



The Rule After the Sorry

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: Put It Away

"Put it away now!"

Tatty's voice fills the room more quickly than the dominoes cover the table.

Moishe freezes with one tile in his hand.

He knows the rule. The family needs this table clear before supper. Tatty reminded him earlier, and Moishe said he would stop in time.

Then he started a second row.

Now Mama is ready to set out the dishes, and the tiles are still everywhere.

The sudden sharpness stings.

Moishe puts down the tile.

He isn't sure whether to clear the table or defend himself first.

Chapter 2: A Grownup's Apology

Tatty takes a breath.

"I spoke too sharply. I'm sorry. I can tell you to clear the table without shouting."

Moishe looks up.

An apology changes the room. Tatty is looking at him, not merely at the tiles.

"It's all right," Moishe says.



Then he picks up the tile again.

"I only need to finish this bit."

Tatty points to the box.

"The table still needs clearing."

Moishe's relief disappears.

If Tatty is sorry, why is Moishe still being told to stop?

He begins putting away the dominoes, making each one sound louder than it needs to.

Chapter 3: Two Different Things

After supper, Moishe asks Mama about it.

Her gray tichel covers all her hair. She sits down instead of answering while carrying bowls.

"Did Tatty mean the sorry?"

"What makes you ask?"

"He still made me clear the table."

Mama asks him what Tatty apologized for.

"Shouting."

"And what did the table rule say before he shouted?"



"Clear it before supper."

Moishe looks toward the empty table.

He wants the apology to undo the whole moment: the sharp voice, the unfinished line, and the dishes waiting beside Mama.

It only names one part.

"You can tell Tatty that the voice hurt," Mama says. "You also had a job to finish. Neither part makes the other disappear."

Chapter 4: Asking Tatty

Moishe finds Tatty at the bookshelf.

"When you said sorry, I thought I could keep going."

Tatty turns to him.

"I was sorry about my voice. I wasn't changing the table arrangement."

"It sounded as if I was very bad."

"I should have spoken calmly about what you needed to do. You weren't a bad boy because there were dominoes out. You did miss the time we agreed on."

Moishe nods slowly.

"I knew. I kept doing another row."

Tatty doesn't use the admission to take back his apology.



"Thank you for telling me. We both have something to do differently."

Moishe feels less like one of them must be wrong about everything before the room can make sense.

Chapter 5: A Line That Can Wait

The next afternoon, Moishe asks when the table will be needed.

Tatty tells him. Moishe chooses a smaller domino design.

It still grows.

When the stopping time comes, one side has three more tiles than the other. Moishe wants to fix the balance.

Tatty says, in an ordinary voice, "It's time to clear."

Moishe doesn't enjoy the sentence more just because it is quiet.

He puts the tiles away. Tomorrow he can begin again, with a smaller design or more time.

Tonight's table is needed now.

Chapter 6: No Exchange

At supper, Mama places a bowl where the long domino row stood yesterday.

Moishe tells Tatty about the design.

"I didn't finish."



"I saw you clear it on time."

"I still wanted to finish."

"I know."

Nobody has to pretend the rule is exciting.

Nobody gives Moishe an extra half-hour because he accepts an apology.

Tatty doesn't speak sharply to prove the rule counts either.

The ordinary family arrangement remains ordinary.

Later, Moishe puts the domino box on its shelf. Tomorrow he can choose a different surface Mama and Tatty don't need for supper.

He also has words for a different problem if it happens again: "Please tell me without shouting."

Those words don't secretly mean, "And let me keep the table."

They mean exactly what he needs to say.