



The Coat Without Her Name

Ages 15-18



Chapter 1: The Third Hook

Shprintza recognizes the coat before she recognizes the girl wearing it.

It is dark blue, with a small repair inside the left cuff. She makes that repair herself last winter. She knows the crooked final stitch, although nobody else can see it when the coat is on.

Now Nissel stands in front of the borrowing room's mirror, fastening the buttons.

"The sleeves are right," Mrs. Klein says. Her gray tichel covers all her hair, and her long sleeves are rolled down as she checks the hanger number. "Try sitting in it before you decide."

Shprintza, eighteen, holds a stack of freshly cleaned scarves. Her next task is to put them into the labeled drawers.

She does not move.

Nissel sees her in the mirror.

"Hello."

"Hello."

They are in the same writing class. Nissel is new to town. Shprintza knows which stories she likes and that she argues gently with teachers who ask a question containing its own answer.

She does not know Nissel uses the community clothing library.

Then again, Nissel does not know Shprintza gives it the coat.



The borrowing room works like a library: families can choose clean, checked items for an agreed period. Mrs. Klein handles fittings and records. Volunteers sort only the supplies assigned to them, without access to borrowers' private information.

Shprintza is here every other Sunday.

Until now, she imagines herself on one side of the counter.

Chapter 2: The Sentence at the Door

Nissel tries sitting, then stands again.

"It works," she says.

Mrs. Klein explains the borrowing arrangement privately at her desk. Shprintza returns to the scarves. She puts two into the wrong drawer, notices, and moves them.

When Nissel passes her on the way out, Shprintza almost says, That's mine.

She means, That used to be mine.

She also means something else, something less easy to admit: You should know who makes this possible.

"See you tomorrow," she says instead.

"Yes. We get our essays back."

Nissel leaves.

The coat goes with her.



On Monday, Nissel hangs it beside the classroom door. Shprintza notices that one button is unfastened. She wants to tell Nissel the best way to store it. She wants to ask whether she finds the inside pocket.

During the lesson, Nissel lends her a ruler. It is an ordinary kindness.

Shprintza says thank you too warmly, then worries that warmth gives everything away.

Nothing gives anything away. Nissel goes back to her own page.

Chapter 3: A Good Deed With an Audience of One

At home, Shprintza describes the coat to Mama without naming the borrower.

Mama wears her plain brown tichel and a high-necked dress with sleeves to her wrists. She is making a list of groceries, not a speech about generosity.

"Does it fit her?"

"Yes."

"That's good."

"I don't think she knows it comes from me."

Mama looks up.

"Does she need to?"

Shprintza sits down.

"I know she doesn't. I just feel odd."



"What kind of odd?"

She considers saying pleased. She is pleased the coat is useful. That is not the whole feeling.

"I want her to think well of me. And I don't want her to think I think badly of her. Which she can't think, because she doesn't know."

Mama sets the pencil down.

"That's a crowded conversation to have without the other person."

Shprintza laughs, unwillingly.

"I picture giving things to people I never meet," she says. "Now she is there, in my class, wearing it."

"You gave the coat to the library. Mrs. Klein handles the borrowing. It isn't a private arrangement between you and your classmate."

"I know."

"Knowing may take a little while to catch up with seeing it."

Mama returns to her list. She does not make Shprintza confess that every generous feeling is false. The coat is still warm. It still goes to the library because Shprintza outgrows it and wants someone to use it.

Now she needs to stop adding an invisible condition after it leaves.

Chapter 4: The Wrong Kind of Careful

At school, Shprintza becomes careful around Nissel.



She does not complain about the classroom being cold, in case that sounds like a comment on the coat. She does not mention the writing workshop fee, in case Nissel cannot pay it. She does not ask why Nissel misses the optional session on Wednesday.

She decides not to invite her to a small study afternoon because snacks might make the afternoon feel expensive.

Nissel notices the distance, not the private calculations behind it.

"Have I annoyed you?" she asks after class.

"No."

"You keep starting sentences and stopping."

"I'm just tired."

Shprintza hears the excuse and dislikes it. She is tired. That is not why she leaves Nissel outside the invitation.

