

# The Game With Three Missing Rules



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



## Chapter 1: The Wrong Notebook

The notebook on the school shelf is blue.

Benaiah's is blue too.

For one second, he knows he has found it. Then he sees the name inside the cover. It belongs to somebody else.

He closes it without reading the pages and returns it to the shelf.

His own notebook has a loose back cover and an ink spot beside the word ROUTES. It contains a game he and his cousin invented when they were eleven. They added rules for years afterward. Most concern a traveler trying to cross a paper map without spending all his supplies.

Some rules are sensible. Others exist because his cousin once lost a whole round to a bridge neither of them remembered drawing.

Benaiah is seventeen now. His cousin lives in another town. Their families arrange a visit this week, and Benaiah wants to bring out the old game.

He last used the notebook at the supervised school activity afternoon. He remembers packing the counters. He cannot remember packing the book.

The adult program leader checks the cupboard where that afternoon's materials are stored. The notebook is not there.





"Ask the office about found property," the leader says. "Don't go into closed rooms to search."

Benaiah asks.

There is no notebook with his name in it.





## Chapter 2: The Places He Knows

At home, Tatty helps him list the places he actually used that day.

Kitchen table. School activity room. His usual bag. The low shelf beside his desk.

Benaiah empties the bag onto the table and checks each pocket. Tatty waits while he looks through the papers, then helps him put the ordinary schoolwork back in order.

They check the shelf together.

The notebook is not behind the books. It is not under them. It is not inside the game box, where Benaiah has already looked twice.

"Maybe someone put it in another cupboard," Benaiah says.

"You can ask the caretaker about the room tomorrow."

"What if it went out with the spare paper?"

"We don't know."

Benaiah imagines the notebook crushed beneath things he cannot identify. The picture feels so clear that he nearly tells Tatty this is what happened.

Instead, he puts a question mark beside the activity room.

They do not search rubbish, storage areas, or anyone else's belongings. Tatty helps him write a short description for the office: blue notebook, ROUTES on cover, Benaiah's name on first page.





The loose cover suddenly seems like a detail he should have repaired long ago.





## Chapter 3: What Is in the Book

At supper, his younger brother asks whether the cousin is still coming.

"Yes."

"Then you can play something else."

Benaiah knows that. It is also the answer he least wants.

The notebook is not simply a set of instructions. On one page, the cousin wrote BRIDGE CLOSED and then drew a ladder because he disliked the result. Benaiah added a rule underneath that ladders cannot stand in rivers.

There is a whole argument about whether a traveler can carry two blankets. The first drawing of a blanket resembled a loaf of bread.

For months afterward, they called the rule the bread rule.

A new board game could give them something to do. It could not supply those pages.

After supper, Tatty finds him opening the empty game box again.

"Have you found another place to check?"

"No."

Benaiah sets the lid down.

"I don't remember the rules properly."

"Some of them?"





"Some. Not the last ones."

He touches the stack of counters.

"If I forget them, what do we have left?"

Tatty pulls up a chair.

"Tell me what you remember."

Benaiah tells him about the blanket shaped like bread. Tatty laughs at the drawing he has never seen.

Benaiah still wishes he could show it.





## Chapter 4: Not Found Today

The next afternoon, the caretaker checks the activity room's approved storage places with Benaiah and the program leader present.

A folder of blank maps is there. Two pencils have rolled behind a box. The missing notebook is not with either.

"We'll keep your description at the office," the caretaker says. "If it turns up, we'll let you know."

Benaiah wants another cupboard. He wants the promise of a search long enough to end in blue cardboard.

There is no unchecked cupboard in the room that he has a reason or permission to inspect.

He thanks the adults and goes home.

Tatty asks how the check went.

"They didn't find it."

"What do you want to do before your cousin comes?"

"Remember all of it."

Benaiah writes a rule about supplies. Then he writes one about bridges. He stops at the third line.





