

The Question He Asks Again



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: The Same School

"Which school are you in now?" Grandpa asks.

Azarya answers.

Ten minutes later, Grandpa asks again.

Azarya says the name more loudly. Grandpa has heard it the first time. Volume is not the missing part.

They sit in Grandpa's front room during a family visit. Tatty is in the next room speaking with Mama, and the adults are nearby. Azarya is seventeen. He has visited this room since his feet barely reached the rug from the chair.

Grandpa asks about school most times. Usually he also asks which teacher is strict and whether the school still has the cabinet with the door that refuses to close.

Today, he comes back to the first question.

"Which school are you in now?"

Azarya knows the answer. He does not know what the repeating means.

He gives the name once more and watches Grandpa's face.





Then Grandpa asks whether he wants a biscuit.

Azarya says no, although he does.





Chapter 2: A Report With Too Many Conclusions

On the way home, Azarya tells Tatty that Grandpa forgets everything.

Tatty asks what happened during the visit.

Azarya gives the school question and the number of times he hears it. Then he says Grandpa is getting worse and will soon forget who he is.

"Those are different kinds of sentences," Tatty says.

"He asked the same thing three times."

"That's what you notice. Tell me that. The adults will discuss the change with the appropriate health support. You aren't responsible for deciding what causes it or what will happen next."

Azarya looks out of the window.

"You don't think it's serious?"

"I don't know from that one report. I am taking what you tell me seriously. Serious doesn't mean I should accept a prediction you make because you're frightened."





They arrive home. Tatty handles the adult follow-up. He tells Azarya which family arrangements remain in place and asks him to bring concerns to the adults rather than checking Grandpa on his own.

Azarya agrees.

He still wants an answer he can obtain himself.





Chapter 3: A Game With a Hidden Result

Before the next family-arranged visit, Azarya takes out an old photograph.

It shows him and Grandpa beside a crooked snowman. The snowman has an enormous button nose and a small branch held against one side like a walking stick.

Grandpa made a joke on the day the photograph was taken: the snowman needed help standing because its grandson gave it two unequal feet.

Azarya remembers the words clearly.

He puts the photograph in his bag with family permission. He tells himself he is bringing a nice memory.

He is also bringing a test.

At Grandpa's house, the adults follow their agreed visit plan. Azarya shows the picture.

"Do you remember this?"

Grandpa looks at it.

"A good snowman."





"What about the stick?"

"It needs one, I suppose."

"You said something funny."

Grandpa studies the picture.

"I don't recall exactly."

Azarya feels the room shrink around the missing sentence.

He wants to supply a clue, then another, until Grandpa can give him
the answer that makes everything safe again.





Chapter 4: Not a Grandson's Examination

Tatty comes into the room while Azarya asks whether Grandpa remembers the unequal feet.

Grandpa looks tired.

Tatty sits beside them.

"Let's put the questions away for a while."

Azarya hates being stopped before he gets the right answer.

"I'm just showing him the picture."

Tatty looks at the photograph.

"Then you can tell him what you like about it. You don't need him to pass a quiz."

Grandpa says the snowman looks pleased with itself. Azarya nearly corrects him: that is not the old joke.

He hears how absurd that is. Grandpa can make a new remark about a snowman without restoring a remembered one.

"The nose is much too large," Azarya says.

"A useful nose. It can find biscuits."





Azarya smiles, then feels ashamed for smiling after the questions.

Tatty does not turn the smile into a verdict either. He follows the family's plan for ending the visit and taking appropriate concerns to responsible adults.

The photograph goes home in Azarya's bag.

It contains the same two people. It supplies no diagnosis.





Chapter 5: What He Wants Measured

At home, Mama asks how the visit feels to him.

Azarya says it is frightening. He admits the photograph's secret job.

"If he remembered the joke, I'd know we were still us."

Mama listens.

"And if he doesn't?"

Azarya does not want to say the answer. It is the answer he gives
the silence in the front room.

"Then maybe I'm just someone who visits."

Mama waits a moment.

"He couldn't recall one remembered sentence. That is not the same
thing as establishing what you mean to him. If there are changes,
we will get help understanding and arranging them. You don't have
to turn every visit into a measurement."

"I don't want you to say nothing changes."

"I'm not saying that."

That helps more than a promise.





Azarya describes the repeated question and the missing joke separately. Mama makes sure Tatty has the concrete observations for the adult follow-up. She does not ask Azarya to monitor him or keep a secret score.

"Can I bring the picture again?" he asks.

"If he wants to see it. Not as a test."

Azarya looks at the button nose.

He is not sure he can manage that yet.

He says so.





Chapter 6: A Visit Without the Picture

For the next visit, Azarya leaves the photograph at home.

He tells Tatty he needs help keeping the visit ordinary. The adults arrange a suitable length and remain responsible for Grandpa's care and support.

Azarya brings a short funny passage Grandpa might enjoy, with family agreement. He does not bring it as a memory exercise. If Grandpa is tired or uninterested, they can leave it closed.

"Would you like me to read this?"

Grandpa says yes.

Azarya reads. At one line, Grandpa laughs. At another, he does not seem to catch the joke.

Azarya wants to read that one louder and ask whether he understands.

He stops before making the passage another examination.

"Shall I keep going?"

"A little."

He reads a little. When Grandpa wants to rest, the book closes.





Later, Grandpa asks which school he is in.

Azarya gives the name.

The familiar fear arrives. Azarya tells Tatty afterward. He does not make Grandpa answer another question to remove it.





Chapter 7: Sadness With an Adult Beside It

One evening, Azarya feels sad about the old conversations even though Grandpa is still alive and still glad to see him.

He worries that sadness is disloyal. He also worries that saying he is sad will make the adults tell him to stop noticing.

Tatty asks whether he wants to walk with him for a short errand.

Azarya says yes.

On the walk, he tells Tatty he misses not thinking about whether every sentence is a sign.

"I can understand that," Tatty says.

"I want the old visits."

"I know."

They walk quietly for a while.

Tatty explains what the family can appropriately share about its support arrangements. He does not supply certainty about every future change. He says Azarya can ask for help with the feelings, including further support if the worry keeps taking over his days.

Azarya asks whether he has to visit every time the family goes.





They discuss a suitable plan. Being a loving grandson is not a test of how many frightening afternoons he can handle without support.

When they return, Azarya puts the old photograph in its album.

He does not hide it because it makes him sad. He does not keep it beside the door as a tool for next week's test.





Chapter 8: The Biscuit He Wants

At another family-arranged visit, Grandpa offers a biscuit.

Azarya says yes this time.

Tatty is nearby. The adults follow the actual care and food arrangements, and Azarya takes only what they approve for the visit.

Grandpa asks about school. Azarya answers. He waits for the same question to return, then notices that waiting itself makes him miss the biscuit's crumbly edge and Grandpa's comment about a bird outside.

He looks at the bird.

"It's stealing something," Grandpa says.

"I think it's a twig."

"Then it needs a better pocket."

Azarya laughs.

This joke is new. He does not write it down to test Grandpa with it later.





When Tatty says the visit is ending, Azarya helps clear his own plate as the adults direct. He thanks Grandpa for the biscuit.

At home, he puts the book back on its shelf and tells Mama about the bird's missing pocket.

