



The Hat in the Picture

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: Not Above the Desk

Esti looks above Aunt Chana's desk.

There is a little calendar, a shelf, and an empty nail.

No picture of the purple hat.

Esti drew it carefully for her aunt's birthday. The hat belongs to an imaginary lady who buys twelve onions and forgets all of them on a bus.

Aunt Chana laughed when she opened it.

"I love that enormous feather," she said. "Thank you for making this for me."

Esti has been expecting to find it hanging at this visit.

Now she stares at the empty nail as though it has failed an examination.

Chapter 2: A Drawer Opens

"Where's my picture?" she asks.

Aunt Chana, wearing a chestnut sheitel that covers all her hair, opens a desk drawer. The picture lies flat in a folder beside several letters.

"Here."

It isn't crumpled. It isn't discarded. The enormous feather still sweeps across the page.

"Why isn't it on the wall?"



"I keep the things above my desk fairly plain. I put your picture in this folder."

Esti looks at the calendar.

"There's a nail."

"That was for a shelf I moved."

Esti wants the nail to mean something else. A place already prepared for the present. A promise nobody needs to say.

She folds her arms.

"You said you loved it."

Chapter 3: The Part She Means

"I love the feather and the funny idea," Aunt Chana says. "I don't want to hang this picture over my desk."

The second sentence seems to swallow the first.

Esti doesn't want to hear them separately.

"Then give it back."

Aunt Chana pauses.

"If you regret giving it, we can talk. I'm not going to hang it because you're upset with me."

Esti flushes. She hadn't meant to sound as though she is giving orders.



She also hadn't expected her aunt to say no so plainly.

They go to the kitchen, where Mama is helping arrange a tray. Her plum tichel covers all her hair.

The folder stays in the drawer.

Esti hardly speaks while they eat.

Chapter 4: A Present With Instructions

At home, Esti tells Mama about the empty nail.

"You worked hard on the drawing," Mama says.

"She doesn't like it."

"She told you what she likes."

"But she won't put it where I want."

That sounds different when Esti says it without the nail or calendar in front of her.

Mama lets her think.

"Did you give it as a gift, or lend it with an arrangement about the wall?"

"A gift."

Esti remembers choosing the feather's stripes. She imagined Aunt Chana smiling whenever she looked up from writing. That imagining was one reason she enjoyed making the picture.



She never asked whether Aunt Chana wanted a purple hat above her desk.

"I wanted to see that it matters."

"I understand. You can ask what she likes about it. You can't make her room show the answer your way."

Esti goes upstairs. Her own wall has drawings she chooses herself.

She doesn't want someone else to choose all of them.

Chapter 5: The Gift Stays Given

At their next visit, Esti asks to speak to Aunt Chana for a moment.

"I'm sorry I told you to give it back because you wouldn't hang it. I want you to keep it."

"Thank you."

"I thought putting it in a drawer meant you didn't like me making things for you."

"It meant I wanted it in a drawer. I like your visits even when you don't bring a drawing."

Esti is glad to hear that. She is still a little disappointed about the wall.

Her aunt asks about the imaginary lady's onions.

Esti explains the part she doesn't draw: the lady remembers them only when she starts to prepare supper.



"Twelve onions and one empty soup pot," Aunt Chana says.

They laugh.

The conversation is real. The empty nail is still upstairs.

Chapter 6: Before the Next Drawing

A month later, Esti wants to make something for her aunt again.

For a moment she considers drawing a very small, very plain hat, one that ought to pass the desk-wall test.

Then she stops.

There isn't a desk-wall test unless she invents one again.

Mama helps her ask whether Aunt Chana would enjoy a little drawing on a letter. Her aunt says yes, especially if it tells her what happens to the onions.

Esti draws the lady carrying a sensible shopping bag this time. The feather remains enormous.

She writes a short letter underneath.

It is a new gift, with no instruction about a nail.

Chapter 7: The Empty Place

Later, Esti visits the upstairs room again. Aunt Chana needs a ruler from the shelf.



The nail is still empty.

Esti notices it. She doesn't need to pretend she doesn't.

Then her aunt asks whether she will hold the folder while she finds the ruler. The purple hat peeks out beside a letter in Bubby's handwriting.

Esti recognizes the little curl she added to the feather's tip.

She can be pleased with her own work even when nobody hangs it where she imagines.

Downstairs, Aunt Chana asks her to help choose a title for the onion lady's next adventure.

"Only if you want to make one," she adds.

Esti does.

She returns the folder to the desk. It belongs to Aunt Chana now, along with the choice of where to keep it.