



After the Waiting Room

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: A Spoon at Home

The spoon rattles against Chani's cereal bowl.

Yesterday, she sat in a hospital waiting room without crying.

Today, at her own kitchen table, she cannot pour milk neatly.

Her younger brother is upstairs with Tatty. His injured wrist has a cast. The doctor gave Mama and Tatty instructions, and they are handling those instructions.

Chani knows all that.

She spills milk anyway.

"Careful," her sister says, reaching for a cloth.

Chani pushes the bowl away.

Yesterday, everyone called her brave.

Apparently it lasts one day.

Chapter 2: The White Chair

Yesterday afternoon began with a crash in the yard.

Chani didn't see the fall. She heard her brother cry and ran to the door. Mama was already with him. Mama sent Chani to get Tatty from the next room, then took over the decisions.



Later, Chani went with them because a neighbor could stay with her sister but could not stay until evening.

In the waiting room, Chani sat in a white chair. Mama's dark tichel covered all her hair. Tatty talked with the staff. Her brother leaned against Mama and made a small unhappy noise whenever he shifted.

Chani found his other shoe in the bag. She handed Mama a tissue when asked. Mostly she waited.

She didn't feel like herself. She felt like a person made of chairs and clocks.

When they went home, Mama said, "Thank you for being so patient. That was a frightening afternoon."

Her brother said, "Chani didn't even cry."

Tatty called her brave.

She held the word all the way home.

Chapter 3: A Quiet Kitchen

Now Mama comes downstairs.

"Chani?"

"I spilled the milk."

"I see. Are you hurt?"

"No."



Mama sits beside her. "What happened?"

Chani tries to explain, but the spoon and the cast and the white chair arrive in her mouth together. She begins crying before the explanation makes sense.

Mama stays.

After a while, Chani gets out the part that bothers her most.

"I didn't feel scared yesterday. Now I do. But he's already home."

Mama doesn't argue about what yesterday ought to feel like.

"It might take a while to tell me everything. We have time."

"You said I was brave."

"You stayed with us through a hard afternoon."

"But now I'm crying about something that is finished."

Mama looks at the wet cloth and the abandoned cereal.

"Your feelings don't have to arrive on the same schedule as the ride home."

Chapter 4: The Wrong Question

Chani asks whether her brother will fall again.

Mama can't promise that no accident will ever happen.

She can tell Chani where he is now, what the doctor told them to watch for, and that the adults will look after him. She doesn't make Chani responsible for watching his cast.



"But what if-"

Chani stops. The question begins turning into all the things she didn't see yesterday but can imagine today.

Mama asks what she needs right this minute.

Chani looks around the kitchen.

"Can you sit here?"

"Yes."

They sit.

Mama brings a fresh bowl. Chani eats a few spoonfuls. The milk still tastes like milk, which surprises her.

Her chest doesn't stop feeling tight immediately.

Mama doesn't ask whether she feels better after every mouthful.

Chapter 5: The Brave Girl Upstairs

By late morning, her brother wants to show her the cast.

Chani goes upstairs with Mama.

He rests on the sofa beside Tatty. He has a pillow under his arm and a book open on his lap.

"You can sign this side," he says, pointing.

Tatty checks where writing is permitted before handing Chani a marker.



She writes her name slowly.

"You were brave yesterday," her brother says again.

Chani's eyes fill.

"I'm scared today."

He looks at her.

"Me too. When I think about the yard."

Chani doesn't expect that. He has the cast, so she imagines all the fright belongs to yesterday for him as well.

Tatty sets the marker aside.

"You can both tell us when you're frightened. You don't have to keep yesterday's face on."

Her brother asks Mama to read a page. Chani stays for two pages, then goes back to her room.

She doesn't have to turn her visit into another brave performance.

Chapter 6: A Different Afternoon

Later, her sister asks if she wants to sort their paper animals.

Chani says she doesn't know.

They sit on the carpet anyway. Her sister makes two piles: animals with tails and animals with very questionable tails.



A rabbit has something that looks like a spoon.

Chani laughs.

Then she feels guilty for laughing while her brother has a cast.

She remembers that he wants a book and her name on the cast. He doesn't ask her to be frightened all afternoon.

She puts the rabbit in the questionable pile.

That evening, she tells Mama she worries about bedtime.

They make a simple plan: Mama will check on her, and Chani can come tell her if she needs help. If the fright keeps troubling her days or sleep, Mama will get more help for her. Chani doesn't have to decide how much is too much alone.

Chapter 7: Not Gone Backward

The next morning, Chani pours milk with steadier hands.

Then she hears a sharp bang from the cupboard and jumps.

Mama has dropped a lid. She shows it to Chani.

"A lid," Chani says.

She takes a moment before sitting down.

Yesterday's crying doesn't change what she managed in the waiting room.

Today's jump doesn't erase a steadier morning.



Her brother comes in with Tatty and asks whether there is cereal for a boy with one difficult sleeve.

"There's cereal for your other sleeve too," Chani says.

He laughs.

She passes Tatty the box, and he helps her brother with breakfast.

Chani keeps her own bowl in front of her. Her spoon is quiet this morning.

If it rattles again, she knows who she can tell.