

The Name on the Clipboard

Chapter 1: Two Kinds of Work

The senior class visits the women's residence every Sunday for four weeks - twelve girls, a list of residents, flowers in October and then, when the weather turns, little knitted squares for laps.

The project has two kinds of work, and two girls carry them.

Tirtsa carries the organizing. Hers is the clipboard: the list of residents and what each one loves, which girl sits well with which resident, the bus permission slips collected and counted, the reminder at Thursday lunch about whose turn it is to bring the squares. She does it the way she does everything - quietly, completely, and at a volume that does not travel.

Blimy carries the voice. When the residents need a program - a few songs, a short something to mark the end of the four weeks - Blimy builds it and Blimy delivers it. She is seventeen and she speaks the way some people sing: it costs her nothing and it fills a room.

The Sundays have a shape. The girls come in twos to the residents' rooms in the morning, and in the afternoon there is the program in the common room - the songs everyone knows, the short piece Blimy found or wrote. The activities director says the residents start asking about Sunday on Friday.

It is a good division. Everybody says so. The trouble starts because everybody says so out loud, to Blimy, for four weeks - nice catch, beautiful program, you run such a good thing - until the two kinds of work blur into one name.

Chapter 2: The Clipboard

If you want to know what organizing is, watch Tirtsa for one Thursday.

A resident who loves roses is moved to a different floor on Tuesday. By Thursday lunch, Tirtsa's list shows the new room number, and the girl assigned to her knows. Two girls have a test Sunday morning and cannot come; Tirtsa swaps two names on the grid, and no resident gets skipped. The activities director at the residence mentions, once, that the pianist is away in November; Tirtsa writes it down, and the program Blimy builds quietly assumes no piano.

There is a grid, too - girls down one side, Sundays across the top - and every girl's name appears the same number of times, because week one showed the same girls doing every visit. She fixed it without a speech. She just built the grid so the fair thing was the automatic thing.

None of it is hard, exactly. That is the thing about organizing done well: it looks like nothing until it is missing. It is forty small catches a week, and every catch lands silently, and the silence is the success.

Blimy sees it. She wants that on the record early. She tells Tirtsa, more than once, "You know you're the whole machine." Tirtsa always says the same thing: "I like the machine." And she

does. Liking the machine is not the same as wanting to be mistaken for its owner. Liking the machine is not the same as being fine when someone else gets the credit for it.

Chapter 3: The Assembly

The wrap-up assembly is on a Tuesday, the whole grade in the auditorium, the principal at the podium reviewing the term's chesed projects. It is the ordinary kind of assembly - coats on laps, the winter light through the high windows. The coat drive gets its paragraph. The tutoring roster gets its paragraph. Blimy is thinking about her English essay.

She comes to the residence project, and she says warm things - the residents wrote a letter, the activities director sent thanks - and then she says it: "And our thanks to Blimy, who organized all of it and gave such a beautiful closing program."

The applause is immediate and real. Blimy is on her feet before she has decided anything - her row is standing, the grade is turning toward her, and the moment has the speed of a wave. She smiles. She says thank you, into the noise, to no microphone. She sits.

Two rows away, Tirtsa is clapping. That is the part Blimy will keep: Tirtsa claps, and her face does the thing faces do when they are being good sports - nothing wrong, everything arranged - and the arranging is visible if you know her. Blimy knows her.

The whole thing takes ten seconds. The wave moves on to the winter coat drive. Blimy sits in the noise and thinks to herself: I just accepted something. I did not steal it, but I am holding it, and holding it is a decision I am making right now.

Chapter 4: Three Versions

That night, at the kitchen table with her notebook and no answers, Blimy lays out the three versions.

Version one: do nothing. It was the principal's sentence, not hers; she never claimed anything; Tirtsa probably does not care. Tirtsa clapping with her face arranged is the answer to probably. And credit is not a pie - but it is a record. The grade now believes a thing that is not true, and next term, when someone is chosen to organize the spring series, they will reach for the name they remember. Hers. The wrong name compounds.

Version two: the speech. She could ask for two minutes at next week's assembly. She writes two lines of it and stops. It would embarrass the principal, who made an honest error. It would turn Tirtsa into the girl who needed defending - a spectacle, in front of two hundred girls, for someone who works at a volume that does not travel. And - she makes herself write this part, because it is true - it would make Blimy look wonderful. Generous, humble, glowing. A correction that buys the corrector more credit than it returns is not a correction. It is a second theft with better manners.

Version three takes her an hour to find. She walks the long way to the store for her mother and thinks it through twice. The correction has to reach the person who made the error - that is the office, not the auditorium. The honoring has to be the kind Tirtsa would choose for herself - and

Tirtsa chooses work, every time, at a volume that does not travel. And the record has to be set right in the place records actually live, which is not speeches. It is trust. It is who gets handed the next real thing.

She writes it down in three lines and sleeps on it, and in the morning it still looks right.

Chapter 5: The Office

Wednesday morning, Blimy knocks on the principal's office door.

"Yesterday you thanked me for organizing the residence project," she says. "I gave the closing program - the speech, the songs, that was mine, and I worked hard on it. But the organizing was Tirtsa. The lists, the swaps, the residents' rooms, all four weeks - hers. The thank-you belongs to her."

The principal is quiet for a moment. Then she says, "Thank you for telling me plainly. What would you like me to do?"

It is the question version three lives in.

"Not a correction speech," Blimy says. "It would make her a story instead of an organizer. The spring series starts planning in two weeks. Make her the organizer - announced plainly, the way roles get announced, because she is the right person and everyone will finally know it. The credit that means anything to Tirtsa is the work itself, held visibly. She earned it four weeks running. Let the record say so where records live: in who gets trusted next."

