Sivenko thinks for twenty minutes, then captures with the f pawn. I lash out on the flank, pawn h4, smacking the clock button so hard it makes my opponent jump. She furrows her brow and thinks for another twenty minutes.

She has clearly never seen this position before, but I have. It's Mikhail Tal versus Bent Larsen, 1969. I studied it in my room a couple years ago, wearing my crocodile onesie same as always. In that game, Tal got a passed pawn on the a file. He should have won, but he didn't push the pawn fast enough and the game slipped away from him. I won't make the same mistake.

Tick-tock, tick-tock. Confidence surges through my arteries. I have used up eleven seconds on my clock and Sivenko has used up fifty *minutes*!

At last my opponent moves again, but instead of launching a counterattack like Larsen did against Tal, she plays pawn to g6, a weasely consolidating move. No, not weasely. Hedgehoggy. She's going to curl up into a tight prickly ball and pray I don't run her over.

I look up from the board, daring her to meet my gaze. *What's wrong, Sivenko? You scared?*

She refuses to look at me. She just stares at the board all hollow-eyed, dabbing her forehead with the napkin. But here's the thing. If you feel truly nervous during a game of chess, you do everything you can to try and hide it. You don't mop your brow like you're coming down with malaria.

You don't hyperventilate like a blonde in a slasher movie. You hide your distress.

I get it. The sly Ukrainian has been studying my Round 5 game, and she has reached the same diagnosis as Mom and Coach, that I'm into self-sabotage. She thinks her time-wasting and brow-mopping have fooled me. She's waiting for me to lunge forward, impale myself on her stupid spines and bleed out in agony all over the board.

I reach out and grab my kingside knight. *Come on then, Sivenko, let's see who bleeds out first.* I lift the knight high in the air, then freeze.

Fly high, Molotov Me!
Sky high, Molotov Me!

I close my eyes and try to force the Marsh Gibbons lyric from my mind. I have no idea where it came from – I don't even like the Marsh Gibbons – but the more I try to force it out, the louder it gets, until my head is full of noise like a juggernaut crunching gears.

This pleasure dome is doomed to fall
Molotov Me will sabotage it all!

Maybe they're right about me, Mom and Coach and Larissa Sivenko. Maybe I'm just a feckless kid, a Mikhail Tal wannabe with a flair for cheap tactical combos. Maybe I don't have what it takes to be a grandmaster.

Cry me a river in Memphis Mall
Molotov Me will sabotage it all!

Now that I've touched the knight, I have to move it somewhere, so I slam it down on g5. *Do your worst, donut girl.*

And she does.

And the game goes straight down the pan.

Over the course of the next two hours, Sivenko blunts the position, neutralizes every threat, forces a trade of queens and oozes through into the endgame with that extra pawn still in her sticky-fingered grasp. It's a passed pawn and her king is right in front of it, ready to escort it all the way to queendom. I'm in zugzwang. Any move I make right now is bad.

Blowing the farm on the Powerball
Molotov Me will sabotage it all!

There's nothing I hate more than losing with White. Having the first move is a big advantage at GM level, and White is expected to win or at least draw. When you lose with White, it feels like death.

It's not worth playing on, so I topple my king and we bump fists. Sivenko throws back her head and drops the last morsel of donut into her open mouth.

It's. Not. Worth. Playing. On. And if you think I'm just talking about the Sivenko game, you can think again. I'm done with chess.