The coat tells Shprintza nothing about what Nissel can afford, why she borrows it, or what she likes to do on a Wednesday. It certainly does not tell her that a plate of biscuits is a difficult topic.

"Actually," she says, "I've been deciding what to ask you without asking. That's unfair."

Nissel waits.

"I'm having two girls over to work on the writing assignment Sunday afternoon. I'd like you to come. If the time doesn't suit, that's all right."



"What time?"

Shprintza tells her.

"I can come for the first hour. Then my aunt is taking me somewhere."

"An hour works."

Nissel picks up her folder.

"Next time, ask. I don't mind answering."

It is neither a thank-you nor a revelation. It is the answer to the question Shprintza actually asks.

Chapter 5: The Cupboard at Home

On Thursday, Mama asks Shprintza to get the larger serving bowl from the high cupboard.

Shprintza brings down two boxes before she finds it. One contains the family's old photographs. The other contains papers and a folded white tablecloth.

There is a cloth label sewn into the tablecloth's edge.

Community linen library.

"Are we returning this?" Shprintza asks.

"Not yet. Mrs. Adler confirms we can keep it for your brother's celebration next month."



Shprintza looks at the cloth. They use the linen library for family events often. She knows it as well as she knows the cupboard.

She simply never places that knowledge beside the borrowing room.

"I think I divide things strangely," she says.

Mama comes to the cupboard.

"In what way?"

"A tablecloth is something we borrow because it makes sense. But when someone borrows clothes, I imagine a whole story about her."

Mama folds the cloth along its old crease.

"You can notice that without deciding what her story really is."

Shprintza wants to ask whether Nissel's family needs help. She realizes the question would not improve the invitation, the classroom conversation, or the coat.

She puts the tablecloth back in the box.

At the next Sunday shift, she asks Mrs. Klein a question without names.

"What if a volunteer recognizes an item someone chooses?"

Mrs. Klein looks at her carefully.

"The borrower doesn't owe the volunteer an explanation. Don't identify whose it was, discuss who borrows, or look for their records. If something about the item needs attention, tell me privately."



"Even if it's something I gave?"

"Especially then. You gave it to be used."

Shprintza nods.

Mrs. Klein hands her the scarf labels. "These drawers still need sorting."

The task is welcome. It is a task she actually has.

Chapter 6: The Study Afternoon

Nissel arrives on time, carrying her assignment in a cardboard folder.

The dark coat hangs in Shprintza's front hall.

Shprintza looks at it once. Then she brings Nissel to the table.

The girls work on openings. One begins with a thunderstorm, one with a badly wrapped parcel, and Shprintza's begins with a girl describing the kitchen before anything happens in it.

Nissel reads Shprintza's paragraph.

"I think this sentence is where it starts."

She points halfway down the page.

Shprintza wants to defend the earlier sentences. They take her a long time. She has also given the coat Nissel wears, though that fact has no place at the table.



For a moment, she feels the ridiculous wish that receiving her coat should make Nissel gentler with her paragraph.

The wish is private. It does not need to become a rule.

"What would you cut?" she asks.

Nissel shows her. Shprintza tries reading the shorter beginning aloud.

It works better.

She thanks Nissel for the suggestion. Then she reads Nissel's opening and asks about the narrator. Both girls have something to offer and something to learn. Neither is the person who only gives.

At the end of the hour, Nissel puts on the coat.

"I can stay longer next time," she says. "If there is a next time."

"I'd like one."

Shprintza does not add a promise about every Sunday. They will arrange another afternoon when they know their work.

Chapter 7: On the Rack Again

In early spring, Shprintza sees the coat on the library's return rack.

It is cleaned and checked before going back into circulation. Mrs. Klein handles a small loose button. The cuff repair still holds.

Shprintza feels a little proud of the repair. She does not need to remove that feeling to leave the coat alone.



"Can I help with this rack?" she asks.

"Not today. Finish the scarves, please."

She finishes the scarves.

At school the next morning, Nissel wears a different coat. Shprintza does not ask where it comes from. She asks whether Nissel wants to exchange drafts again.

"Yes. But don't spare the weak part."

"Only if you don't spare mine."

They agree.

Shprintza takes out her newest page. The opening reaches the trouble sooner this time.

At the bottom, there is space for someone else's pencil marks.