



The Duet With Different Parts

Ages 15-18



Chapter 1: Alone, It Works

Alone at the piano, Tzofia can make the final page sound effortless.

It is not effortless. She spends most of the week on three bars where her left hand wants to travel faster than the right. Now both hands arrive together. She plays the ending and lets the last chord fade.

"Good," Mrs. Stein says. Her dark sheitel fully covers her hair; her high-necked blouse has sleeves to her wrists. "Now let's hear it with Henya."

Henya takes her violin out of its case.

The girls are seventeen. Both study music for several years. For the school's gathering of mothers and older girls, their teacher suggests a duet. Henya's violin carries the melody; Tzofia's piano has its own moving part beneath it.

Tzofia likes the score. It looks substantial without taking ten minutes of the program.

They begin.

For sixteen bars, it works.

Then Henya's bow stops.

Tzofia keeps playing for another bar before she notices.

"I'm behind you," Henya says.

"I keep the beat."

Mrs. Stein puts her pencil down.



Chapter 2: The Place Between Them

They start again, more slowly.

At the same turn, the parts separate. Tzofia reaches the next chord while Henya is still shaping the end of her phrase.

"Can you finish that note sooner?" Tzofia asks.

"Not like that. It sounds chopped."

"Then I'm supposed to wait with my hands in the air?"

Henya lowers the violin. "You're supposed to hear me."

Tzofia looks at the page. She hears the violin. It is difficult not to hear a violin beside a piano. She simply also hears the count she practices all week.

Mrs. Stein asks them to stop playing.

"The phrase can breathe there," she says. "We need to agree how both parts move through it. Neither of you has to guess alone."

She demonstrates the piano part while Henya plays. There is a slight change before the next chord, a shared arrival rather than a long pause.

Tzofia can hear it when she is not responsible for making it.

"Try just those bars," Mrs. Stein says.

The first attempt is awkward. The second is closer.

On the third, Tzofia watches Henya so hard that she misses her own chord.

Henya smiles, then stops when she sees Tzofia's face.



"Now I'm doing both parts badly," Tzofia says.

"You're learning how your part fits," Mrs. Stein answers. "That isn't the same exercise as playing it alone."

Chapter 3: The Practice That Cannot Happen

At home, Tzofia plays the difficult turn repeatedly.

She pauses exactly where she thinks Henya will pause. She nods at the empty space beside the piano. She goes on.

After twenty minutes, she has a polished version of waiting for a person who is not there.

Mama comes to the doorway in her plain gray tichel, all her hair covered.

"Is Henya coming today?"

"No. We meet tomorrow."

"Then who are you nodding at?"

Tzofia laughs. "A very predictable violinist."

She stops playing.

She can practice her notes alone. She cannot decide exactly how another musician will shape every phrase and call it listening.



She writes two practice lists. One is for her own part: fingering, quieter chords, the left-hand leap. The other is for their next supervised session: the turn, the opening cue, the ending.

The second list is short. That does not make it less important.

Chapter 4: Not the Slow Girl

At school the next afternoon, Tzofia finds Henya near the music room.

"I think the problem is the turn," she says. "Not you being slow."

"I know I'm not slow."

Tzofia feels her face warm.

"I spoke as if you were. I'm sorry."

Henya puts her case on a chair.

"I need to hear your part too. Yesterday I watched my page and expected you to know when I was ready."

They take the list to Mrs. Stein.

The teacher helps them agree on cues. Henya gives a small breath before the opening. At the troublesome turn, they listen for the end of the violin phrase and move into the chord together. At the last line, Tzofia's piano phrase leads, so Henya follows her.

"Different places can have different leads," Mrs. Stein says. "You don't need one permanent person in charge of every bar."



They practice the turn, then the ending, then the turn again.

Tzofia plays the chords more quietly. The notes are still there. They no longer make the melody work to be heard.

"I like that," Henya says.

Tzofia likes it too. She misses the larger sound a little. It is satisfying to fill a room.

But this piece is not empty space waiting for her to fill it.

Chapter 5: The Small Piece

With two weeks left before the gathering, the girls are still unsteady in the middle.

Mrs. Stein gives them a choice. They can keep working on the current duet if there is time to make it secure, or play a shorter piece whose shared timing is simpler. They will decide after the next session, not from one difficult afternoon.

Tzofia dislikes the shorter piece at first. Its piano part looks too easy.

"It won't show what we can do," she tells Henya.

Henya studies the page.

"It might show whether we can play together."

That sounds like a victory in their earlier argument. Tzofia opens her mouth.



Then she hears Henya play the melody. It is plain, not empty. The piano answer comes after it, and the next violin phrase takes up a note Tzofia leaves ringing.

Tzofia tries her part.

At the next session, they compare both pieces with Mrs. Stein. The demanding duet needs more shared practice than the schedule permits. They choose the shorter one for this gathering and keep the other for later work without promising a date.

The harder score stays in Tzofia's folder. It does not become a failure because they do not perform it now.

Chapter 6: Before the First Note

On the afternoon of the gathering, the room is full of mothers and older girls. The performers wait at the side.

Tzofia adjusts the bench. Henya checks her bow.

Tzofia wants to play the first notes quietly to be sure they are still there. She does not. Henya is not ready, and their agreed start has not happened.

When Mrs. Stein introduces them, Tzofia looks toward Henya.

Henya gives the small breath.

They begin.

Halfway through, a chair shifts in the audience. Tzofia loses a moment of attention and plays one chord a little early.



Henya hears it. They recover at the next agreed point. Neither tries to repair the mistake by speeding up the whole piece.

At the ending, the piano phrase leads. Henya waits with her and answers.

The last note fades. The audience applauds.

Tzofia is pleased. She also remembers the early chord.

Both girls stand and thank the room. They do not discuss the mistake in front of everyone.

Chapter 7: Two Parts in the Folder

Afterward, Mrs. Stein asks what they notice.

Tzofia names the early chord.

"And the recovery?" the teacher asks.

"We find the next point together."

Henya says she hears the piano answer clearly at the end. They speak about two places to improve and one part they want to keep.

There is no need to pretend the performance is perfect. There is also no need to reduce it to the one chord that comes too soon.

At home, Tzofia opens the demanding score again. She plays the left-hand leap slowly. It is work she can do alone.

On the next page, she writes a note for Henya and Mrs. Stein: Rehearse the middle together when we have time.



She does not try to solve Henya's phrase on her own.

The shorter piece goes behind it in the folder. Its piano part still looks simple on paper.

Tzofia remembers waiting for the first breath, hearing the violin's answer, and finding the next point after the mistake.

There are things a page of notes cannot show until someone else begins to play.