

The Half-Yes



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: The List

The committee list goes up on the bulletin board on Tuesday, between morning prayers and first period, and the hallway jams in front of it.

The midwinter chesed fair happens on the last Thursday before break. Twelve booths. Every class sends workers, and the older girls run the crews. It is the one school event Yita actually looks forward to. She is sixteen, and she put her name in for booth design last week. She has a folder of booth sketches at home - fronts, signs, a striped awning she has been refining since last year's fair - and she told Goldie so in the stairwell.

She finds her name in the third column.





"Schedule coordinator," she reads.

Goldie, a twelfth-grader, chairs the committee. Yita reads the line twice. The design column lists two other girls, both from her own grade.

I draw booths, she thinks, standing on her toes over someone's shoulder. I don't build grids.

At home, Mama asks what she got.

"The schedule," Yita says.

"Not the designs?"

"Not the designs."

Mama waits. Yita shrugs and goes to set the table.





Chapter 2: The Half-Yes

On Wednesday, Goldie stops each coordinator in the hall and asks for a draft within a week.

"Fine," Yita says.

It is not fine, exactly, but it is not worth a scene, either.

At home, she borrows last year's fair folder from the school office - a fat accordion file that smells like the supply closet - and copies the old schedule grid onto fresh paper. She changes the date at the top. She hands it in before lunch on Thursday. It takes her twenty minutes, including finding a pen.

On Friday, Goldie's note comes back with two questions. Are the setup girls free during period three? Did anyone check the bake booth girls against their class party?





Yita reads it and puts the note in her bag.

The note rides to school and home again on Monday. It rides in again on Tuesday. Each evening she does her homework, helps with supper, and looks at the note and does not touch it. The note is not heavy. That is the strange part she will think about later. It is one sheet of paper, and it somehow makes her whole bag heavier.

On Sunday night she almost answers it, and instead she reorganizes her desk drawer, which has never once needed reorganizing.

When she finally answers, on Tuesday night, the work takes twenty minutes.

The note sat for five days.

She answers half of it. "Setup girls are fine," she writes, without checking.

It isn't my fair, she thinks. Goldie is running it. Let it be her grid.





Chapter 3: Sent Back

On Thursday, Mrs. Adler, the teacher advisor, reviews the grid.

Yita gets it back in an envelope with her name on it, and three marks in Mrs. Adler's square handwriting.

The setup crew is scheduled during its own history test. Two girls appear in two booths in the same hour. The bake booth has nobody for the last shift.

At the bottom, one line: "The grid has to be true. Bring me a true one."

Yita's face burns. She reads the three marks again on the walk home, hoping one of them is wrong.

None of them is wrong. The period three history test is on the test calendar taped inside every locker. The double-booked girls are in her own grade. The bake booth's last shift is empty because last year's bake booth closed early, and this year's does not.

The errors are not bad luck. They are the half-yes, written down. She said yes at the board. In her bag, in her slow answers, in the unchecked line, she said no.





Chapter 4: The Honest Offer

After school, Goldie finds her near the lockers.

Goldie does not look angry. She looks buried. She is carrying three folders and a list with things crossed out in two colors.

"Listen," Goldie says. "If you don't want the schedule, tell me. I'll give it to someone else, and nobody will hold it against you. But I can't carry a maybe."

"A maybe?"

"A maybe lands on me," Goldie says. She shifts the folders. "If it's yours, it's yours, and I stop worrying about it. If it isn't, say so, and I'll fix it today. Either way is fine. The maybe is the only thing that isn't."

Yita stands with her books.

The offer is clean. Nobody calls her lazy. Nobody gives a speech about commitment. There is an in, and there is an out, and both of them are real.

She sees the other thing too. Her half-yes did not float in the air somewhere. It sat on Goldie, on top of the three folders, all week.





Chapter 5: The Choice

That night, Yita actually weighs it.

Out is allowed. That is the strange part. She could hand over the grid tomorrow, take teardown crew, and no one would chase her about it. Goldie said so in plain words.

In means the part is hers - the full part, on a plan she did not design, at a fair where two other girls draw the booths.

She lists what she knows, sitting at the kitchen table after everyone else has gone up. She likes things that line up. Once she starts a grid, she gets fussy about it, and the fussiness makes it good. The drag was never about the work. The work was twenty minutes at a time. The drag was about not being asked.

Mama comes in for a cup of water and asks one question - "Which part did you want?" - and listens to the answer without fixing anything.

I said yes at the board and no in my bag, Yita thinks, going upstairs. That cost more than the work did.

In the morning, she finds Goldie before the bell.

"Mine," she says. "Give me two days."





Chapter 6: The Full Part

Yita rebuilds the grid from nothing.

She asks each booth leader her real limits, one by one, between periods. The setup crew captain checks the test calendar: history, period three, so setup moves to period two. The bake booth leader says her girls have their class party after lunch, so the early shifts work and the last shift is the problem - Yita gives the last shift to two girls from the younger grades who begged for a booth job and got waitlisted. The ticket girl's sister has an engagement party that week; her cousin covers one shift.

No girl appears twice in any hour. Every shift has a name.

Then she writes a swap rule, because fairs do not go according to grids. One swap per girl, written on the grid itself, approved by Mrs. Adler before the fair.

Mrs. Adler checks the finished grid against the test calendar and signs the rule.

The whole rebuild takes two evenings. The drag before it took a week and a half.

The drag weighed more than the job, Yita thinks.





Chapter 7: The Fair

The fair runs on the last Thursday before break, and the gym smells like popcorn and floor cleaner. Mothers and grandmothers and half the neighborhood's little girls come through the doors with their purses and their tickets.

The grid holds. Nobody thanks a schedule that works, because nobody notices it. Booths open on time. Shifts change on time. The bake booth's two younger girls show up for the last shift in matching headbands, ten minutes early.

In the second hour, the ticket-booth girl is called home - her sister is sick, and her mother needs the car driven back.

A year ago, or a month ago, this is where a fair starts to wobble. Instead, the swap rule does its job. Her cousin is already listed. One written swap, already approved. The ticket booth never stands empty.

Goldie stops by near the end, still carrying folders.

"It's holding," Goldie says.

"It's true," Yita says.





Chapter 8: Teardown

After the fair, the crew stacks chairs and pulls down signs, and the gym goes back to being a gym.

Yita collects the booth signs, one by one, and counts them against the list.

Goldie finds her at the supply closet.

"Next year, you get first pick," Goldie says. "Designs, if you want them."

"I want them," Yita says.

She folds the final grid, with its one crossed-out swap and Mrs. Adler's initials, and puts it in her folder, next to the booth sketches.

Then she goes to find her sisters at the bake table, where the leftover rugelach is being divided up, and takes the one with the most cinnamon.

