

Chaya and the Stomachache Clues

A story about what your body is telling you

Every Tuesday morning, Chaya gets a stomachache. It starts on the bus and sits in her belly like a small cold stone. By second period she is asking the secretary if she can lie down. Tuesday is also the day of the math quiz.

Chaya's mother takes her temperature. Normal. She checks her throat. Normal. "Maybe it is something you ate," Mommy says. Chaya does not think so. She feels the stone every single Tuesday, and she is starting to hate Tuesdays.

That night, Chaya's aunt Sori comes for supper. Sori is a nurse and she has a notebook habit. "Next Tuesday," she says, "be a detective. Do not try to fix the stomach. Just collect clues. Where is the feeling? What does it do? What was happening just before it started?"

So on Tuesday morning, Chaya looks closely. The stone sits low in her belly, a little to the left. It is tight, not sharp. Her hands are cold. Her jaw is clenched. She notices her breath is high up in her chest, quick and shallow. She writes all of it down on the back of her hand.

Then the detective question: what was happening just before? At breakfast she looked at the calendar. She saw the word quiz. And a thought flashed by that she had not even noticed: "I am going to freeze and get everything wrong."

Chaya stares at her hand. The stone has a story. It is not a sign she is sick. It is her body getting ready for something it believes is dangerous, the same way a body gets ready to run. A quiz is not a lion, but her body does not know the difference.

Aunt Sori calls on Tuesday afternoon. "What did you find?" Chaya tells her. "So the clue is real," says Sori. "Your body is not lying. It is just a little loud. Do you want to learn how to turn the volume down?" Chaya nods.

They make a Tuesday tool kit. First: slow breath, in through the nose for four, out through the mouth for six, belly soft. Second: press both feet into the floor and feel the ground. Third: one sentence for the thought. "I can do the first question. I just have to start."

The next Tuesday, the stone arrives right on time. Chaya almost smiles. "Hello, stone," she says in her head. "I see you." She breathes. She presses her feet down. She picks up her pencil and does question one.

The stone does not vanish all at once. It shrinks by recess. By the end of the quiz it is hardly there. And Chaya has a new idea about her body. It does not have to be an enemy. It can be a messenger, and she can learn to read its messages.

Chaya's Body Clues Tool Kit

Be a detective. Where is the feeling? Is it tight, hot, cold or fluttery? Write it down.

Ask what happened just before. A thought, a place or a day can start the feeling.

Remember that your body is trying to help. It gets ready for danger, even when the danger is only a quiz.

Turn the volume down. Slow breath, feet on the floor, and one kind sentence can help your body settle.

Your body gives clues. You can learn to read them.