

**Y**oung Ralph was not that popular –  
this everybody knew,  
Especially ‘The Coolest Kids’,  
who thought him someone who . . .  
Was really quite ‘unusual’, though chivalrous and kind.  
And, truth be told, Ralph knew all this, but really didn’t mind.



Besides, our Ralph was brushing up his chess skills –  
night and day.  
His entry was accepted and he soon was going to play  
In the ‘Under-Fifteen European Chess Champs’ – that weekend!  
(But, being eight, would have to take ‘*a relative or friend*’.)

‘You want me to go WHERE?’ his sister answered, in disgust.  
‘I’d rather stay at home and help Mum IRON, COOK or DUST!’  
“But I must bring a relative because I’m under ten . . .  
And you know you’ve always fancied dating European men.”

‘That’s true,’ his sister told him. ‘Foreign accents do appeal.’  
“And I’ll buy lunch,” Ralph added, as he tried to clinch the deal.



“Perhaps you might find one or two are worthy of a date . . .  
Then I can introduce you, sis – just think of me as bait!”

But little did Ralph know, as he sat reading books that day,  
That in a secret bunker, many hundred miles away,  
A dark and bony figure, fuelled by jealousy and hate,  
Was heading up a meeting to discuss our hero’s fate!

‘There’s something wrong! There HAS to be!’

he told the other men.

‘For nobody could play that well, yet still be under ten!

His moves aren’t just ingenious – he plans out every stage

With all the skill and knowledge of a man six times his age!’

‘So tell us, boss, what should we do?’ a nervous voice replied.

‘THE TIME HAS COME, AT LAST, MY FRIENDS!’

the darkened figure cried.

‘The championships are next weekend,

we have to seize our chance . . .

To see this BOY in action!’ he spat out, in angry stance.

‘We need to send an agent, and he has to be our best

And here I’ve written down ONE name that stands

out from the rest.

For at The Chess Academy, such cheating’s not condoned<sup>1</sup>,

But if Ralph REALLY is this good – we must know HOW!’

he groaned.

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<sup>1</sup> See Spy Zone page 92.