

The Crack in Bar Twelve



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: The Promise

In September, Morah Tema asks who will sing the solo at the mother-daughter evening in Cheshvan, and Shlomit's hand goes up before her sense does.

It is not a big solo. The mother-daughter evening is the school's warmest night of the year - three hundred mothers and grandmothers folding into the auditorium, a program the twelfth grade runs, and the school song at the end with one voice carrying the high part. Eight bars in the middle, the part that sits high and plain where everyone can hear whether the singer meant it. Shlomit can sing it. She has sung it at the Shabbat table a hundred times, and her father always stops chewing for bar twelve.

She promises. She writes it in her planner. She tells her mother, who says, "Your grandmother will plotz," in the good way.

For six weeks it is a fact on a calendar, easy to carry.





Chapter 2: The Crack

The first full rehearsal is on a Tuesday, in the auditorium, with thirty girls on folding chairs and the eighth grade ushering class watching from the back because their teacher needed a room. The stage lights are hot, the folding chairs creak, and the empty seats behind the girls wait like the real night.

Shlomit sings the verse fine. She reaches bar twelve, the high plain one, and her voice folds in half - a clean, public, unmistakable crack, the kind that sounds like a door opening in the wrong place.

Someone in the eighth grade giggles. Just one girl, and she stops fast, but the giggle lands where giggles land.

Morah Tema does not flinch. "Again from bar ten," she says, and Shlomit sings it again, and it holds, thin but true. Rehearsal moves on. Nobody says anything. That is almost worse.





Chapter 3: The Way Out

By supper, Shlomit has the whole plan built.

A sore throat. Not a lie, exactly - her throat does feel scratchy, the way throats do when you check them every four minutes. Morah

Tema will be kind about it. Morah Tema will move the second soprano up; the solo will be sung; the evening will be fine. Nobody will be able to say she quit. A sore throat is weather. It happens to everyone.

She practices the sentence in her head while she clears the table. Morah Tema, I'm so sorry, my voice is gone. It is a smooth sentence. It is also not quite honest, and she can taste that while she thinks it.

"You're clearing like someone with a decision in her mouth," her mother says.

"I'm fine," says Shlomit, which is what you say when you are holding a decision and a plate at the same time.





Chapter 4: What the Urge Is Carrying

On Wednesday, in her room, Shlomit does the thing she does with hard decisions: she writes what the urge actually says.

It says: quit before Friday, and no one ever hears you crack again.

Then she asks the urge the two questions her father asks his own worries at the table, out loud, because it works better out loud.

First: what are you protecting me from? The answer comes fast. Not from failing - she held bar twelve the second time, thin but true. From the giggle. From thirty faces remembering the door-opening sound.





Second: is the thing you're pointing at real? She checks it honestly, the way she'd check a friend. Is she sick? Her throat is scratchy, and she does not wave that away. She watches it Wednesday and Thursday, drinks tea because tea is comfort and not a verdict, and by Friday morning the scratchiness has eased - a good sign, not a certificate. If it comes back, that goes to her mother and the nurse, whatever the evening needs. Is she exhausted? No - regular school-week tired. Is the solo too big for her? She doesn't actually know, and that, she realizes, is the one question on the page that needs a second pair of ears.

Stepping down is a real choice - people step down from solos, honestly, and the world turns. But if she steps down, she wants it to be a choice made with the facts in, not an escape hatch built at supper out of one giggle she never checked.





Chapter 5: The Honest Version

On Friday morning, Shlomit knocks on the music room door, and she does not say the sore-throat sentence.

"I want to quit," she says, "and I came to say it out loud before I decide, because the reason is embarrassing and I want to check it with you. I cracked on bar twelve, someone giggled, and my whole brain says get out before it happens again. Tell me true what you hear: is bar twelve too big for me?"

Morah Tema does not answer from memory. "Sing it for me now," she says, and plays bar eleven, and Shlomit sings the entrance twice, once thin and once clean.

"From what I just heard," Morah Tema says, "the crack could have been first-rehearsal nerves - the commonest thing I see all year - and I hear room to work on how you come into that bar. That is my ear on one Friday morning, not a verdict on your voice. The part fits the voice I just heard. Whether you want to sing it is a different question, and that one is yours, not mine."





