



The Sigh at Supper

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: The Wrong Answer

"I didn't break it," Boruch says.

Tatty looks up from the supper table.

"Break what?"

"Anything."

His sister stops passing the bread. Mama lowers the serving spoon. Her blue tichel covers all her hair.

Tatty looks puzzled, not angry.

That doesn't improve things. Boruch has prepared for angry. He doesn't have a plan for puzzled.

"You keep sighing," he says.

Tatty looks at Mama.

"Do I?"

Boruch wishes he could disappear beneath the tablecloth without anyone noticing the large bump.

Instead, he picks up his fork.

"Never mind."

But he does mind.

He has minded since Tatty walked in the door.



Chapter 2: Before the Soup

Tatty comes home later than usual. His shoulders droop. He takes off his hat and stands beside the coat hook for a long moment.

Boruch is in the hallway with his schoolbag open.

There are plenty of reasons for Tatty to be disappointed in him.

He left his shoes in the wrong place this morning. He forgot to pass on a note from school until yesterday evening. He argued with his brother about whose turn it was to choose a game.

None of those things seems large enough for the sigh Tatty gives in the doorway.

Perhaps Tatty has discovered something Boruch doesn't even know about yet.

"How was school?" Tatty asks.

"Good."

Boruch says it too quickly.

Tatty nods and goes to wash his hands.

Boruch puts the shoes away. Then he checks the bag for another note. Then he goes to find his brother and offers him first choice of game.

His brother looks delighted.

Tatty still sighs at supper.



Chapter 3: The Confession That Grows

After supper, Boruch follows Tatty into the little room where he keeps his seforim.

"I'm sorry about the shoes."

Tatty turns.

"Thank you for putting them away."

Boruch waits.

Nothing else happens.

"And the school note."

"We dealt with that yesterday."

"And the game."

Tatty sits down. "What happened with the game?"

Boruch describes the argument. He leaves out his brother's part because he is trying to repair the sigh, not begin another argument.

Tatty asks a question. Boruch adds the part he left out.

"It sounds like you both need to work on taking turns," Tatty says. "We'll talk about it together tomorrow."

Boruch nods. Tatty reaches for a book, then rubs his forehead.

The sigh returns.



Boruch feels a quick stab beneath his ribs.

He must be missing something. There is still something.

Chapter 4: Mama's Question

Mama finds him outside the little room, staring at the baseboard.

"Boruch?"

He tells her the shoes, the note, the game, and the sigh.

"Did Tatty say he was upset with you?"

"He doesn't have to. I can tell."

Mama leans against the wall beside him.

"What can you tell?"

"He's upset."

"That may be true. What tells you why?"

Boruch looks through the open doorway. Tatty's book lies unopened on his knees.

"Nothing," he says reluctantly. "But he isn't usually like this."

"You noticed a real difference. You don't have the reason yet."

Boruch wants Mama to tell him every reason, immediately.

She doesn't.



"You can ask him a question. Not a list of every wrong thing you can remember."

"What question?"

Mama lets him try a few. Are you cross? comes out sharp. What did I do? has the answer tucked inside it already.

Finally, Boruch has one he can say.

Chapter 5: A Question without Shoes in It

Tatty puts the book down when Boruch comes back.

"Do we need to talk about something I did?" Boruch asks. "You seem tired and upset. I keep thinking it's about me."

Tatty looks surprised. Then his face softens.

"No, Boruch. I had a difficult afternoon at work. I'm still thinking about it."

Boruch breathes out.

"So it's not the shoes?"

"No. The shoes needed putting away. They didn't cause my afternoon."

Boruch nearly laughs. Then he asks what happened at work.

Tatty shakes his head gently.

"Some details are private. I can tell you I'm handling it with the adults involved. You don't have to solve it."



Boruch imagines a difficult problem sitting somewhere beyond the house. He wants to march over and make it stop following Tatty home.

"Can I do anything?"

"You can give me ten quiet minutes. After that, I want to hear about your school day. The long version this time."

Boruch goes out and closes the door gently.

Ten minutes are possible.

A whole work problem is not.

Chapter 6: Not a Perfect Son

Boruch waits in the sitting room. His brother brings the game.

"You said I could choose."

"You can. I don't want to play yet."

"Why?"

"I'm waiting for Tatty."

His brother starts building with the pieces anyway. Boruch nearly snaps at him for taking the carriage he likes.

Then he remembers that nobody asked him to become a perfect son before Tatty could finish a difficult day.

He still asks for the carriage back. He asks without shouting.



When Tatty comes in, Boruch tells him about the geography lesson. A boy labeled the lake as a mountain. Boruch finds that hilarious, though he can't explain why it is still funny the fourth time.

Tatty smiles. He doesn't become cheerful in every corner of his face.

Boruch notices.

For once, he doesn't add another story to force the rest of the smile.

They sit together until Mama calls the children to get ready for bed.

Chapter 7: Tuesday's Actual Trouble

The next afternoon, Boruch knocks over the open pencil tin while reaching for a book. Pencils scatter into the hall.

Tatty, just home, stops beside them.

"Please clear these before someone slips."

Boruch's stomach tightens. Tatty's voice sounds tired again.

He bends to collect the pencils.

"You're upset about this?"

"I want the floor safe. Yes, I'm annoyed about having to step around them."

Boruch waits for the rest.

"That's the whole thing," Tatty says. "The pencils."



Boruch picks up the last one. He puts the tin on a steady shelf and says he's sorry for leaving it at the edge.

Tatty nods.

There is a real mistake this time. It has a size and a repair. It doesn't grow into everything Boruch has ever done wrong.

At supper, Tatty sighs once.

Boruch hears it. His mind starts searching.

He catches himself halfway to asking about a homework page Tatty doesn't even know exists.

Instead, he reaches for the bread and asks whether Tatty wants a piece.

"Yes, please."

Boruch passes it.

Tatty may explain his day later. He may not.

If they need to talk about something Boruch does, Boruch can ask. He can also listen when Tatty tells him.

For now, the bread is warm, his sister is arguing that the crust is the best part, and there is a place at supper that doesn't require a confession.