The principal listens the way principals do when they are deciding.

"You are describing my own error back to me very gently," she says at last. "I read the thank-you off the program, and the program had your name on it. That is not an excuse - it is an explanation, and it is mine." She picks the pen back up. "The spring series. Yes."

The principal writes something down. "And if she says no?"

"She will not say no to the work," Blimy says. "Only to the speech about the work."

Chapter 6: Tirtsa

She tells Tirtsa at lunch, plainly, the way she did it in the office: what the principal said, what she said back, what she asked for.

Tirtsa is quiet for a bit. "You didn't have to do the office part," she says at last. "I wasn't sitting there bleeding."

"I know," Blimy says. "You were clapping with your face arranged. I've known you since we were nine. The arranged face is the bleeding."

That gets a real laugh, and then Tirtsa says the thing Blimy did not expect. "The program was beautiful, you know. The residents talked about your speech for a week. The resident with the roses - she asked if you were a professional." She says it without any arranged face at all. "I can run a list into the ground. I can't do what you did in that room. It was the right division."

"It was," Blimy says. "The division was right. The name was wrong. Both things can be true at once - that's the whole repair. I'm not handing you my part and calling it yours. I'm handing you yours."

Tirtsa looks at her for a long second. "Spring series," she says. "I'll think about the list." Which, in Tirtsa, is a yes with a planning horizon.

Chapter 7: The Announcement

Two weeks later, at the term's first assembly of the new month, the principal reads the spring roles in her ordinary reading-voice: the coat drive team, the tutoring roster, and then, "The spring residence series will be organized by Tirtsa, whose work on the fall visits was exceptional - the spring program will be built with Blimy."

No correction. No story. Just the record, set right, in the place records live. Honor, it turns out, does not need a microphone.

The applause for Tirtsa is loud and a little surprised, the way applause sounds when a grade learns something it should have known. Tirtsa stands, because her row makes her, and her face is not arranged. It is just her face, pink and real, and Blimy thinks to herself: that is what credit looks like when it lands where it was aimed.

The principal does not look at Blimy when she reads it, and Blimy is grateful: there is no wink in it, no private acknowledgment from the podium, nothing that makes the morning about the repair. The repair is the plain sentence itself.

Afterward, three girls ask Tirtsa how she did the swapping grid. Three. She answers all three at her usual volume, and the volume turns out to travel fine when people lean in. One of the three asks if the grid works for carpool rotations, and Tirtsa says it works for anything with names and weeks.

Chapter 8: The Clipboard

The spring clipboard appears on Tirtsa's desk the next morning - a new one, because the fall one is full.

On the back, Tirtsa writes her name, and under it, in small letters, the two roles for spring: organizing, and program. She carries it to lunch, and there the back reads, in Tirtsa's exact handwriting:

Organizing: Tirtsa. Program and speeches: Blimy. And under that, smallest of all: each other's, when needed.

Blimy reads it twice. Then she borrows Tirtsa's pencil and writes, under the smallest line, one word - agreed - and hands the clipboard back, and they go to class, each carrying the part that is hers.

Eight activities

Activity 1: Two kinds of work

The story says the project had two kinds of work, carried by two girls. Name them, name who carried each, and explain in your own words how "everybody says so out loud, to Blimy, for four weeks" blurred them into one name. Two or three sentences.

Activity 2: The three versions

List Blimy's three versions from Chapter 4. For version one and version two, give the story's own reason for rejecting it - there are at least two reasons each. Short answers.

Activity 3: Order the repair

Put these in the story's order, and say why the order matters: (a) Blimy tells Tirtsa what she did and what she asked for; (b) the assembly thanks the wrong name; (c) the principal announces the spring roles; (d) the kitchen-table audit of versions; (e) the office conversation. One sentence on why the order matters.

Activity 4: The record compounds - a made-up set of numbers

The numbers in this activity are made up for practice. A grade chooses organizers by memory: whoever the grade believes did it last time gets asked first. Suppose a wrong record stands for 3 straight terms, and each term the wrong name is thanked publicly 2 more times (assembly + newsletter). (a) How many public thank-yous does the wrong record total after 3 terms? (b) If each term also brings 2 new organizing opportunities that go to the remembered name, how many opportunities does the wrong record steer? (c) Blimy says the wrong name "compounds." Using your numbers, explain what compounding means here in one sentence.

Activity 5: "A second theft with better manners."

Blimy writes that a correction which buys the corrector more credit than it returns "is not a correction. It is a second theft with better manners." What does she mean? Why does she make herself write that reason down? Two or three sentences.

Activity 6: Draw the clipboard

Draw the back of the spring clipboard as Chapter 8 gives it: the three lines, their hands, and the one word. Only what the story tells you. Caption it with one line from the story.

Activity 7: Dassy's score sheet - a fictional case

A girl named Dassy keeps score for the class's review-game afternoons. At the term party, the teacher thanks "Dassy and Chumi" for running the games - but Chumi only brought the buzzers once; Dassy ran eleven afternoons alone. Dassy likes Chumi and does not want her embarrassed. Write what Dassy does, where she does it, and one thing she makes sure stays true. One sentence each, with names.

Activity 8: Word grid

Find the eight words in the grid. They all go left to right, one per row.

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C R E D I T W B F Y
S P E E C H N O R S
O R G A N I Z E X J
A S S E M B L Y U P
T H A N K S T C D E
C L I P B O A R D B
P R O J E C T M N O
H O N O R E A I Q Z
X J K V W B F Y G H
U P L M N O R S T C

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The eight words: CREDIT, SPEECH, ORGANIZE, ASSEMBLY, THANKS, CLIPBOARD, PROJECT, HONOR. Which word names what Blimy really contributed, and which word names what she hands back?