

Room for a Second Table



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: Six More Roses

Zissia makes six paper roses before breakfast.

They sit in a straight line beside her bowl. Her older sister comes into the kitchen and lifts one by its wire-free paper stem.

"That's lovely."

"We could put them on the favor boxes."

"All of them?"

"There aren't that many."

Her sister looks at the guest list on the refrigerator.

There are quite a few.

At seventeen, Zissia can fold a rose so neatly that nobody sees where the last flap goes. Her sister usually cannot find the flap even when Zissia leaves it sticking out for her. Last winter, they started making their own crossword book together. Zissia draws the grids. Her sister writes clues that are either too difficult or far too pleased with themselves.





Now her sister is engaged. The wedding is approaching, and the kitchen holds lists that have nothing to do with their crossword book.

"We could do them on Tuesday nights," Zissia says.

Her sister turns the rose over.

"Let's ask Mama what actually needs doing. I don't want you making a hundred things because I say they're pretty."

Zissia nods.

She has not counted the things. She has counted the Tuesday nights.





Chapter 2: A Sensible Choice

Mama stands at the table with a sample favor box and two lists.

The wedding favors do not need handmade flowers. The adults decide to use a simpler arrangement they already have.

"We can use these six on our table at home," Mama tells Zissia. "But don't make any more for the wedding."

The choice is sensible. Zissia can see why before Mama finishes explaining it.

She hates it anyway.

"They aren't difficult."

"They take time."

"It's my time."

"And your sister's?"

Zissia looks at the rose in her sister's hand.

Her sister is not being cruel. She is relieved.

"I want to help," Zissia says.





"You are helping," her sister replies. "You're sorting the approved place cards with our aunt on Sunday. That job has an end."

Zissia thinks of an afternoon beside an aunt who always wants a sharper pencil. It is not the job she wants.

"Fine."

She gathers the roses quickly. One stem comes apart. She presses the fold too hard and makes a new crease.





Chapter 3: Seventeen Missing Clues

In their bedroom, the crossword notebook sits on a high shelf.

One page has half a grid and no clues. The next has seventeen clues and nowhere to put an answer. A penciled heading says EASY, which is her sister's most inaccurate contribution to the book.

Zissia takes it down.

She can finish the grid alone. That seems like a poor reason not to ask.

Her sister comes in to collect a folder.

"Are we working on that?"

"If you want."

"I'd love to another night. Tonight I have the family meeting Mama told us about."

Zissia closes the notebook.

"There's always something."

Her sister stops.

"This week, yes."





"And after the wedding there won't be?"

The question sounds accusing even though Zissia means it as a real question. Perhaps it is both.

Her sister puts the folder down.

"There will be different things. I don't know every part yet."

"So you can't say Tuesday."

"Not every Tuesday."

Zissia does not ask for one Tuesday. One is too small to protect the future she wants.

"Then forget it."

Her sister does not forget the crossword book. She also does not cancel the meeting.

The folder goes with her. The grid stays empty.





Chapter 4: Work as an Invitation

On Sunday, the place-card job ends early.

The aunt checks the names against the approved list. Zissia sorts the finished cards into their groups. They put the uncertain ones aside for an adult to handle rather than making guesses.

There is enough time left to make more roses.

Zissia takes out paper.

Mama passes the doorway.

"Are those for home?"

"Just practicing."

It is not quite a lie. She is practicing the folds. She is also hoping a boxful of finished roses will change everybody's mind.

She makes two, then puts a third unfinished one beside her sister's place at supper.

"I get stuck here," she says.

Her sister looks at it.

"No, you don't. You're the one who teaches me."





Zissia feels her face warm.

Mama says nothing across the table. Later, in the kitchen, she asks why Zissia is still making flowers after the decision.

"Because when there's a job, she sits with me."

The sentence is out before she can make it prettier.

Mama leans against the counter.

"That is something you can ask her for. It doesn't have to hide inside a hundred favor boxes."

"If I ask, she can say she's busy."

"She can be busy when you make the boxes too. Then you have the same disappointment and a box of work nobody agrees to."

Zissia looks at the unfinished rose.

