



The Story Tatty Always Tells

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: The Flour Bowl

"Tell them about the flour," Uncle Meir says.

Esther stops cutting her potato.

Tatty smiles. "When Esther was four-"

"Not that one," Esther says.

It comes out too softly. The serving dish moves past. An aunt begins laughing before the story starts.

Tatty continues.

At four, Esther decided flour should be stirred with water in the biggest bowl. She climbed onto a low stool. Mama caught her before anything tipped, but not before Esther announced that she was making snow for the kitchen.

The family loves this story.

Esther used to love it too.

Now she is eleven, and her classmate's mother is at the supper table. Tomorrow, that mother might tell her daughter. The daughter might tell the other girls.

Everyone laughs at the snow.

Esther puts down her fork.



Chapter 2: Still Four

After the guests leave, Esther goes upstairs.

She has plenty of stories Tatty could tell instead. She helped make a real kugel last week. She designed the little place cards tonight. She knows how to use the ruler properly and where every guest sits.

But the flour story comes out whenever someone says her name and funny in the same sentence.

Mama knocks at the door. Her rose-colored tichel covers all her hair.

"You left the table very quickly."

"I'm eleven."

Mama looks puzzled.

"I know."

"Does Tatty?"

Mama sits beside her. Esther explains the classmate's mother and the flour bowl and how the table keeps turning her back into a little girl.

"Did you tell him clearly you didn't want that story told tonight?"

"I said not that one."

"I didn't hear. Maybe he didn't either. You can tell him now."

"It will sound rude. It's his story too."



Mama considers that.

"He remembers it. You are the child in it. It's fair to talk about where it gets told."

Chapter 3: Not a Critic

Esther asks Tatty to speak with her in the kitchen.

He puts down the dishcloth.

"What is it?"

"I don't want the flour story told in front of guests anymore."

Tatty blinks.

"You always laugh at that story."

"I used to. Tonight I wanted you to stop."

"I didn't hear you."

"I know. I said it quietly."

Tatty leans against the counter.

"I wasn't making fun of you."

"I know. I still don't like it now."

He looks disappointed, which is the part Esther fears. She wants him to keep all the happiness of remembering her at four, but keep it somewhere guests can't use.



"It's a lovely memory for me," he says.

Esther feels herself almost agreeing to another telling.

Instead, she takes a breath.

"Can it stay a family memory for a while? At home with us. Not when other people come."

Tatty nods slowly.

"All right. I can do that."

Chapter 4: The Table Without Snow

The next Sunday, they visit an uncle's house.

Esther brings her place-card ruler to help a younger cousin make a straight border. Afterward, the family sits for a meal.

Someone describes a kitchen mishap.

Uncle Meir looks toward Tatty.

"Like Esther and the-"

Tatty interrupts gently.

"We're letting that story rest. Esther made the place cards at our last supper. You should see the little folded stands."

Esther's cheeks warm anyway. Now the whole table knows a story is resting.

Uncle Meir glances at her.



"All right. Tell me about the stands."

She explains one fold, not every little measurement. He listens.

The conversation moves on.

Nobody demands a reason for the resting story.

Esther feels relieved, then uncomfortable, then relieved again.

Changing an old habit apparently takes more than one feeling.

Chapter 5: A Story He Can Tell

At home, Tatty asks whether he handled the uncle's remark well.

"Yes," Esther says. "Thank you."

"I didn't want to announce that you'd asked."

"You didn't."

Tatty goes quiet for a moment.

"When I tell that story, I remember you in the little apron. You look so serious about the snow. I forget the eleven-year-old at the table is hearing it differently."

Esther doesn't know what to say. She likes knowing he remembers her kindly.

"You can keep remembering it," she says.

"I will."



"I don't want to be four in front of everyone."

"Understood."

They talk about other family stories. Esther doesn't want the whole list erased. She still loves the one about the suitcase that arrives with three gloves and no matching pair.

"That one is mostly about me," Tatty says.

"You can choose whether it gets told."

He laughs. "Fair enough."

Chapter 6: The Flour Returns

Two weeks later, Esther stands beside Mama in the kitchen, measuring flour for rolls.

Mama handles the mixer and hot trays. Esther measures from the container and checks the recipe.

A puff of flour lands on the counter.

Tatty comes in.

He looks at it. Esther looks at him.

Both smile.

"Can I say it here?" he asks.

Esther thinks for a moment.



Just Mama, Tatty, the younger children waiting for their snack, and the kitchen where the story begins.

"Here," she says.

Tatty starts with the very serious four-year-old in the apron.

This time, Esther adds the part where she told Mama that winter belonged indoors.

Her little brother laughs. Esther laughs too.

The same story can be welcome in one room and unwelcome in another. She doesn't have to choose forever.

When the doorbell rings, Tatty stops to answer it. A neighbor comes to return a dish.

The flour story stays on the counter with the measuring cup.

Esther wipes the little white patch away and asks Mama what goes into the bowl next.