



Three Chairs, No Argument

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: The Perfect Afternoon

Rivka pulls three chairs around the table.

One for her. One for Suri. One for Esther.

She likes talking with Suri about every character in every book they read. She likes playing word games with Esther, who can find six little words hiding in an ordinary sentence.

They haven't spent an afternoon together before.

Rivka imagines how good it will be when her two favorite companions like each other too.

Mama has arranged the visit with their mothers. She sets out a plate and checks the table, her navy tichel covering all her hair.

"You have enough pencils?"

Rivka has pencils, paper, a book to discuss, and a word game.

Nothing seems to be missing.

Chapter 2: Enough About the Ending

At first, they eat and talk about school.

Then Rivka mentions a book she and Suri finished this week.

Suri has strong feelings about the last chapter. Rivka disagrees with half of them. That is usually the best part.



Esther listens for a while.

"What shall we play?" she asks.

"Just one more thing," Rivka says.

One more thing becomes another scene, then a question about a character Esther doesn't know.

Esther folds her napkin into a small square.

Rivka brings out the word game quickly.

Esther smiles. Suri tries one round. Then Suri asks how long they will keep playing.

Both friends are polite.

Neither is having the afternoon Rivka imagines.

Chapter 3: A Better Explanation

Rivka tries explaining each friend to the other.

"Suri is really funny when she tells stories."

Suri's smile stiffens.

"Esther always thinks of the best words."

Esther says, "Not always."

Rivka suggests a story with hidden words in it. Suri doesn't want to write today. Esther doesn't want a long story.



The chairs aren't empty. Nobody insults anyone. There is no argument to repair.

That makes it harder to know what to fix.

Rivka hears herself saying, "You'll like it if you try properly."

Suri looks down at her paper.

"I did try."

Rivka goes to ask Mama for more drinking water. She stays in the kitchen longer than water requires.

Chapter 4: Not a Failed Visit

"They don't like each other," Rivka whispers.

Mama glances toward the doorway.

"Did one tell you that?"

"No. They aren't talking much."

"Perhaps they haven't found much to talk about."

"But I like both of them."

Mama fills the jug.

"They aren't you."

Rivka knows that. She hasn't arranged the afternoon as though she knows it.



She has been treating the afternoon as if her liking both friends must make them like each other.

"What should I make them do?"

"Don't make them prove they belong together. Ask what they'd enjoy for the rest of the visit. Something simple may suit everyone. If not, we can help you finish the afternoon kindly."

Mama doesn't promise a discovery that will turn the three chairs into one perfect friendship.

Rivka carries the water back.

Chapter 5: One Short Round

"I'm sorry I said you weren't trying properly," she tells them.

"I kept picking things because I wanted us to like the same afternoon."

Esther unfolds her napkin.

"We can do something else."

They consider a few choices. All three agree to one short drawing game, with a picture passed around and a new detail added by each girl.

They aren't suddenly alike. Suri likes the ridiculous drawings. Esther likes guessing what they become. Rivka likes hearing them both laugh once.

When the round ends, they leave it ended.



They help clear the table and sit with Mama until the agreed collection time. The conversation wanders from a missing school ruler to a neighbor's very large sukkah.

It is an ordinary conversation, not the beginning of the lifelong friendship Rivka has been planning.

Both girls say thank you when they leave.

Chapter 6: Two Invitations

The next week, Suri asks Rivka to talk about another book.

Esther asks her to play the word game on a different afternoon.

Rivka accepts each invitation after Mama checks the arrangements.

She nearly tells Suri that Esther will like her if she hears one particular funny story. She doesn't.

She nearly tells Esther that Suri needs more time to learn the game. She doesn't know whether Suri wants to learn it.

Neither friend asks her to stop seeing the other. Neither requires a secret.

At school they greet each other pleasantly. Sometimes all three talk for a moment. Then they go where they mean to go.

Rivka still wishes the first afternoon had gone differently. A wish doesn't need to become another campaign.



Chapter 7: A Chair Can Move

Before Suri's next visit, Rivka sets out two chairs.

The third goes back against the wall. It isn't being punished. Neither is Esther.

Mama puts down a plate of biscuits.

"Only two pencils today?"

"We're talking about a book. We may not need any."

Rivka smiles at how much she prepared last time for something she cannot prepare at all: what two other people will feel about each other.

There may be another group afternoon someday, if everyone wants it.

For now, she can enjoy the friendship that is actually coming through the door.

Suri arrives with the book under her arm.

"I disagree with the ending," she announces.

"Of course you do," Rivka says, and pulls out the chair.