



Not the Biggest Problem

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: A Cancelled Place

Pinny wants to tell someone about the music group.

He has been practicing the little part his teacher gave him. Now there aren't enough boys for the planned after-school session, and the teacher has to cancel it.

Not forever. Until another arrangement can be made.

Pinny knows that. He is still disappointed.

He opens his mouth at supper.

Then Mama tells the family that a neighbor needs help after a difficult operation. The grownups are arranging meals.

Mama wears her blue tichel with all her hair covered. Tatty asks which errand he can do.

Pinny closes his mouth.

A canceled music afternoon doesn't belong beside an operation.

Chapter 2: Nothing to Report

Tatty asks him about school later.

"Fine."

"And the group?"

"Nothing."



Pinny puts the practice page away. He won't make a fuss about a little thing when somebody has a real problem.

The next afternoon, his brother asks him to sing the part.

"Leave me alone."

"I only asked."

Pinny knows. He doesn't explain.

He is spending a surprising amount of energy on a problem too small to mention.

Chapter 3: The Quiet Answer

Tatty sits beside him after his homework.

"You sounded upset before."

Pinny thinks about the neighbor.

"It doesn't matter."

"What doesn't?"

He tells Tatty about the session and immediately adds, "It's not like being in the hospital."

"No, it isn't."

Tatty doesn't enlarge it to make Pinny's disappointment count.

"So I shouldn't complain."



"Are you asking me to cancel the meals and think only about your music?"

"No."

"Then we can talk about one disappointing afternoon too."

Pinny looks at the practice page.

"I was looking forward to playing it with the others."

It is the first time he says the actual thing he misses. The sentence doesn't need to be the worst sentence in the neighborhood.

Chapter 4: What the Problem Needs

Tatty listens to the part about waiting for a new arrangement.

Pinny doesn't need an emergency plan. He doesn't need Tatty to argue with the teacher or invent a promise about next week.

He wants someone to understand why the little page feels different now.

"Would you like to play the part for me, or would you rather put it away tonight?" Tatty asks.

"Play it."

Pinny plays his little recorder where Mama says the sound won't disturb the younger children.

Pinny makes two mistakes. Tatty doesn't announce that the canceled group is secretly the best thing that can happen.



He listens to the music Pinny has prepared for an afternoon that isn't happening yet.

That is enough for tonight.

Chapter 5: A Different Kind of Help

On Sunday, Mama asks if Pinny wants to decorate a plain card to go with a meal the adults are taking to the neighbor.

"You don't need to write about the operation. Just a friendly note."

Pinny draws a little window with flowers outside it. Mama checks the card and handles the food and visit arrangements.

He doesn't do it to pay for talking about his music.

The neighbor's care is the grownups' job. Pinny can choose one kind thing without turning the neighbor's difficulty into a scale on which he weighs every feeling.

Afterward, he apologizes to his brother.

"I was upset about the group. You didn't do anything wrong by asking."

His brother asks whether he can hear the part now.

Pinny says yes.



Chapter 6: An Ordinary Question

The teacher speaks with the boys on Monday. There is still no new session date.

Pinny asks whether he should continue practicing the same part.

"Yes, for now. I'll tell you when we know the arrangement."

It isn't the answer he most wants. It is a useful one.

At home, Tatty asks about the group again.

"Still waiting. I asked about the page."

Pinny doesn't whisper as though someone might catch him having a small disappointment.

There is room to care about the neighbor, room for supper, and room for a boy who wishes his music afternoon could go ahead.

Not every problem needs the same kind of help.

Tonight, his needs a short conversation and a little practice.

He takes the page from the drawer.