



The House With One Less Voice

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: A Remarkably Quiet Chair

For the first time all afternoon, nobody explains the rules of something to Shaindy.

She sits in the chair by the window and reads.

Her older brother Elchonon is spending three days with Zeidy. Their parents have arranged it because Zeidy enjoys having him and Elchonon wants to help sort some family papers.

Usually, Elchonon has a new fact, a new joke, and a new question before Shaindy reaches the second paragraph.

Now the second paragraph arrives all by itself.

Then the third.

Shaindy stretches her feet and smiles.

She is having a lovely time because her brother isn't home.

The thought makes her sit upright.

Chapter 2: What a Good Sister Does

At supper, Mama asks whether she misses Elchonon.

Mama wears her brown sheitel, with all her hair covered.

"Yes," Shaindy says quickly.



She does miss his joke about the uneven kitchen shelf. She nearly says it herself when Tatty puts a dish there.

She also likes not having Elchonon correct the way she says it.

After supper, she leaves the reading chair empty. She takes her book to the kitchen, where her little siblings make enough noise for three Elchonons.

If she enjoys the quiet too much, perhaps she is enjoying his absence too much.

A good sister should be counting the hours until he comes home.

Shaindy is counting the pages instead.

Chapter 3: The Question She Asks

Mama notices her moving twice with the same book.

"Is that chair uncomfortable?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

Shaindy looks at the window.

"If you're glad someone is away, does it mean you don't like him?"

Mama doesn't answer before asking what Shaindy is glad about.

"The quiet. He talks while I'm reading. I like some of it. Not all of it."

"Would you want him to stop living here?"



"No!"

That answer comes easily.

Mama sits beside her.

"You can enjoy something different about the house while he is away. It isn't a vote about whether he belongs in it."

Shaindy picks at the book's corner.

"I said I missed him."

"Did you miss anything?"

"His shelf joke."

"Then you told me one true part. You can tell me another."

Chapter 4: A Quiet Afternoon

The next day, Shaindy reads in the chair for the time Mama says is hers.

She likes it.

She doesn't get up to create noise that will prove she misses her brother. She doesn't make herself think of him every few minutes either.

Later, the family speaks with Zeidy and Elchonon. Shaindy tells him she has finished the book.

"Already?" he asks.

"Nobody kept asking me questions."



She says it with a small smile, not as a complaint mailed after him.

Elchonon laughs. Then he describes a paper with Tatty's childhood handwriting on it.

Shaindy wants to hear about that. She asks two questions of her own.

When they finish talking, she is glad he is enjoying his visit.

The reading chair is still hers for another day.

Chapter 5: Before He Returns

Shaindy asks Mama about making a reading arrangement after Elchonon comes home.

"I don't want all the quiet to leave with his suitcase."

They choose a short after-school time when she can use the chair without conversation, unless there is something important she needs to hear.

Mama will explain the arrangement. Shaindy won't have to announce that her brother is forbidden to speak anywhere near a window.

"What if he has something funny?"

"You can hear it afterward."

Shaindy likes that answer. A saved joke is less worrying than a lost paragraph.



She sets aside one part of the book she wants to tell Elchonon about when he returns.

She wants a quiet time. She also wants a brother to tell things to.

Chapter 6: The Suitcase in the Doorway

Elchonon arrives with his suitcase and a family paper Zeidy lets him bring home.

Shaindy comes to see it. She laughs at Tatty's crooked letters. She asks about the little drawing in the margin.

The house is louder again.

During her agreed reading time, Elchonon begins a question, remembers, and stops.

"Afterward," he says.

"Afterward," she agrees.

She doesn't feel guilty about the quiet.

At the end of the time, she shuts the book and finds him at the kitchen table.

"What were you going to ask?"

It turns out to be a very long question.

Shaindy pulls out a chair. This time, she has chosen to hear it.