

No Speech at the Door



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: The Welcome

The first sentence on the paper is, "Some girls teach us courage without saying a word."

Yiska reads it upside down.

Her friend turns the page over so quickly that the corner catches beneath the sugar bowl.

"You aren't supposed to see that yet."

"Then why is it on my kitchen table?"

"Because I want your mother's opinion."

Mama stops measuring. She looks from the visitor to Yiska.

"An opinion about what?"

"Friday's welcome."

For three weeks, Yiska stays home between medical appointments and lessons she completes at the kitchen table. Now she is going back to school, with the back brace her clinician prescribes and a plan the adults arrange with her. Friday afternoon's girls-only celebration is the first school event she can attend.





She imagines finding her usual seat. She imagines somebody saving her a biscuit. She does not imagine a welcome.

"I don't need one," she says.

Her friend smiles. "Nobody needs one. That's what makes it nice."

Yiska feels the stiff edge of the brace beneath her loose blouse. She shifts on the chair the way her clinician shows her.

"Who's 'some girls'?"

Her friend pulls the paper free.

"You. Obviously."





Chapter 2: An Ordinary Question

After the friend leaves, Yiska puts her hand on the upside-down ring
the sugar bowl makes.

Mama wipes the counter.

"Do you want me to speak to her?"

"No."

"Do you want to speak to her?"

"Also no."

Mama puts the measuring cup away.

"Those are the options we have so far."

Yiska knows her friend means well. During the weeks at home, she
brings the class notes and makes sure the missing pages are
actually missing before insisting that Yiska loses them. She comes
even when Yiska has nothing interesting to say.

Now Yiska feels ungrateful for wanting her to leave the page
unwritten.

"Maybe I'm being horrible."





"You can appreciate the visits and not want the speech."

"She'll think I'm rejecting everything."

"Has she said that?"

"No. But I know how she gets when an idea is nearly finished."

Mama laughs softly. "You have that in common."

Yiska does not laugh yet.

At seventeen, she is old enough to understand why people like a brave girl. A brave girl makes a worrying situation easier to watch.

She sits upright, thanks everyone, and gives the afternoon a satisfying ending.

Yiska has no satisfying ending to give. Her treatment is ongoing.

Some days she is bored. Some days she is furious about needing help with things she normally does without thinking. Sometimes she is quite happy until somebody lowers her voice and asks how she is really doing.

"I don't want to be everybody's Friday lesson," she says.

Mama leaves the cloth on the counter.

"That sounds clearer than horrible."





Chapter 3: The Second Page

On Thursday, Yiska visits school for a short meeting with her teacher. Mama comes with her. The return plan covers the arrangements Yiska actually needs; the teacher does not ask her to explain her diagnosis to the class.

They agree on a seat that works with the plan and on whom Yiska will tell if she needs help. Her clinician's instructions remain the guide for movement and activity. Nobody decides she can do more because she looks cheerful.

After the meeting, Mama waits by the office while Yiska collects a folder.

Her friend is in the empty classroom with another girl. Two sheets lie between them.

The second girl sees Yiska first.

"We aren't making you stand up," she says.

Yiska stops beside her desk.

"I don't want a speech at all."

Her friend presses the pages flat.





"It's not a long speech."

"That isn't the part I mean."

"Everyone wants you to feel included."

Yiska looks at the sheet. Under the opening sentence is a description of what it must be like to wake up knowing her body cannot be trusted.

Her body.

A girl she eats lunch with is making public claims about her body.

"You don't know that," Yiska says.

"It's a way of putting it."

"It isn't my way."

The second girl gathers her books very slowly.

Yiska wants to snatch the paper. She also wants to say something so sharp that neither girl can mistake her for a gentle example again.

Instead, she puts her own folder down. Both her hands are free.

"Please don't read this. Don't pass it around either. I want to come to the afternoon, not have my treatment explained."





Her friend's face changes.

"You could have told me before we wrote it."

"I didn't know you were writing it until yesterday."

There is no elegant answer to that.





Chapter 4: Not Coming Is Easier

At home, Yiska says she might skip Friday.

Mama does not tell her that attending will prove courage. She asks whether the plan still works physically and whether the school knows the speech is unwanted.

"The plan is fine. I just don't want to walk into that room."

"Because they'll read it?"

"Because they won't. And they'll know it's because I stopped them."

She imagines an afternoon full of careful smiles. People who never look at her back before will look twice to demonstrate that they are not looking.

Mama sits down opposite her.

"Would you want to go if the paper had never existed?"

"Yes."

"Then the paper is one thing to deal with. You don't have to decide about every afternoon at school tonight."

Yiska takes out a blank sheet.





She writes what she wants the teacher to know: no speech, no surprise welcome, no discussion of her medical details. She wants to use the arrangements already agreed on. If somebody has a practical question about helping her, they can ask her privately rather than announcing an answer for her.