Then she lays out the choices, all of them real, all of them today.

"One: you keep the solo, and we build a plan. Two: bar twelve becomes two voices from the start - you and a second singer share the high line. Three: you step down now, we hand the part over kindly, and nothing is counted. You do not have to practice first to earn the exit. Stepping down is a choice, not a failure, and if you choose it I will think no less of you. As for the giggle: in my rehearsal room, that is mine to handle. My room listens like guests."

Shlomit expects to be told what to do. Instead she is handed the whole decision, and it is heavier and lighter than being told.

"Can I tell you Monday?"

"Monday works," says Morah Tema. "The evening is close, so Monday it is. And if Monday's answer is that you step down, we hand the part over kindly on Monday, and it will still have been the right amount of thinking."





Chapter 6: The Two Voices

Over the weekend, Shlomit reads her page again, and finds the urge has learned a new sentence: if it is not a solo, it is nothing. She recognizes the shape. The same urge that wanted her gone by Friday now wants the biggest possible yes, to prove the giggle wrong. Both are the urge talking. What she actually wants is quieter and more specific: she wants to sing bar twelve, and she does not want to build her month on one wobble.

On Monday she gives Morah Tema her answer. "Two voices," she says, "if you can find a second voice who wants it."

Morah Tema knows one: Rayzel, a tenth-grader who has sung under the seniors for two years and never once been offered the high line. She asks her in private, with the no as easy as the yes - "You may say no, and nothing changes for you" - and Rayzel says she would like to try. Before anyone promises anything, Morah Tema listens to her sing the line. "It sits comfortably in your voice," she says. "We will keep it that way, or we will change the plan."





Twice that week the three of them stay twenty minutes after choir, and Morah Tema coaches them both: where the breath sits at bar eleven, how the two voices come in together, and what happens if a voice wobbles or strains on the night. They call it the rescue plan: either girl may stop, or both, and the choir is ready to carry the line - or the song may simply pause, because a paused song is not a disaster and no one sings through a strained voice. Nobody promises the plan will be needed, and nobody promises it won't. They stop practicing whenever a voice feels strained. "A tired voice is a day off, not a push-through," Morah says.

Shlomit tells Rayzel the honest thing about bar twelve: "Mine folded right at the top, in the first rehearsal, in front of everyone. If yours ever does the same, you will be in good company." Rayzel laughs, and the bar gets less like a cliff.





Chapter 7: The Night

The mother-daughter evening is warm and loud.

Standing on the side of the stage, Shlomit does not feel brave. She feels exactly as scared as she felt in rehearsal, plus a corsage. She has stopped expecting the scared to leave. It can sit in the front row. It still doesn't drive.

The verse goes fine. Bar eleven comes, Morah Tema nods the entrance, two breaths come in together, and bar twelve arrives as two voices.

One voice wobbles at the top. Afterward, nobody can say whose. The other holds the line, the way they planned it, and the bar lands - a little thin, and true. Her grandmother, third row, has her hand flat on her heart like she is swearing in court.

The evening is women-only; her father is waiting with the car around the corner, where he dropped her off hours ago. He does not say anything about bar twelve. He just hums it on the drive home, wrong on purpose, until she laughs and corrects him, and then he says, "That's the note," and drives.





Chapter 8: The Question Mark

A week later, Morah Tema stops Shlomit after choir. There is a midwinter concert in the works, and the solo is hers if she wants it. Shlomit feels two urges arrive in the same breath. One says grab it, prove the giggle wrong. One says say no fast, stay safe. She knows both voices now. Neither one gets to answer alone.

"Can I sing it at home for a week," she says, "and tell you after that?"

"That's a real answer," says Morah Tema. "Sing gently, and if your voice complains at any point, you stop and you tell me or your mother - and the answer can still be no, whatever the week shows."

In her room, Shlomit opens her planner and writes the concert date with a question mark after it. Underneath, in smaller writing, she copies the two questions, because they have earned their page: What are you protecting me from? Is the thing you're pointing at real?

Then she closes the planner, puts it in her bag, and goes down to supper, because it is Tuesday and her mother made soup.

