

Who Has the Note



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: Three Channels on Purpose

The midwinter trip is Soroh's job this year, and she is good at it in the way that shows on paper.

Thirty-eight girls, two buses, one Monday in January. The buses load at school; that is the rule for every trip, with Mrs. Hoffman riding the first bus and another teacher riding the second. The venue is the old textile mill with the working looms, booked since October. Soroh tells the class in three ways, on three days, on purpose: she says it at roll call, she sends a note home for the parents, and she puts a poster in the grade hallway with the mill's name in letters an inch high.

"Three channels is one channel twice too many," Tzipora tells her.

"Three channels is nobody saying they never heard," Soroh says.

Mrs. Hoffman, who has run thirty years of trips, watches the poster go up and says one thing. "You have told everyone. That is different from everyone knowing."

Soroh writes that down. She is seventeen, and she files the sentence where she files things she does not fully understand yet.





Chapter 2: The Mill Cancels

On Thursday afternoon, four days before the trip, the mill calls the school office. A pipe has burst over the loom hall. No tours for a month, maybe two.

Mrs. Hoffman finds Soroh at her locker. "The glassworks across town can take us Monday. Same hours, same buses, same price.

The office booked it and cleared it." She hands Soroh the confirmation. "The office sends the official notice to the parents tonight - that is their channel, not yours. Your channels reach the girls. Do the girls, and keep me in it."

At supper, Soroh says the obvious plan out loud: tell the class again, send a new note, change the poster.

Tatty is mending a strap on his satchel and does not look up. "And on Monday morning, how many girls stand at the mill?"

"None. I'll tell everyone."

"You told everyone the first time," Tatty says. "Who knows it?"

Soroh opens her mouth to say everyone, and stops, because she cannot actually name who knows what. She told three channels.

The channels are not the girls.





Chapter 3: The Map

That night, Soroh takes a sheet of paper and rules it into three columns: TOLD THE MILL, TOLD THE GLASSWORKS, CONFIRMED.

The first column is easy to fill and useless. Everyone was told the mill, one way or another. The whole class goes in that column, and the column teaches her nothing.

The second column is the work. The roll-call correction she can give Friday morning. The poster she can fix Thursday night, glassworks letters an inch high over the mill's name. The note home is the problem: there is no time to print and carry a new one to thirty-eight houses by Friday, and some houses read notes a week late anyway.

The third column has the hardest rule, and Soroh writes it at the top: a name moves here only when the girl says the new name back.

Not "I heard something changed." Not a nod. The name, said back: the glassworks, Monday, same buses. A poster is a wall, and a wall cannot say a name back. A note is paper in a house she cannot see. The only audience she can actually measure is a person answering.





Chapter 4: Friday

Friday is a workday with a bell schedule.

At roll call, Mrs. Hoffman announces the switch once, plainly, and then Soroh works the room the way she planned: girl by girl, one question each. Not "did you hear?" but "where are we going Monday?"

Thirty-one girls say "the glassworks" and move to the third column. Two say "the mill, why?" and get the thirty-second version and then say the new name back, and they count too, because the rule is the rule. Three more she catches in the morning breaks, one by one, and each says the name back.





Absent Friday: Tzipora, whose family left Thursday for a cousin's wedding out of town, back Sunday night. Rena, home with the flu.

Thirty-six girls are in the building, and by lunch all thirty-six are confirmed: thirty-one, plus two, plus three.

Mrs. Hoffman reads the sheet at lunch and writes one line at the bottom: "Confirmed is the right column." Then she says the official part out loud: the office will reach both absent families directly over the weekend, as the channel of record. Soroh's catches are the backup, not the bridge.

The map is honest about one more thing: two of the thirty-six had gotten the mill secondhand from friends, not from any channel of Soroh's, and were sure enough of their secondhand to be surprised today. Soroh adds a line at the bottom of the sheet: secondhand is a channel too. It just doesn't sign its name.





Chapter 5: The Sister and the Old Mailbox

Rena is the easy one, and the easy one teaches Soroh the method. Rena's sister is in the parallel class. On Friday, Soroh gives the sister one sentence to carry - "glassworks, Monday, same buses, tell her to say it back to you" - and on Sunday afternoon the sister reports: Rena said it back, and also said to bring her a notebook on the bus. Confirmed, with a receipt.