It looks very strict on paper.

She adds, I am looking forward to coming.

Both parts are true.

Mama helps her deliver the note through the school office. The teacher confirms privately that the event will not include the speech and that the adults will handle the agreed arrangements.

Yiska still does not know what her friend will do.

The teacher cannot promise friendship into place.





Chapter 5: A Chair, Not a Symbol

On Friday, Yiska arrives early enough to find the room before it fills.

The chairs do not match. They never match at school events, although the girls manage to speak about the chairs as if one person deliberately orders an assortment to upset them.

Yiska finds the place agreed on in her return plan.

Her friend is beside it.

For a moment, Yiska thinks there is another sheet in her hand.

It is a paper bag.

"I brought the biscuits," the friend says. "The ones that don't turn your mouth blue."

"I like the blue ones."

"You complain about them for the whole lesson afterward."

"That's different."

The friend puts the bag on the table, not on Yiska's lap.

"Is this where you want to sit?"

"Yes."





"Do you want me here?"

Yiska looks at the empty neighboring chair.

She is angry enough to enjoy saying no. She is lonely enough to regret it before she speaks.

"Yes. But can we talk about the paper first?"

The friend sits.

"I put it away. We aren't reading it. I told the other girl not to share it."

"What did you tell her about why?"

"That you didn't want it."

Yiska waits.

"That's all," the friend says. "I didn't tell her you're sensitive."

It is an awkward thing to say. It is also exactly the thing Yiska needs to hear.





Chapter 6: The Part She Gets Wrong

The friend turns the empty bag over in her hands.

"I wanted you to know we missed you. The room felt wrong without your comments."

"You can say that."

"I thought a normal afternoon would look like we didn't care."

Yiska considers that. From the outside, a biscuit and a chair might look disappointingly small beside three weeks of missing lessons.

From the inside, they look like a place she can actually occupy.

"I don't need you not to care," she says. "I need you to stop deciding what my life means before I get there."

Her friend looks down.

"That sentence is worse than saying you hate the speech."

Yiska hears the edge in her own voice.

"I don't mean you never listen. You bring all the notes. You listen when I complain about them."

"They're terrible notes."





"They are."

Both girls smile, briefly.

"I mean this one thing," Yiska says. "You make me sound like a person who learns something wonderful every morning. Mostly I want the brace to stop being the first thing I think about."

"I'm sorry. I wrote things you didn't tell me."

"Yes."

The apology does not need a second version with more beautiful words. Yiska lets it stand.

The second girl comes over to ask whether they can share the table. She asks Yiska about the history assignment. Neither girl announces how ordinary they are being.

Yiska answers the question.





Chapter 7: Two Kinds of Being Seen

Halfway through the afternoon, the teacher starts a game that involves getting up and changing places.

Yiska follows her agreed plan. She does not try the activity to show anybody that she can. The teacher has an option that lets her take part without changing the medical instructions.

A classmate offers to stay seated with her.

Yiska wants to say she needs no one. She is tired of help arriving ahead of her request.

But the classmate is asking, not announcing a sacrifice.

"For this round, if you want," she says.

They disagree over an answer and ask the teacher to settle it. Yiska's friend argues for the opposite side. Being back in school includes people thinking she is wrong about something that has nothing to do with her back.

Later, Yiska needs to leave before the final activity, as planned.

She hates that part. She wants the afternoon to continue without her body setting the end.





Her friend looks at the clock but does not say, One more minute won't matter. She walks with Yiska to the office, where Mama waits.

"Do you want me to carry that folder?" the friend asks.

"Yes, please."

Accepting the folder help does not make the speech necessary. Refusing the speech does not make every offer of help offensive.

Yiska hands it over.





Chapter 8: An Unfinished Afternoon

At home, Mama asks whether she enjoyed it.

"Most of it."

"Which part wasn't most?"

"Leaving. And the game. And the conversation before everybody arrived."

Mama nods. She does not turn the parts Yiska dislikes into evidence that going is a mistake.

On Monday, Yiska returns for the school time set in her plan. Her desk has two loose sheets on it.

For a second, her stomach drops.

They are the missing history notes. At the bottom, her friend writes, I think this date is wrong. Ask before you learn it.

Yiska takes out her pencil.

The brace is still there. So are the appointments. Nothing about Friday makes the treatment shorter.

Her friend comes into the room.





"Do you need anything?"

"The right date."

"From me? Impossible."

They look it up in the class text together.

Before the lesson begins, Yiska sees a fresh sheet inside her friend's folder. A draft of an essay. Not about her.

"Can you read my opening later?" the friend asks.

"If you can survive my comments."

"That's why I'm asking."

Yiska agrees. When the teacher comes in, they put the draft away.

