

# HEART OF A SHEPHERD

"A depth and honesty seldom seen in contemporary children's literature. Rosanne Parry's first novel is something to celebrate."

—*The Washington Post*



YEARLING

ROSANNE PARRY

## THE CHESS MEN

JULY

Grandpa frowns when he plays chess, like he does when he prays. He's got a floppy mustache that pulls that frown right down past his chin. He used to have freckles like me, but I guess they expanded on him because his whole face is pack-mule tan, with a fan of wrinkles at the corners. Years and years of moving cattle and mending fences gives a man a fearsome look, and I bet if I work at it, I can look just like my grandpa by the time I go to board at the high school. But the fences are mended for now and the cows are up in the mountains with my older brothers, so Grandpa and me are playing chess out on the back porch.

Grandpa's chessmen are world-famous around here. They came over the Oregon Trail with Grandpa's grandfather in the covered wagon, and before that they

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came straight from Paris, France. They were carved by hand from ebony for the dark side and ivory for the light. The pawns all have round helmets and longbows. Everyone else has a sword, even the bishops, and their faces are dead serious, which is what you want when there's a war on.

Grandpa is the chess champ of Malheur County, Oregon. We've been playing each other for years, so I've got him pretty well sized up. He always opens by moving the middle pawn up two spaces. But after that first move, he's as wily as a badger and twice as tough. I haven't beaten him yet, but when I do, it will be worth a town parade.

Now, to my mind, pawns are a shifty-looking bunch, plus they clutter up the board, so I try to clear most of them off right away, his and mine. I like my knights to have plenty of room to ride. My queen's knight rides a paint mustang. That horse has got a temper; she's lean and fast, and brave as a lion. My king's knight rides a Clydesdale; not so much speed, but plenty of power.

Rosita's my queen, of course. She's a fifth grader up at the school, and my best friend's sister. She can birth a lamb and kill a rattlesnake with a slingshot, which is what I look for in a queen. Plus, she's as pretty

as a day in spring, and she laughs when I'm the one talking.

I bet Grandpa's working on putting me in a fork. That's his favorite move, but I see it coming a mile away, so I take a sip from a sweaty glass of lemonade and talk things over with the men. My king's bishop is all for killing Grandpa's queen before she can get us, because, after all, he is an excellent swordsman. The trouble is, Grandpa's queen would have to be Grandma, and I couldn't let anything bad happen to her, now could I? It's confession for sure, for killing your grandma.

My queen's bishop and I talk the other bishop out of it, which we do a lot. The queen's bishop is the more reflective type because his hands are carved together for praying.

Grandpa leans forward in his straight-backed chair, still frowning. Dad's orders sit on the card table beside the chessboard, in a tan army envelope. I made Dad show me, because I couldn't believe what he said. They're going to send him and the entire 87th Transportation Battalion all the way to Iraq. Reserve guys are only supposed to go places for two weeks—maybe three, if there's a hurricane in Texas. Fourteen months! It says Dad will be gone fourteen months, right in



**"A perfect book not only for the middle-grade reader but for every reader."**

**—Patricia Reilly Giff,  
two-time recipient of the Newbery Honor**

Brother has never been the rancher that his father and the older boys are. Sure, he can ride a horse, rescue a wayward calf, or mend a broken fence, but his heart just doesn't seem to be in it. Then Brother's father is shipped off to Iraq, and it's up to Brother to help his grandparents keep the ranch going. He's determined to maintain the ranch just as his father left it, in the hope that doing so will bring his father home safe and sound. But life rarely goes according to plan. The hardships Brother faces will not only change the ranch but also reveal his true calling.

Rosanne Parry's extraordinary debut takes an uplifting, soulful look at one boy's coming-of-age and the corner of the heartland that he calls home.