The Karp family is the strange one. They moved houses midweek, which nobody scheduled with Soroh. Their daughter is in school Friday and confirms directly - easy. But the original trip note, with the mill's name an inch high, went to the old address two weeks ago, and it is presumably still in that mailbox, being read by nobody, or by the new tenants, who must think the twelfth grade has excellent taste in mills.

Soroh cannot retrieve it, and it is not hers to retrieve - other people's mail is not a job for girls with sheets. She writes it down as what it is: one loose old copy, uncontrolled. Then she does the right available thing: she tells Mrs. Hoffman, who knows the new tenants, and Mrs. Hoffman asks them herself to recycle any old trip note they find. Soroh marks it: reported to an adult, not verified by me. Some copies you cannot confirm. You can only know they exist, and hand them upward.





Chapter 6: The Girl You Cannot Confirm

Tzipora is the hard one, and Soroh settles her plan on Friday,
before Shabbos.

No school Friday. Home Sunday night. On the bus Monday morning.
The office will reach the family directly over the weekend - that is
the channel of record. But a family at a wedding answers late, and
Soroh says it out loud to make it true: "I cannot confirm Tzipora
myself."

What she can build is catches.

First catch: Fraidy, Tzipora's best friend, whose house is three doors
from hers. On Sunday evening, Fraidy writes the new venue on a
card in big letters - GLASSWORKS, MONDAY, SAME BUSES, SAME
TIMES - and puts it through Tzipora's front door, where
Sunday-night luggage lands.





Second catch: Monday's roll call becomes a confirmation checkpoint. Mrs. Hoffman agrees - attendance happens at school before anyone boards, as always, and this Monday each girl says the venue back as her name is called. A girl who somehow arrives sure of the mill gets the correction while the buses wait, and the buses wait for everyone.

Third catch: the mill itself. The office asks, and the mill agrees to tape a page to its Monday-locked door: TRIP MOVED TO THE GLASSWORKS, ADDRESS BELOW. It will probably never be read. Catches are for the cases you failed to imagine, not the ones you planned.





Chapter 7: Monday

Monday morning, the roll is called in the schoolyard, by name, buses idling. Thirty-seven names are called - the thirty-eighth, Nechi, is being driven straight to the venue by her mother, who told the office on Friday and had Mrs. Hoffman's yes.

Thirty-seven names, thirty-seven girls. Tzipora arrives with the card in her hand, waving it at Fraidy across the yard. Her family got home Sunday night and found it inside the door, right where the luggage landed. "A note through my door, like a spy," she says. "And the office reached my mother Sunday besides. I would have gone to the mill."

"I know," says Fraidy. "That's why the card."





Soroh checks the last box. The map was right about every girl on it - thirty-eight names, thirty-eight confirmations. The adults ride their own channel, and their own morning is about to prove it.

The one slip of the morning belongs to Nechi's mother, and the map was never wrong about Nechi at all. Nechi knew - she had said the glassworks back twice on Friday. Her mother knew too: the office had reached her over the weekend. But driving to spare her daughter the early bus, she aims the car at the mill out of pure habit and pulls up at the locked door before anyone says a word. "Ma, the glassworks," Nechi says. "I know," says her mother. "The address is on our kitchen counter at home." The office's page on the door gives the address. They laugh at themselves the whole way across town, and pull into the glassworks lot as the buses unload.

The third catch, the one nobody expected to use, is the one that gets used.





Chapter 8: The Folder

The glassworks is hot and loud and better than the mill would have been, and no one says so out of politeness to the mill.

On the bus home, Mrs. Hoffman sits down beside Soroh. "The note you wrote me this morning says all thirty-eight were confirmed before boarding. How did you know they knew?"

"They said the name back," Soroh says. "Thirty-six in school on Friday, Rena to her sister on Sunday, Tzipora to me this morning with the card. All thirty-eight." She thinks about Nechi's mother.

"The slip wasn't a girl at all - it was a driver I never confirmed, because my map counts girls and the adults ride their own channel. So the fences aren't only for the unreachable. They're for everyone standing next to the reachable."

Mrs. Hoffman nods, once, the way she nods at correct answers that were expensive.

That night, Soroh puts the three-column sheet in the class trip folder, for whatever girl runs it next year. On the top of the sheet she writes the only instruction that earned its place:

"Count who knows. Not who you told."

