



Her First Helper



Nussbaum Mind

Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18





Chapter 1: An Excellent Assistant

"You're my favorite," the little girl says.

Oriella pretends to be busy opening the paper packet.

She is seventeen, an assistant in a supervised girls' summer program. The adult leader plans the activities, handles safety and discipline, and remains responsible for the children. Oriella helps with the approved paper projects and small routines she is assigned.

It is her first role where someone younger waits for her instructions without being her sister.

She likes it more than she expects.

The girl beside her likes it too. She laughs at Oriella's jokes, notices a new hair clip, and always wants to hand out supplies.

"Can I be helper?"

"Today?"

"Please."

Oriella lets her carry the paper to the tables. It is a small approved job under adult supervision. The other children watch.





One quiet girl puts her hand up.

"I want a turn tomorrow."

"We'll see," Oriella says.

She does not write it down. Tomorrow seems large enough to
remember.





Chapter 2: Two Hands in the Air

Tomorrow has the same two hands.

The admiring girl is beside Oriella before the supply box opens.

"You're the best at the funny voices. Can I do the cards?"

Oriella looks toward the quiet girl. Her hand is up too.

The cards will be quicker with a child who knows where they go.

Oriella likes the excuse as soon as she finds it.

"You can do them today," she tells the first girl.

The quiet girl lowers her hand.

At the end of the activity, she asks why.

"Why what?"

"You said tomorrow."

"I said we'd see."

The distinction is technically true. It is a poor answer to the pattern the child sees.

"She always gets it," the quiet girl says.





"Always is a big word."

The girl looks at the empty box.

"Yesterday and today."

Oriella feels foolish. She also feels annoyed that a child knows how to keep the answer small enough to be correct.





Chapter 3: The Complaint She Hears Wrong

During the supervised break, Oriella tells the adult leader the quiet girl complains about the helper job.

"What does she say?"

"That another girl always gets it."

"Does she?"

Oriella expects advice about handling complaints, not a question about the turns.

"Not always. Twice."

"How many times have you assigned that job?"

"Twice."

The leader waits.

"I wanted to keep it moving," Oriella adds.

"That matters. So does who gets a chance. Do you have a plan for the turns?"

Oriella does not.





They review the activity records and Oriella's actual choices, not guesses about either child's personality. The leader explains the group's helper arrangement: eligible children can take turns in the small tasks, with adults checking what suits the activity and each child's needs. Preference from the assistant is not part of the arrangement.

"You can repair it," she says. "Don't ask the child to stop noticing it."

Oriella nods.

For the rest of the break, she feels as if the quiet girl has reported her for not being the excellent assistant she wants to be.

The girl asks for a drink. The leader helps with the routine.

It is not a report. It is a child needing a drink.





Chapter 4: Liking the Child Is Not the Problem

At home, Oriella tells Mama she feels trapped between being kind to one child and fair to another.

Mama asks what kindness requires.

"The first girl is so pleased when she helps."

"And the other girl?"

"She wants a turn."

Oriella can hear where the answer is going. She says it first.

"I'm not supposed to like one more."

Mama does not agree to that rule.

"You may find one easier to talk to. What do you do with that?"

Oriella describes the compliments. She says she likes being the favorite before she can make it sound like concern for the little girl's confidence.

Mama listens without laughing.





"The child isn't wrong for liking you. You're the older person assigned the work. She doesn't have to manage your choices."

That is worse than deciding the girl is spoiled. A spoiled girl would explain the problem without making Oriella responsible for liking the praise.

"I keep hearing the complaint as if she dislikes me," Oriella says.

"She tells you about the turns. You can answer the turns."

Oriella writes yesterday and today on a scrap page.

Beside both, she writes the same child's name in her own private review note. She does not share or publish the note. It is simply a way to see what she has done.

She takes the page to the leader the next morning.





Chapter 5: The New Turn

The leader approves a simple rotation for the appropriate small jobs. She checks it against the children present and the actual activity. It is not a public ranking, and the children do not need to earn a turn by flattering Oriella.

Oriella speaks to the quiet girl with the leader nearby.

"You asked for a turn and I gave the job to the same girl again. I didn't have a fair plan. I'm sorry. We're using a checked turn list now."

The girl looks at the papers.

"Am I first?"

"For this job today, yes. The leader will show you what to do."

"All right."

There is no hug, no declaration that Oriella is wonderful after all. The child goes to get the adult's instructions.

The admiring girl arrives a moment later.

"Can I help?"





"Today it's someone else's turn. You can ask about a later turn when we look at the list."

"But I know how."

"You do. She can learn too."

The girl frowns.

Oriella wants to invent a second helper job with no purpose just to recover the smile.

She asks the leader whether another job is needed. It is not.

Oriella returns to her own work.





Chapter 6: An Assistant Who Can Survive a Frown

The first new helper takes longer.

A small stack goes to the wrong table. The leader notices, gives clear instructions, and helps the child correct it. Oriella assists as assigned.

The delay is real. It does not prove the old favoritism is efficient leadership.

During the activity, the admiring girl does not laugh at Oriella's joke.

Oriella notices immediately. She wishes she could stop noticing.

The child asks for help with a paper corner.

Oriella gives the same appropriate help she would give any child. She does not say, "I thought you liked me." She does not turn a helper disappointment into an emotional debt.

At break, the girl asks whether tomorrow is hers.





They check the actual plan with the leader. Tomorrow's job differs, and the adult needs to decide which tasks are suitable. Oriella does not promise it to end the question.

"We'll check the list and activity tomorrow," she says. "You don't have to ask before everyone else arrives."

The girl looks at her for a moment.

Then she joins the group.





Chapter 7: Different Jobs Are Still Different

Later in the week, one task needs an adult, not a child helper. Oriella nearly calls the new rotation unfair because it cannot make every job identical.

The leader explains the difference again: fair turns for suitable small tasks are not a rule that children must do any job that exists.

Oriella says that to the group in plain words.

She does not add a lecture about equality. They need to know who is handing out paper and which materials the adult will handle.

The quiet girl volunteers for an ordinary drawing, not a helper job.

Oriella wants to praise her patience lavishly.

She stops. The child does not need to become the lesson's gracious heroine.

"Do you need another sheet?" Oriella asks.

"Yes. This tree won't fit."

Oriella supplies the approved sheet.





The admiring girl draws a house beside the tree. The children argue about whether its roof is too high. The leader helps them manage the shared space respectfully.

Neither girl is a label in Oriella's story about becoming good at the job.





Chapter 8: The Box Closes

At the end of the week, the leader checks the next activity and the turn plan with Oriella.

"What do you want to watch next week?"

"Whether I give someone extra chances because she makes me feel good."

"And what will you do if you notice?"

"Check the actual turns with you. Fix the choice."

The answer is less impressive than being naturally fair. It has a useful next step.

As they put away the supplies, the admiring girl comes to say goodbye.

"You're still good at the funny voices."

Oriella smiles.

"Thank you."

She does not offer next week's first job in return.





The girl leaves with the adult dismissal arrangement. The quiet girl leaves the same way after showing the leader her enormous tree.

Oriella matches the remaining sheets to the supply list. Then she puts the turn plan in the leader's folder and closes the paper box.

