

Twice, Out Loud

Chapter 1: The News

The news comes at the Shabbos table, in front of the whole family, the way big news does.

Tatty's new position is finalized. They are moving in the summer - two hours away, to a community with a smaller school and a bigger backyard, and Mama is already saying something cheerful about the bedrooms.

Chaiky, sixteen, says the right things. She asks about the bedrooms.

Inside, she is doing the math nobody wants to do, and the math has one number in it: Tobie.

Tobie, who has been her best friend since second grade, when they were assigned to share a cubby and decided to share a life. Tobie, whose family's Shabbos table knows her by her first name. Tobie, who walked her home from the birthday party in the rain and shared one umbrella and half a coat. Tobie, who does not know yet. Tobie, who has to hear it from Chaiky, in person, soon - and the thought of that conversation sits in Chaiky's stomach like a stone that talks.

The almosts pile up. Tuesday at the lockers: Tobie is laughing about something, and the sentence gets as far as Chaiky's teeth, and Tobie says "what?" and Chaiky says "nothing, your hair clip is cute." Thursday walking home: the perfect quiet stretch, two whole blocks of it, and Chaiky spends both blocks composing the first line and misses the window at the corner where they always split. Sunday: she actually gets as far as "Tobie, I have to - " and Tobie's little brother falls off the swing and needs a bandage and the moment goes wherever moments go.

Two weeks of that. The news gets heavier every day it goes untold, like a suitcase she keeps packing and not leaving with.

Chapter 2: Two Weeks of Almost

For two weeks, Chaiky almost tells her.

The friendship goes on, normal and warm, and the secret sits in the middle of it like a third person neither of them can see. They share a notebook margin in math. Tobie saves her a seat at the assembly and tells the whole story of her uncle's parrot, twice. It is the best two weeks the friendship has had in a year, and Chaiky enjoys none of it whole, because enjoyment needs both people fully in the room, and part of Chaiky is always off somewhere rehearsing. She starts three sentences with "Listen," that week and finishes none of them.

Every almost makes the next one harder, because now there is something else to explain: not just the news, but the two weeks.

She's going to ask when I knew, Chaiky thinks, walking home with the stone. And I'm going to have to say two weeks, and then I'm going to have to explain the two weeks, and I don't know how.

Chapter 3: Rochele's Rule

On Shabbos afternoon, Rochele comes for lunch.

Rochele babysat Chaiky for years and is in seminary now, home for the weekend, and she has known Chaiky long enough to read her face like a schedule.

It all comes out, on the front steps. The move. Tobie. The two weeks of almost.

Rochele does not say "just tell her." People who say "just tell her" have never had to tell anyone anything.

She also does not say the move is easy, or that two hours is nothing, because Rochele has always been honest about distances, geographic and otherwise.

"Here's the rule," Rochele says instead. "Out loud. With a person. Twice. Not in your head - in your head it stays a fog. Out loud, with me, once tonight and once before you go. And listen, because this is the important part: you only get to write your side."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you don't script Tobie," Rochele says. "You don't decide she cries, or she gets angry, or she says something perfect back. People who rehearse both sides fall apart when the other person goes off-script, and she will go off-script. You rehearse you. Your first line. The things you have to say. Then whatever she does, you've met it before."

Chapter 4: The First Rehearsal

On Saturday night, in Rochele's room, they do the first one.

Chaiky stands by the dresser. It feels ridiculous. She says so.

"Ridiculous is fine," Rochele says. "Ridiculous is why we're inside. Go."

"Tobie, I have to tell you something - " Chaiky stops. "No. Too much like a doctor." She tries again. "Tobie, we're moving." She winces. "Too blunt. There's a right first line and I don't have it."

They work on it for ten minutes, and here is what Chaiky learns: the right first line is not the cleverest one. It is the one she can actually say, out loud, to Tobie's face, without her voice breaking in the wrong place.

They land on: "Tobie, I need to tell you something big, and I should have told you sooner."

It is not poetry. That is why it works - poetry is for people who are performing, and she is not performing, she is telling.

Then the two must-says. One: the family is moving this summer, two hours away. Two - and this one takes longer to find - the honest answer to "when did you know": "I knew for two weeks, and I didn't tell you because I was scared, not because you didn't matter. You mattered so much I kept almost telling you."

"Good," Rochele says. "Now comes the part you don't get to write."

Chapter 5: The Three Tobies

Rochele plays Tobie three ways.

Tobie One cries immediately, silently, the way people cry when they're trying not to. Chaiky's instinct is to take the news back, to say never mind, to fix it. She practices, instead: "I know. I'm so sorry. I didn't want it to be true either."

Tobie Two is angry. "You knew for TWO WEEKS? You let me plan the whole summer?" Chaiky's instinct is to defend herself - the almsots, the reasons. She practices, instead, the second must-say, without varnish: "I was scared. It was wrong. I'm sorry."

Tobie Three goes quiet. Completely quiet, looking at her hands. This one is the hardest, because there is nothing to answer, and Chaiky fills silences like her mother fills suitcases. She practices, instead, letting the quiet be quiet, and then saying: "You don't have to say anything yet. I just needed you to know from me."

By the third Tobie, Chaiky's voice is steadier. Not because she knows what Tobie will do. Because she has stopped needing to.

Chapter 6: The Second Rehearsal

They do the second one on Sunday morning, an hour before Chaiky walks over.