Does a traveler pay before crossing, or after? What happens if he cannot pay? He remembers an argument and the cousin waving a counter. He cannot remember their decision.

He leaves a gap.

The gap feels less like missing instructions than an accusation against the six-year-old friendship.





## Chapter 5: Two Different Memories

His cousin arrives on Sunday with the family.

Benaiah tells him about the notebook before they sit down.

"I wanted to find it before you came."

"Where did you lose it?"

"I think at the activity afternoon. We checked, but we don't know."

The cousin looks disappointed.

"The original map too?"

"Everything in the book."

They take the counters and Benaiah's partial list to the dining-room table. The adults are talking nearby. The younger children have their own game at the other end.

"Crossing costs two," the cousin says.

"I think one."

"We changed it after the bridge round."

"That was the ladder rule."

The cousin shakes his head.

Both sound certain. Neither has the page.

Benaiah writes ONE OR TWO in the gap.

"It can't be both."





"It can be what we don't remember," the cousin says.

They read the rest. They agree on four rules, disagree on two, and cannot recall a third at all.

The cousin reaches for the counters.

"We could try a round."

"Not until it's right," Benaiah says.





## Chapter 6: The Afternoon Waiting

The cousin puts the counters down.

"How will we know it's right?"

"You'll remember. Or I will."

"What if we don't today?"

Benaiah looks at the incomplete list.

The visit has an end time. Their families have another arrangement afterward. He can spend all the remaining time waiting for the old pages to return inside one of their heads.

The cousin asks whether they can play a different game.

Benaiah feels hurt, though the cousin has not said the notebook is unimportant.

"Did you even like this one?"

The cousin looks up.

"Yes. I don't like being tested on it."

Benaiah pushes the list away.

"I didn't mean it like that."

"You asked as if forgetting meant I didn't."

They sit quietly for a moment.





"I'm sorry," Benaiah says. "I miss the book. I wanted you to remember enough to make it come back."

"I miss the little map with the bridge. I don't remember every rule."

Benaiah gets another sheet.

He labels it VERSION FOR TODAY.

"Could we agree on the missing parts just for this round?"





## Chapter 7: A Rule They Make Now

They keep the four rules both remember.

Beside the disputed crossing cost, Benaiah writes OLD COST UNCERTAIN. For today's game, they choose one counter. They agree to review it after the round if it makes crossing too easy. They make a fresh paper map together. It has a river and a road. It does not pretend to be the lost drawing.

The third missing rule concerns running out of supplies. Neither can reconstruct it.

"We could finish at the last town reached," the cousin suggests.

"Then no one gets trapped for the rest of the visit."

Benaiah writes NEW RULE beside it.

They begin.

The game is less complicated than the one he remembers. He misses the corner of the map where his cousin drew a ridiculous mountain. The fresh page has no mountain.

Halfway through, the cousin points out that crossing for one counter barely costs anything. They finish the round using the agreed rule, then change the cost to two for the next round.

Benaiah writes TODAY'S CHANGE below the list.

The cousin notices the bread rule is still there.





"That blanket was enormous."

"It was a very important loaf."

They laugh. The laugh does not tell Benaiah where the notebook is.





## Chapter 8: What Goes in the Box

Before the family leaves, they read the new sheet together.

Four remembered rules. Three uncertain old rules. Choices they make today, labeled as such.

The cousin asks to keep a copy. Benaiah copies the short list while the cousin checks it against the original sheet. The adults confirm when the next family visit may work, without making a promise before checking their plans.

"If the notebook turns up, we can compare," the cousin says.

"Yes."

Benaiah does not ask him to keep trying to remember during the journey home.

After the visitors leave, he places the new map and list in the counter box. The office still has the missing-notebook description. There is no new place to search tonight.

He writes one more line on the version sheet: Original notebook not found.

Below it, he keeps the words NEW RULE.

Then he puts the lid on the box and carries it to the shelf.

