



The Label on the Empty Box

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: The Future Printer

"Our future printer," Uncle Berel says.

Avrumi's hand stops over the box of paper letters.

He has spent one afternoon helping his uncle make a little sign for the community book room. Now, apparently, the rest of his life has a title.

Uncle Berel is pleased with the sign. He shows Tatty how Avrumi spaced the big letters before fastening them onto the backing.

Avrumi likes the sign too.

He isn't sure he likes being a future printer.

Yesterday, he thought he might like to design gardens. Last month, he wanted to write a funny book.

He cannot do all those things, can he?

He closes the empty letter box.

Chapter 2: One Label Too Many

At home, Tatty asks whether he enjoyed the afternoon.

"Yes."

"Uncle Berel says you have a good eye for spacing."

"Does that mean I have to keep doing it?"



Tatty looks puzzled.

"The sign is finished."

"Not the sign. Printing."

Tatty sits down beside him.

Avrumi explains the gardens and the book. The more he says, the more foolish it sounds. He doesn't know how to design a real garden. He hasn't finished the funny book. He just likes thinking about both.

"I thought I could try things," he says. "Now everyone knows what I am."

"Did Uncle Berel ask you to promise anything?"

"No. He called me a future printer."

"Then we need to understand what he meant. You didn't agree to a future by making a sign."

Avrumi doesn't completely believe that yet.

Chapter 3: The Invitation He Avoids

The next week, Uncle Berel asks whether Avrumi wants to help make labels for the book room's shelves.

Tatty checks the practical plan. It is a short paper project in the community room, supervised by Uncle Berel. No printing machines or sharp equipment will be used.

Avrumi says maybe.



He wants to make the labels. He wants to see how long titles fit on small strips. He wants to try spacing the words differently.

But every yes might make the future-printer title stick harder.

He tells Tatty he is busy.

Tatty asks with what.

Avrumi looks at his mostly empty afternoon.

"Nothing settled."

"Then tell me what's making this difficult."

Avrumi tells him the actual thing.

Chapter 4: A Small Question for Uncle

They speak with Uncle Berel at his house before deciding about the labels.

Avrumi sits beside Tatty at the kitchen table.

"When you said future printer, did you mean I should keep learning it until that's my work?"

Uncle Berel looks surprised.

"I meant you did a good job. I didn't mean to choose your work for you."

"I like the sign. I also like other things."

"You should. There are plenty of things worth trying."



Avrumi touches the edge of the table.

"Could you call me Avrumi when we make the labels? Not the future printer."

His uncle smiles, then sees Avrumi is serious.

"Yes. Avrumi who helps with this set of labels, if he wants to."

That title is still long. It also has an ending.

Avrumi says yes to the afternoon.

Chapter 5: A Shelf Name

The labels are harder than the first sign in one way. The space is narrow, and one shelf needs four words.

Uncle Berel gives Avrumi strips to practice on. He will approve the finished labels before they go up.

Avrumi tries smaller letters. Then he tries two lines. Then he asks whether the shelf can have a shorter, clear name.

His uncle checks with the book-room organizer. They choose two words that describe the books accurately.

The label fits.

Avrumi enjoys the problem so much that he almost forgets to worry about what it means.



At cleanup, Uncle Berel asks if he wants to keep the spare paper-letter pieces for another project.

"Yes. I don't know what yet."

"You don't need to know today."

They put the pieces in the small box. Uncle Berel writes AVRUMI on the lid.

Nothing underneath predicts a job.

Chapter 6: The Garden That Isn't a Career

On Sunday, Avrumi draws a garden on scrap paper.

He gives it a curved path and a bench that faces a tree. The path is probably too narrow. He asks Tatty whether people could walk along it comfortably.

Tatty shows him how to leave more space on the drawing. They aren't building a real garden. They are discussing one imagined path.

"Do you like this more than the labels?" Tatty asks.

Avrumi considers it.

"I don't know. I like it differently."

That answer doesn't send anybody running for a new title.

He opens the funny book he began last month. It has two pages and a character who owns a hat shop for very tall people.

He adds a sign over the shop door.



The letters fit better than they would have before the afternoon with Uncle Berel.

Trying one thing gives him something to use in another. It doesn't have to close every other door.

Chapter 7: What Goes on the Lid

A cousin sees the letter box on Avrumi's desk.

"Are you going to be a printer?"

"Maybe. I don't know. These are for paper signs."

"Can we make one for my toy shop?"

"Ask Tatty about the materials first. Then we can try."

The cousin asks, and Tatty approves the small paper project at the table.

They make a crooked sign that says OPEN AFTER LUNCH.

Avrumi moves one word. His cousin chooses the color. The sign improves.

When they finish, Avrumi returns the extra letters to the box.

The name on the lid is enough.

He can make something, learn something, and enjoy something today. Later, there will be other choices, with more information than a boy of eleven has now.



For the moment, the shop is open after lunch.

That is the only future the sign needs to promise.