The first line comes out clean on the first try. The must-says hold. When Rochele, being difficult, invents a Tobie Four who says "Fine, whatever, move then," Chaiky laughs, and instead of guessing what it means, she practices the checking she would do with the real Tobie: "Is that a real fine? Because a real fine, I can live with. A fake one, I'd rather hear about now than from two hours away." Rochele nods. Checking beats mind-reading, every time.

"That's the whole trick," Rochele says, pleased. "You're not rehearsing her. You're rehearsing you. When you know what you'll say, you can afford to hear what she says."

They run it once more, all the way through, and this time Chaiky does not laugh at anything - not because it is sad, but because it is starting to feel like a thing she can actually do.

Rochele walks her to the door. "Today, then. And no more rehearsing after today - the two sessions were the number, and you've had both. A third session and it turns back into a script, and you'll be performing instead of telling. It's my rule, not a law of nature, but I've watched it hold." She opens the door. "The real Tobie gets the real you. That's the whole point of the two rehearsals - they carry the words so you can carry her."

"And if I cry?"

"Then you cry," Rochele says. "Crying is not failing. The talk failing is not telling her, or telling her from a script so stiff she can't find you in it."

Chaiky hugs her, gets hugged back, and goes.

Chapter 7: The Porch

On Tobie's porch, it is none of the four Tobies and all of them.

"Tobie, I need to tell you something big, and I should have told you sooner." The first line holds, out loud, in the real air.

The news lands. Tobie goes quiet - Tobie Three - and looks at her hands, and Chaiky lets the quiet be quiet, which is the hardest thing she has ever done on this porch.

Then Tobie cries. Then Tobie is a little angry, around the edges - "two whole weeks, Chaiky" - and Chaiky says the second must-say, plain, without varnish, and does not defend herself, and the anger burns off faster than anger usually does, because there is nothing for it to catch on.

"I hate this," Tobie says finally.

"I know," Chaiky says. "Me too."

They sit with it. It is not a good conversation, exactly. It is an honest one, which is the kind that holds.

There is a long stretch where neither of them talks, and every instinct in Chaiky says fill it, and she hears Rochele instead: you rehearse you. The quiet is Tobie's side. She counts porch slats, and breathes, and lets Tobie have it, and Tobie talks again when Tobie is ready - which is the room she practiced leaving, and it still surprises her that the practice holds.

Eventually Tobie says, "Tell me about the bedrooms," because she has heard about the bedrooms for two weeks without knowing why, and Chaiky tells her, and it is the strangest, saddest, most ordinary twenty minutes of the whole friendship.

Chapter 8: The Door

That evening, there is a knock on the door.

It is Tobie, with her coat half on and her eyes still pink, holding a notebook.

"Okay," Tobie says. "Two hours is far but it's not THAT far. I made a list of when I can visit, and you're coming for the midwinter break, and also I'm mad at you for one more day, and then I'm done being mad."

Chaiky reads the list. It is a very Tobie list - organized, slightly bossy, with a star next to midwinter.

Downstairs, their mothers are on the second cup of tea, pretending they have not been waiting up for exactly this. Tobie's mother hugs Chaiky the way you hug news you already guessed, which travels, in their neighborhood, at the speed of porch. "Midwinter," she says firmly, as if it were her idea.

Chaiky walks her out. At the bottom of the steps Tobie turns and says, "You practiced this. Rochele made you." Not a question.

"Twice," Chaiky says.

Tobie nods, like that explains everything about how the evening went.

It does.

"Deal," she says.

She never tells Tobie what the three Tobies said. Some things belong to the person who prepared them. But that night, she writes one line in her own notebook, because someday she will need it again: out loud, with a person, twice - and only my side.

Eight activities

Activity 1: The almos

From the story, what do the two weeks of almost cost Chaiky - beyond the telling itself? Why does every almost make the next one harder?

Activity 2: Your side or their side?

Label each rehearsal element Y (your side - you may prepare it) or T (their side - you may not script it).

1. Your first line.
2. Whether she cries.
3. The honest answer to "when did you know?"
4. Whether she forgives you.
5. Letting a silence be quiet.
6. What she says back. Then: why does scripting even ONE item on the T list weaken the whole rehearsal?

Activity 3: The three Tobies

Rochele plays Tobie three ways - crying, angry, quiet. What different instinct does each one trigger in Chaiky, and what does she practice doing instead? Why is Tobie Three (the quiet one) the hardest?

Activity 4: Rehearsal arithmetic (all numbers made up for practice)

A girl spends 2 weeks avoiding a talk, rehearsing it in her head 5 times a day at 10 minutes each. How many minutes of fog-rehearsal is that? Her sister's rule: out loud, twice, 30 minutes each. How many minutes is that? Which one worked? Show your steps.

Activity 5: "Crying is not failing"

Rochele says crying is not failing, and names two ways the talk CAN fail. What are they? Why are both of those failures about losing yourself, not about the other person's reaction?

Activity 6: Draw the porch

Draw the porch scene: two girls, the space between them, Tobie's hands. Only what can be seen - no labels for feelings. Caption with one line from the story.

Activity 7: Temmie's team - planning for a fictional case

A teen named Temmie has to tell her teammates she is switching to a different school next term, and she has been avoiding it for a week. Write her possible first line, her two must-says, two ways the teammates might react (that she may NOT script), and one thing she practices saying instead of defending herself. One sentence each, with names.

Activity 8: Word grid

Find eight words left to right. Row/column numbering begins at 1.

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

TALK, TWICE, SIDE, LOUD, LINE, DOOR, WORDS, SAY. Which two words name HOW Chaiky rehearses, and which word names the only part she is allowed to write?