her is frail, skinny, and barely has a head of hair. She blinks and all that is in front of her is Edmund and the board.

For the first time she isn't just seeing a game of chess, but seeing every piece she tried to let go.

A singular tear rolls down her face.

As he makes his final move, Elodie hears the clock start to chime on the wall. Her phone starts to buzz with sympathy texts.

The library buzzes back to life.

Her mouth falls open as she scans the board.

AUNT CARRIE (V.O.)

Checkmate El.

THE END.

CUT TO BLACK.

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