It is an invitation pretending to be a problem with a fold.





Chapter 5: The Request Without Paper

Her sister comes into their room with a basket of laundry. Zissia clears a place on the bed.

"Can we talk about Tuesday?"

"Which Tuesday?"

"That might be the question."

Her sister sits.

Zissia tells her about the roses. She says the part about wanting time together before she can retreat into the easier part about decorations.

"I thought if the project needed both of us, we would keep doing something that feels like us."

Her sister looks at the notebook.

"The wedding is also something that feels like me."

Zissia knows. Hearing it still hurts.

"I don't want you not to get married."

"I know."





"I just don't know where I go when you don't live here."

Her sister reaches for a sock and folds it around its pair. It is such an ordinary movement that Zissia nearly laughs. She expects somebody asking where she goes to produce a scene with no socks in it.

"You're still my sister. But I can't promise our room will keep the same schedule from another house."

"I hate that answer."

"I know."

This time, I know is not enough to end the conversation. Her sister waits.

"Can we have one evening before the wedding that isn't a job?"
Zissia asks.

They look at the actual plans. They find an evening, not a new permanent rule. They agree to keep it modest in length and leave the wedding lists outside the room.

Zissia writes it on her own calendar.

No roses are needed.





Chapter 6: An Evening Without Proof

On the agreed evening, they put the notebook on the floor.

The half-finished grid needs a seven-letter word. Her sister suggests something with eleven letters and offers to pronounce it quickly.

"That won't make it shorter," Zissia says.

"It might sound shorter."

They laugh.

For half an hour, the evening is exactly what Zissia wants. Then her sister mentions a cupboard in the new apartment.

Zissia goes quiet.

"Are wedding lists outside the room or not?"

Her sister looks at the empty squares.

"I'm talking about my house. It matters to me. I don't think I can have an evening where that part of my life doesn't exist."

Zissia wants to argue that a cupboard is technically a list item.

Instead she asks whether the shelf is deep enough for books.





They talk about the cupboard. The conversation is not as painless as arguing over a clue. It still belongs to both of them.

At the end of the evening, Zissia feels happy and sad. She wants to inspect which feeling wins, as if that will tell her whether the evening is worth keeping.

Her sister finds a seven-letter word that connects the grid.

"That works."

It does. The crossings fit, and none of the words needs to be pronounced faster.

Zissia lets it count without deciding what the whole evening proves.





Chapter 7: The Empty Half

After the wedding, her sister's cupboard is half empty.

The wedding itself has been full of noise, joy, work, and company. During it, Zissia barely has time to notice what she dreads. Now the room is quieter in a way nobody can improve with another favor box.

Mama finds her sitting on the bed with the notebook.

"Do you want company?"

"For a bit."

Mama sits. She does not say a beautiful marriage ought to make every corner of the old bedroom feel good.

Zissia says she misses the way her sister opens the door halfway and asks what she is reading before taking off her coat.

Mama listens.

Later, Zissia helps put the actual leftover wedding materials away.

She does not volunteer to invent new tasks for the sister's apartment. She does not want to become an endless source of problems that require a visit.





The six roses go into a small vase in the dining room.
They are decorations now. They do not need to keep anyone home.





Chapter 8: The Second Table

Her sister invites Zissia for an afternoon visit arranged with their family plans.

Zissia brings the crossword notebook. She asks first whether there is room on the table.

There is.

The new home has a cupboard, a table, and a clock her sister says is too loud when the room is empty. Zissia's first feeling is disloyal relief that the new home has an irritating thing in it. The second is curiosity about the cupboard shelf.

Her sister shows her.

"You were right. Books fit well there."

They put the notebook on the table. The heading still says EASY. Her sister leaves it there and writes a clue that makes Zissia groan.

The afternoon ends sooner than Zissia wants. They agree to discuss another visit when they know the coming week's plans. Her sister does not promise all Tuesdays. Zissia does not demand it again to check whether she matters.

At home, Zissia notices the empty space on the shelf.





They agreed to leave the notebook at her sister's house until the next visit. Zissia misses seeing it there. She likes knowing which table it is on.

